

Desire, Knowledge & the Good (From the Meno as translated by Grube, 77e)

S: Do you assume that there are people who desire bad things, and others who desire good things? Do you not think, my good man, that all men desire good things?

M: I do not.

S: But some desire bad things?

M: Yes.

S: Do you mean that they believe the bad things to be good, **or** that they know they are bad and nevertheless desire them?

M: I think there are both kinds.

S: Do you think, Meno, that anyone, knowing that bad things are bad, nevertheless desires them?

M: I certainly do.

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

M: What else?

S: Does he think that the bad things benefit him who possess 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 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 matters and believe them to be good clearly desire good things. Is that not so?

M: 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?

M: Necessarily

S: And do they not think that those who are harmed are miserable to the extent that they are harmed?

M: That too is inevitable.

S: And that those who are miserable are unhappy?

M: I think so.

S: Does anyone wish to be miserable and unhappy?

M: 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.