

**PH1101E/GE1004M****Twelve Practice Questions on Plato's "Meno"**

Passage 1:

"S: But Meno, by the gods, what do you yourself say that virtue is?

. . .

M: It is not hard to tell you, Socrates. First, if you want the virtue of a man, it is easy to say that a man's virtue consists of being able to manage public affairs and in so doing to benefit his friends and harm his enemies and to be careful that no harm comes to himself; if you want the virtue of a woman, it is not difficult to describe: she must manage the home well, preserve its possessions, and be submissive to her husband; the virtue of a child, whether male or female, is different again, and so is that of an elderly man, if you want that, or if you want that of a free man or a slave. And there are very many other virtues, so that one is not at a loss to say what virtue is. There is virtue for every action and every age, for every task of ours and every one of us-and Socrates, the same is true for wickedness.

S: I seem to be in great luck, Meno; while I am looking for one virtue, I have found you to have a whole swarm of them. But, Meno, to follow up the image of swarms, if I were asking you what is the nature of bees, and you said that they are many and of all kinds, what would you answer if I asked you: "Do you mean that they are many and varied and different from one another in so far as they are bees? Or are they no different in that regard, but in some other respect, in their beauty, for example, or their size or in some other such way?" Tell me, what would you answer if thus questioned?

M: I would say that they do not differ from one another in being bees." (71d-72b)

1. Which of the following would be the most accurate summary of passage 1?
  - a. Socrates asks Meno for a list of virtues, which Meno provides. Pleased with this list, Socrates asks Meno to derive from it a general definition of virtue
  - b. Socrates does not like lists. He likes abstract, general, geometrical-style definitions. This is shown by his ironic dissatisfaction with Meno's answer to the question, 'what is virtue?'
  - c. Socrates asks for an abstract, general definition of virtue. Meno does not comply, offering a concrete list instead. Socrates reiterates his desire for a general definition.
  - d. Socrates asks Meno what virtue is. Meno provides a list of virtues. Socrates hypothesizes a list of types of bees analogous to Meno's list of types of virtues, and gets Meno to admit that all the types of bees on this hypothetical list would be alike in being bees.
  - e. Socrates asks what virtue is. Meno provides a list of virtues, by way of defining the concept. Socrates implies, by his criticism of the list, that Meno does not know what virtue is.

Passage 2 continues where passage one leaves off:

". . . M: I would say that they do not differ from one another in being bees.

S: If I went on to say: "Tell me, what is this very thing, Meno, in which they are all the same and do not differ from one another?" Would you be able to tell me?

M: I would.

S: The same is true in the case of the virtues. Even if they are many and various, all of them have one and the same form which makes them virtues, and it is right to look to this when one is asked to make clear what virtue is. Or do you not understand what I mean?

M: I think I understand, but I certainly do not grasp the meaning of the question as fully as I want to.

S: I am asking whether you think it is only in the case of virtue that there is one for man, another for woman and so on, or is the same true in the case of health and size and strength? Do you think that there is one health for man and another for woman? Or, if it is health, does it have the same form everywhere, whether in man or in anything else whatever?

M: The health of a man seems to me the same as that of a woman.

S: And so with size and strength? If a woman is strong, that strength will be the same and have the same form, for by "the same" I mean that strength is no different as far as being strength, whether in a man or a woman. Or do you think there is a difference?

M: I do not think so.

S: And will there be any difference in the case of virtue, as far as being virtue is concerned, whether it be in a child or an old man, in a woman or In a man?

