

Template - A Structural Analysis

1. The *Idea*

Phronēsis originally referred to the proper functioning of the lungs. A medical theory entertained the notion that the soul resided in the lungs, being a mixture of vapours from the blood boiling around the heart and the cooler air breathed in from outside. The term was then used to denote proper thinking and emoting, the functions of a healthy soul in the lungs. The term was adopted by philosophers either as an alternative to *aretē* itself, namely behaviour informed by understanding, or as an alternative to *sophia*, one of the four cardinal virtues (the four main aspects of *aretē*). Socrates speaks of *phronēsis* as all or part of *aretē*, but the dramatization suggests that Plato regarded *phronēsis* as *aretē* in general. Cicero translated *phronēsis* as *prudentia*, a Latin word originating in *providentia* (“foresight”), which is why *phronēsis* is translated as “prudence” in English.

2. The *Eidos*

The aspects are of apparent prudence. This is further explained in the *paradeigma* and *deigma* sections.

3. The *Paradeigma*

Each cognitive state (*eidos*) is converted into an entity (*paradeigma*) believing itself to have *epistēmē*, because its cognitive state does not allow it to conceive of *epistēmē* as other than its own cognitive experience. The tendency of the progression is to conceive of *epistēmē* as knowledge, into which, at more advanced stages, is mixed elements of knowledge usage, and understanding. All the cognitive states appear to themselves falsely to be *epistēmē*, except for *epistēmē* which appears to itself correctly to be *epistēmē*, because it is true understanding.

4. The *Deigma*

Not all of the *deigmata* are participants in the dialogue, but they are necessary for the

presentation of the whole spectrum of cognitive states leading to true *epistēmē*, with the added twist in this dialogue that each *deigma* considers itself to have *epistēmē*. This twist is not arbitrary, but is an aid to answering the question why one or other cognitive state apart from *epistēmē* is insufficient for a beneficial life:

- No *Sensum*
 - The know-nothing: Someone lacking all sensation is arguably necessary for a presentation of the complete spectrum of cognition. A *deigma* based on this *paradeigma* could not be a participant in the dialogue, but Plato cleverly sneaks one into the dialogue as half of the solution to Meno's "Paradox". Such a person, despite lacking *sensa*, is able in this dialogue to consider himself someone with *epistēmē* since he can find whatever he wants within his omniscient soul. That is how bad Socrates' eristic solution to Meno's eristic objection is.
- *Sensum*
 - The all-seeing soul: To emphasize the insufficiency of raw *sensa* for the claim of *epistēmē*, Plato adds an entity which has seen everything in this world and in Hades. While it sounds as though this soul is omniscient, and may suppose itself to have *epistēmē*, it is in fact passive and does nothing with its *sensa*. It requires the know-nothing human to use the *sensa*.
- Isolated *doxa* (a *sensum* recollected)
 - Meno: This character believes each *doxa* (opinion) to be an *epistēmē*, a piece of knowledge. *Doxa* is "that which appears", and that which appears to oneself is an opinion, while one's own appearance to others is reputation. Well-reputed people have *eudoxia* (99b): their *doxa* is good. Meno finds the *doxai* of famous people like Gorgias, and even infamous people like Socrates, to be of more worth than other opinions, since it allows his answers, showing off his knowledge, to be more impressive. On such occasions, he is effectively transmitting to others what he regards as *epistēmē*, but he does not regard it as teaching since he does not claim to teach and does not get paid for doing it.

- A limited matrix of coherent *doxai* (experience)
 - Theognis. A repeated pattern of cause and effect has some power of predictability, and it is worth teaching others. An aristocrat does not stoop to teaching, but giving advice is not only acceptable but also socially appropriate, especially when that advice is to do with finding one's place in polite society, among the rich and powerful. Framing that advice as a collection of poems is the very height of aristocratic behaviour. The poor, and people who behave as if they too want to be poor, are clearly lacking *epistēmē*. Socrates brings up Theognis, as if incidentally, after his episode with Anytus.
 - Anytus. In addition to the long-dead Theban Theognis, we are treated to a contemporary Athenian wielder of wealth and power. Unlike Theognis, Anytus is nouveau riche and boorish. The unfavourable comparison is more cosmetic than essential, since they are of the same type.
- A fuller matrix of coherent *doxai*, with method and a goal (craft/skill)
 - The Thessalians. These are horsebreeders well-reputed for their product, they appear to have *aretē*, and actually do have *aretē* to the extent that they are good at their *technē*. They acquire their *aretē* (or appearance of it) through birth to horsebreeders, being taught by them, and exercising, and Socrates mentions the Thessalians incidentally in his reply to Meno's first disjunctive question asking whether *aretē* is teachable, or exercisable, or comes to people naturally, or in some other way. These represent good *technitai*.
 - Anthemion. The father of Anytus is mentioned in passing, but he made his money from tanning. Anytus is not mentioned here as a craftsman. He evidently does not regard craft as *epistēmē*, since his political power rests on his political experience.
 - Gorgias. The sophist abuses *technē* to appear to be a teacher of reputation. He teaches people to appear to be like those who know, and this is in order for them to appear to be good. In this way, Gorgias is the antithesis of Socrates in this dialogue. He ensures that people like Meno remain incapable of critical

thought, as opposed to Socrates, whose entire attention is devoted to sparking critical thinking in his interlocutors.

- A free-ranging matrix of coherent *doxai*, reflexive, methodical, aiming at truth and understanding (dialectic)
- Socrates. This character is prepared to appear foolish in pursuit of his goal, to spark critical thinking in his interlocutors. He confronts his interlocutors with the contradictions in their own *doxai*, their own positions, their own expectations. Dialectic and true *epistēmē* is not about knowledge *per se*, but the means to acquire it. for this reason, Socrates has no qualms telling outright lies and using sophistry.