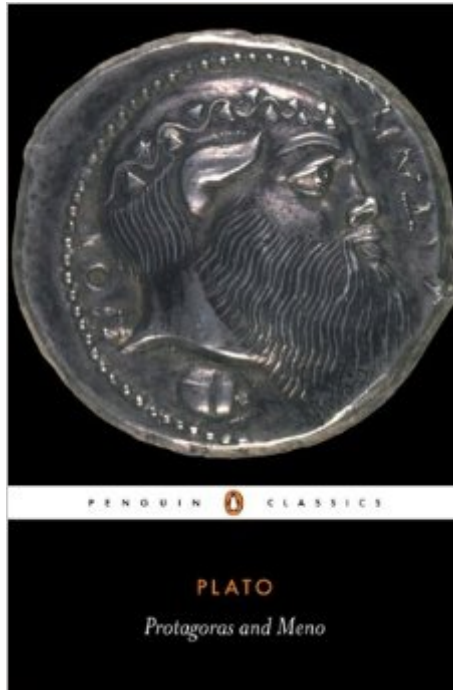


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Protagoras And Meno (Penguin Classics)



Synopsis

Plato's finest dramatic work, an entertaining tale of goodness and knowledgeExploring the question of what exactly makes good people good, Protagoras and Meno are two of the most enjoyable and accessible of all of Plato's dialogues. Widely regarded as his finest dramatic work, the Protagoras, set during the golden age of Pericles, pits a youthful Socrates against the revered sophist Protagoras, whose brilliance and humanity make him one the most interesting and likeable of Socrates' philosophical opponents, and turns their encounter into a genuine and lively battle of minds. The Meno sees an older but ever ironic Socrates humbling a proud young aristocrat as they search for a clear understanding of what it is to be a good man, and setting out the startling idea that all human learning may be the recovery of knowledge already possessed by our immortal souls. For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

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Customer Reviews

When I saw that I had been assigned Plato I have to confess I worried if the book might be a bit too

dry and heavy for my tastes. I was therefore pleasantly surprised at the accessible, readable and indeed rather enjoyable nature of Protagoras and Meno. The two dialogues are concerned with the nature of being 'good'. A central theme is the question of whether virtue (or 'being good') is something that can be taught. In both dialogues the central figure is Socrates. He is engaged in debates with the two eponymous figures Protagoras and Meno. Protagoras is the most famous sophist in Greece but Socrates is sceptical as to what a sophist can achieve. Protagoras believes that the job of a sophist is to teach people how to be good. Socrates then sets out to show that virtue cannot be taught. This dialogue ends rather unsatisfactorily. Socrates cuts short the debate as both speakers had become confused -- arguing the opposite of what they originally intended. The thoughts developed by Socrates in Protagoras are rounded off in Meno. Here, Socrates concludes that virtue is not teachable. This is because so many great sophists are unable to teach their own sons how to be good. As virtue is not teachable, nor can it be a form of wisdom. Instead, Socrates contends that virtue comes when people are "inspired" -- it is "a gift of god". Earlier on, Socrates had brilliantly demonstrated that knowledge can be innate by leading one of Meno's slaves through a geometric puzzle without teaching anything. As an economics graduate, I particularly appreciated the sections of the dialogues where Socrates contended that people do not set out to do bad things. It is easy to see how this Benthamite argument influenced J. S. Mill.

The penguin edition was the first edition of Meno I've read, the other is the Hackett edition. Between the two the Penguin does seem easier to understand and has better sentence structure, but I don't know which is more accurate. One of the big differences between the two is the Penguin edition uses "Good" where as the Hackett uses "Virtue". This edition also contains way better footnotes. Protagoras was my first introduction to Plato, but sadly I read it a while ago and I don't really remember much. The impression I got at the time was that Socrates sure likes to hear himself speak. The part I remember best is where Protagoras gives a half page reply to one of Socrates questions which causes Socrates to rant for 5 pages about how he's leaving if Protagoras can't answer his questions more direct with less words, oddly later on when Protagoras asks Socrates questions, most of his answers are far longer than Protagoras's. In any case I definitely need to read this again. I've recently read Meno again and it was pretty good, not the best Socrates dialogue but I did like it more on second readings. I think reading a few more of Plato's dialogues did cause me to like Socrates far more. It was somewhat interesting, Socrates meets with Meno to discuss what virtue is and how can it be acquired. Meno seems to have some ideas but he comes in contact with a broad torpedo fish (Socrates) and this leaves him numb and in a state of perplexity, in the end

we're not really sure what virtue is but we know a few things its not. The thing this seems to be best remembered for a part where Socrates questions a slave to prove that souls already learned everything before inhabiting a human.

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