M: I think, Socrates, that somehow this is no longer like those other cases." (72b-73a)

2. Which of the following would be the most accurate summary of passage 2:

- a) Strength, size and health are virtues. Therefore, virtue must be like strength, size and health. Therefore, virtue must be 'one thing', just as strength, size and health are each 'one thing'.
- b) Socrates implies there must be one 'form' of virtue, then sets out to explain to Meno what he means by this, and to give some indication why he says it. He begins by pointing out that with regard to strength, size and health, we are not tempted to say there is one with regard to men, another with regard to women, and so on and so forth. He asks whether virtue is likely to be different, clearly implying that it is not likely to be different. Meno is unmoved by this suggestion.
- c) Socrates sets out to prove that there must be a general 'form' of virtue. He constructs his argument by making reference to strength, size and health. These concepts show that there must be a general 'form' of virtue.
- d) Meno says that all bees have something in common that makes them bees, and that he could say what that common thing is. Socrates replies that therefore Meno could also say what is common to all the cases of virtue he has listed. Just as there is one strength, size and health common to men and women, so there must be one form of virtue common to all instances of virtue. Meno disagrees.
- e) Socrates argues that there must be a general 'form' of virtue.

3. Socrates' argument in passage 2 concerning virtue, strength, size and health, is structurally most analogous to which of the following arguments?

a. It is possible to give precise geometrical definitions of 'triangle', 'square' and 'circle'. Thinking about this helps us understand the nature of definition, and also give us reason to believe there must be a precise geometrical definition of 'egg-shaped'.

b. Cats and dogs are species of mammals. Since cats and dogs have hearts and kidneys, it follows that 'mammal' must be defined as 'having a heart and kidneys'.

c. Bronze and tin are alloys of copper. It follows that the definitions of 'bronze' and 'tin' must make reference to copper.

d. If Smith, Chan, and Harris are all bachelors, we have grounds for thinking that there must be a general definition of 'bachelor'.

e. All bachelors are unmarried. Smith is a bachelor. Therefore, 'bachelor' means unmarried.

*Hint: a hard question, and maybe debatable. So that's two reasons why I wouldn't use it on an exam. Sorry about that. Good to crack your head against, though. Builds character.*

## Passage 3.

"M: . . . Justice is virtue.

S: Is *it* virtue, Meno, or a virtue? - What do you mean?

S: As with anything else. For example, if you wish, take roundness, about which I would say that it is a shape, but not simply that it is shape. I would not so speak of it because there are other shapes.

M: You are quite right. So I too say that not only justice is a virtue but there are many other virtues.

S: What are they? Tell me, as I could mention other shapes to you if you bade me do so, so do you mention other virtues.

M: I think courage is a virtue, and moderation, wisdom, and munificence, and very many others.

S: We are having the same trouble again, Meno, though in another way; we have found many virtues while looking for one, but we cannot find the one which covers all the others." (73d-e)

4. Which of the following question-answer combinations makes a conceptual mistake most analogous to the one Meno makes in the above passage?

- a. What is metal? Metal is metal.
- b. What are dogs and cats? Dogs and cats are kinds of cats.
- c. What are dogs? Dogs are mammals.
- d. What is alcohol? Alcohol is beer.
- e. What is size? Size is shape.

*Hint: same as question 3. Bit tough. But there is definitely a right answer to this one.*

## Passage 4

"S: Do you think, Meno, that anyone, knowing that bad things are bad, nevertheless desires them? - I certainly do.

S: What do you mean by desiring? Is it to secure for oneself? - What else?

S: Does he think that the bad things benefit him who possesses them, or does he know they harm him?

M: There are some who believe that the bad things benefit them, others who know that the bad things harm them.

S: And do you think that those who believe that bad things benefit them know that they are bad?

M: No, that I cannot altogether believe.

S: It is clear then that those who do not know things to be bad do not desire what is bad, but they desire those things that they believe to be good but that are in fact bad. It follows that those who have no knowledge of these things and believe them to be good clearly desire good things. Is that not so? - It is likely.

S: Well then, those who you say desire bad things, believing that bad things harm their possessor, know that they will be harmed by them? - Necessarily.

S: And do they not think that those who are harmed are miserable to the extent that they are harmed? - That too is inevitable.

S: And that those who are miserable are unhappy? - I think so.

