MENO

I. VIRTUE (70a-79e)
   1. Introduction: Is virtue teachable? But, what is virtue? (70a-71d)
   2. Definitions: two of virtue (two of shape, one of color) one of virtue (71d-79e)
      a. Virtue Def. 1 (Meno): the virtue of a man is to be 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; the virtue of a woman is to manage well the household, preserving its possessions, and obey her husband; the virtue of a child, whether male or female, is different again, and so is that of an old man or of a free man or a slave (71e-73c)
      b. Virtue Def. 2 (Meno): to be able to rule over human beings (73d-75b)
      1) Shape Def. 1 (Socrates): that which alone among existing things always follows color (75b-76a)
      2) Shape Def. 2 (Socrates): the limit of a solid (76a-76d)
      3) Color Def. 1 (Socrates): an effluence of shape which fits sight and is perceptible (76d-77b)
      c. Virtue Def. 3 (Meno): to desire beautiful things and be able to acquire them (77b-79e)

II. KNOWLEDGE (79e-86c)
   1. Torpedo fish (79e-79d)
   2. Debater's argument (79d-81a)
   3. Recollection (1) (81a-82a)
   4. Geometrical demonstration (82a-82c)

III. VIRTUE (86c-100c)
   1. New beginning: Is virtue teachable? If virtue is knowledge, then it's teachable. Virtue is knowledge. Thus, virtue is teachable. (86c-89c)
   2. Anytus section: Virtue is not teachable. For, there are no teachers of it. (89c-96d)
   3. True opinion is as good as knowledge in practice. Recollection (2). Virtue comes as a gift of the gods (literally, 'by divine fate'). (96d-100c)

Virtue (aretē): a Greek would not use the term 'virtue' to connote doing the moral thing rather than the immoral thing; he or she wouldn't use it to connote doing your duty, or doing something you don't want to do but must do ('I'm being virtuous; I'm cleaning my apartment.'), nor would they use it to connote chastity.

Instead, they would use it to connote something more like the strength or excellence of something, that is, its capacity to do its work well. For example, they might speak of the virtue of a horse, to run swiftly; or of the eye, to see clearly; or of the body, health or strength; or of a lyre-player, to play the lyre beautifully.

The original meaning of 'aretē'--what it meant in Homeric or pre-Homeric times--was strength, manliness or valour. 'Aretē' has 'ar-' in it, which means maleness (and is related to the name of the god of war, 'Ares'). The English word 'virtue' has a similar history. It has 'vir-' in it, meaning maleness (related to the term 'virile'.)'
By the time of Plato's *Meno*, 'virtue' is starting to be a general term with types. Types often mentioned are: wisdom, justice, courage, moderation (i.e., self-control, temperance), and piety. However, it is still, at this time, used to connote the excellence of something, e.g. the virtue of the eye, the virtue of a lyre-player, and so forth.

What 'virtue' ('*aretē*)' means, of course, is one of the main questions of the *Meno*. These comments, though, may be helpful in seeing what's at issue in the dialogue. It's important to keep in mind that when Meno asks how virtue is acquired, he is not asking something like 'How can I become moral?' but something more like 'How can I acquire strength, excellence or ability?'