PLATO’S ARGUMENT THAT VIRTUE IS A GIFT FROM THE GODS
(DAVE’S NOTES ON THE MENO)

PART I: VIRTUE IS NOT TAUGHT:

(1) Virtue is beneficial - virtue makes people good and makes them do things well (87e).

(2) That which is in the soul that makes people good and makes them do things well is wisdom or knowledge. (88c-d)

(3) Virtue, therefore, must be knowledge (89a).

(4) If virtue is knowledge, then virtue is teachable (89c).

(5) Therefore, virtue is teachable (89d).

(6) But we have very good reasons to doubt the conclusion (5), that virtue is teachable; hence, we have very good reasons to doubt that it is knowledge (89d).

(7) Virtue is not teachable, since there are no teachers of virtue and no pupils of virtue (and good fathers fail to impart virtue to their sons, etc.) (89d-94e).

(8) Thus, virtue is neither knowledge nor teachable (94e).

PART II: VIRTUE IS RIGHT OPINION:

(9) Since right opinion makes people good and do things well, premise (2) is wrong (i.e., wisdom or knowledge is not the only possession of the soul that makes people good and do well) (97b).

(10) So, if virtue is that which makes people good and do well (i.e., is beneficial); and only two things make people good and make them do well (knowledge and right opinion) and since virtue is not knowledge; therefore it must be right opinion. (97b-c, 99a-b)

PART III: VIRTUE IS A GIFT OF THE GODS:

(11) All things either are in us naturally or are acquired. (98d)

(12) Neither knowledge nor right opinion is in us naturally (89a, 98c-d).

(13) If they are acquired, they are acquired by teaching, or acquired as a gift of the gods (Implied).

(14) Right opinion is not knowledge; hence it is not acquired by teaching (98e).

(15) Therefore, right opinion, since it is acquired but not by teaching, must be a gift of the gods (99b-d).

(16) Virtue, therefore, is a gift of the gods (100a).