S: Does anyone wish to be miserable and unhappy? - I do not think so, Socrates.

S: No one then wants what is bad, Meno, unless he wants to be such. For what else is being miserable but to desire bad things and secure them?

M: You are probably right, Socrates, and no one wants what is bad." (77d-78b)

5. Which of the following would be a proper illustration of Socrates' point in the underlined portion of the passage 4?

a. Cho is very thirsty and wants a glass of water. She sees what she thinks is a glass of water, but it is really a glass of poison. Therefore, Cho does not really want what is in the glass, even though she thinks she does.

b. Lee has never been taught the difference between bad and good. Therefore, his nature is unspoiled, and he desires only good things, even if it seems he wants bad things, as when he mistakes a bad glass of poison for a good glass of water.

c. Ali does not know whether arsenic is poisonous or not. Since he is not sure whether arsenic is bad or good to drink, he does not want to drink it.

d. Bob believes that all things are good. Having no knowledge that poison is bad, he believes it, too, is good.

e. Mary wants to drink a glass of poison because she wants only what is bad for her. She sees what she thinks is poison; but it is only a glass of water. In this way, those who think they want bad things come to want good things.

6. By means of which of the following counter-arguments might Meno plausibly have resisted the conclusion of Socrates' argument in passage 4?

a. There is no such thing as good and bad, but thinking makes it so. Therefore, no one wants what is bad because what everyone wants they think is good, by definition.

b. Everyone wants bad things because human nature is base and corrupt. Therefore, it does not follow that no one wants bad things.

c. Alcoholics clearly want to drink alcohol, even though many of them clearly know this is bad for them. Therefore, the conclusion that no one wants what is bad must be mistaken, since there is at least one counter-example to it.

d. It is not clear that possession of 'bad things' always brings unhappiness. For example, stolen money may plausibly bring happiness to the thief. Therefore, Socrates' argument seems to rest on a doubtful premise.

e. Both c. and d. are plausible counter-arguments.

## Passage 5:

S: . . . I say this of every shape, that a shape is that which limits a solid; in a word, a shape is the limit of a solid.

M: And what do you say colour is, Socrates?

. . . S: Do you want me to answer after the manner of Gorgias, which you would most easily follow?

S: Of course I want that.

S: Do you both say there are effluvia of things, as Empedocles does? - Certainly.

S: And that there are channels through which the effluvia make their way? - Definitely.

S: And some effluvia fit some of the channels, while others are too small or too big? - That is so.

S: And there is something which you call sight? - There is.

S: From this, "comprehend what I state," as Pindar said, for colour is an effluvium from shapes which fits the sight and is perceived.

M: That seems to me to be an excellent answer, Socrates.

S: Perhaps it was given in the manner to which you are accustomed. At the same time I think that you can deduce from this answer what sound is, and smell, and many such things. - Quite so.

S: It is a theatrical answer so it pleases you, Meno, more than that about shape. - It does.

S: It is not better, son of Alexidemus, but I am convinced that the other is. (76a-e)

7. All of the following statements except one plausibly follow from Socrates' proposed definitions (in passage 5) of shape and color. Which one does not follow?

- a) To be a sphere is to be a solid whose limit is at all points equidistant from the solid's center.
- b) The reason we cannot hear the red color of a ripe tomato is that certain effluvia of tomatoes fit into channels in our eyes but not our ears.
- c) The reason we cannot see the tone of a bell being struck is that certain effluvia of bells fit into channels in our ears but not our eyes.
- d) It is not only possible for certain effluvia to be too big to fit into certain channels in our eyes, ears, etc.; it is also possible for them to be too small to fit.
- e) All things have effluvia that fit at least some channels.

*Passage 6:*

M: What is the difficulty? What do you have in mind that you do not like about it [the claim that virtue is knowledge] and doubt that virtue is knowledge?

S: I will tell you, Meno. I am not saying that it is wrong to say that virtue is teachable if it is knowledge, but look whether it is reasonable of me to doubt whether it is knowledge. Tell me this: if not only virtue but anything whatever can be taught, should there not be of necessity people who teach it and people who learn it? - I think so.

S: Then again, if on the contrary there are no teachers or learners of something, we should be right to assume that the subject cannot be taught?

M: Quite so, but do you think that there are no teachers of virtue?

S: I have often tried to find out whether there were any teachers of it, but in spite of all my efforts I cannot find any. And yet I have searched for them with the help of many people, especially those whom I believed to be most experienced in this matter." (89d-e)

8. Which of the following arguments is most analogous to Socrates' argument in passage 6 concerning teachers of virtue? (We are concerned here with the form of the arguments, not with the truth or plausibility of the premises and/or conclusions.)

- a) The appearance of so-called 'crop circles' in farmers' fields is inexplicable unless we assume that they were made by aliens. Some scientists object to positing the existence of aliens on this basis. But it seems reasonable to do so, since there must be some explanation for the 'crop circles'.
- b) It is almost certainly impossible for aliens to visit us on earth, since it is certainly impossible to travel faster than the speed of light.
- c) It is reasonable to believe that aliens abducted Jones, since there are photographs of them doing so; and the photographs appear to be genuine.
- d) It is reasonable to doubt that all rational beings are human. For, although all rational beings encountered to date have been human, perhaps the future will surprise us. It is, at any rate, conceivable that the inhabitants of other worlds are also rational.
- e) It is reasonable to doubt that there is extraterrestrial intelligence. For if there were any, we would surely have evidence of it in the form of visitors from other planets, or radioed messages from them. But we have had no visitors, nor have we detected radio messages, though many scientific experts have been on the lookout for them.

*Passage 7:*

S: I am asking whether you think it is only in the case of virtue that there is one for man, another for woman and so on, or is the same true in the case of health and size and strength? Do you think that there is one health for man and another for woman? Or, if it is health, does it have the same form everywhere, whether in man or in anything else whatever?

M: The health of a man seems to me the same as that of a woman.

S: And so with size and strength? If a woman is strong, that strength will be the same and have the same form, for by "the same" I mean that strength is no different as far as being strength, whether in a man or a woman. Or do you think there is a difference?

M: I do not think so.

S: And will there be any difference in the case of virtue, as far as being virtue is concerned, whether it be in a child or an old man, in a woman or in a man?

M: I think, Socrates, that somehow this is no longer like those other cases.

S: How so? Did you not say that the virtue of a man consists of managing the city well, and that of a woman of managing the household? - I did.

S: Is it possible to manage a city well, or a household, or anything else, while not managing it moderately and justly? - Certainly not.

S: Then if they manage justly and moderately, they must do so with justice and moderation? - Necessarily.

S: So both the man and the woman, if they are to be good, need the same things, justice and moderation. - So it seems.

S: What about a child and an old man? Can they possibly be good if they are intemperate and unjust? - Certainly not.

S: But if they are moderate and just? - Yes.

S: So all men are good in the same way, for they become good by acquiring the same qualities. - It seems so.

S: And they would not be good in the same way if they did not have the same virtue. - They certainly would not be.”  
(72e-73c)

9. In the underlined portion of passage 7, Meno advances a somewhat indefinite criticism of Socrates' line of reasoning. Which of the following plausibly expresses a more definite formulation of Meno's concern?

- a) It does not obviously follow from the fact that health for a man is the same as health for a woman that virtue for a man must also be the same as virtue for a woman.
- b) The health of a man is not necessarily the same as health for a woman, so it is not necessarily warranted to use this claim as the basis for further arguments about virtue.
- c) Health is not virtue. Rather, to be healthy is a virtue. The proposed equation of health with virtue cannot be quite correct.
- d) Just as virtue for a man is not necessarily the same as virtue for a woman, so health for a man is not necessarily the same as health for a woman.
- e) Just because it is possible to offer an abstract definition of health, it does not follow that it is possible to offer an abstract definition of virtue.

10. In responding to Meno's concern (the underlined bit in passage 7), Socrates advances which of the following counter-arguments?

- a) It is not possible to manage anything well without moderation and justice. Therefore, since to be virtuous is to manage well, to be virtuous must be to exhibit moderation and justice.
- b) The virtues Meno implies are many and varied (one for a man, another for a woman, etc.) in fact exhibit undeniable unity. For men and women must acquire the same qualities to be good: namely, justice and moderation. And it is hardly reasonable to suppose men and women are good in the same way but virtuous in different ways.
- c) To be virtuous is to be good. To be good is to be moderate and just. Therefore, to be virtuous is to be moderate and just.
- d) Moderation and justice are virtues. Moderation and justice make men and women good. Therefore virtue is that which makes anyone good. Therefore, moderation and justice are good.
- e) It is not possible to be virtuous without exhibiting moderation and justice. Therefore, since to be virtuous is to be good, it is not possible to be good without exhibiting moderation and justice.

*Passage 8, from Plato's "Meno". At this point in the dialogue, the slave boy has just solved the geometrical puzzle Socrates puts to him: namely, what is the length of the side of a square with an area of eight square feet? (The mathematical details are not important for the questions that follow; I just thought you might find it helpful to be reminded of the immediate context.)*

S: What do you think, Meno? Has he [the boy], in his answers, expressed any opinion that was not his own?

M: No, they were all his own.

S: And yet, as we said a short time ago, he did not know? - That is true,

S: So these opinions were in him, were they not? - Yes.

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

S: 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.

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

S: And is not finding knowledge within oneself recollection? - Certainly.

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

S: 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.

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

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

M: That seems indisputable, Socrates.

S: 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.

S: Then that was the time when he was not a human being? - Yes.

S: 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. (85c-86b)

11. Which of the following is the *best* statement of the main conclusion Socrates arrives at, on the basis of his demonstration of the slave boy's geometrical capacities?

- a) Everyone exists during all time, either as a human being or not.
- b) Each person has his or her own unique, true opinions. This is why knowledge, which depends on agreement of opinions between persons, is so hard to achieve; hence the need to study geometry, concerning which everyone can always agree.
- c) Only geometry can be 'recollected', as by the slave boy. All knowledge is recollection. Therefore, all knowledge is of geometry. Knowledge is of the world. Therefore, the world must be geometrical.
- d) Everyone has true opinions about all things. These opinions, which are not acquired during life, must be stored in the soul at a time before the soul enters the human body. These opinions can be recollected through a process of questioning and, in that way, become knowledge.
- e) All humans must have souls.

12. In passage 8, what argument does Socrates offer to the conclusion that the account he gives of the nature of knowledge will apply not only to geometry but to other sorts of knowledge as well?

- a) The world is geometrical in nature. Therefore all knowledge, which must be of the world, must be geometrical in nature.
- b) There is no argument. Socrates simply asserts that the sort of questioning procedure he has shown to work for geometry will obviously work just as well for all other sorts of knowledge.
- b) Socrates argues that, being one thing, knowledge must have one 'form'. It cannot have one form regarding geometry and a different form regarding other things. So to investigate the nature of knowledge of geometry is sufficient to establish the nature of knowledge of all things.
- c) Socrates does not in fact conclude that the account he gives of the nature of knowledge applies not only to geometry but to other sorts of knowledge as well. Therefore, there is no argument to this conclusion.
- d) Socrates argues that since the soul is eternal, knowledge must be eternal – that is, of eternal things. Only geometry is eternal. So all knowledge must be of geometry.
- e) Since knowledge is recollection, it follows that all knowledge must be like knowledge of geometry, which – as the case of the slave boy shows – is recollection.