

Epistemology

Plato - Learner's Paradox, Knowledge must be innate (already in you, always, from birth), learning is really recollection of eternal truths written in our immortal souls, so be humble, know your ignorance, ask questions and inquire, Meno's servant boy example

Aristotle - **induction** (senses, connections, memory, generalization, *logos* - rational understanding)... **deduction** (logic, demonstration, application, syllogism (argumentation))... **intuition** (grasping the basics, the starting points of knowledge)

Ancient Period of philosophy...

- Rise of Roman Empire
- Jesus born - Merry Christmas!
- Christian Church is born... early church fathers
- Decline and fall of the Roman Empire (476 AD)
- Dark Ages in Europe
- Rise of Islam in Middle East and Northern Africa (622)
- Crusades

Middle Ages and Medieval Philosophy (1000-1500)

- Europe reorganizes, cities and universities develop
- Church grows powerful
- Theology and Philosophy were intertwined
- Renaissance... Italian but also Northern European

Important transition elements...

- Printing Press
- Age of Exploration
- Luther and the Protestant Reformation (1517)

- Henry VIII... Church of England
- Copernican Revolution begins... (1543)

Start of the “Modern” Period of Philosophy... an Age of Reason... the Enlightenment

Rene Descartes (1596-1650)

- Searching for new foundations for knowledge, for science
- Descartes pursues knowledge through systematic DOUBT
 - o Wants to tear down everything until he finds rock solid foundation... certainty... indubitable
- Reasons why (and how) Descartes doubts:
 - o Childhood beliefs that were proved wrong... what else could be wrong?!
 - o Even if there is a little doubt, he'll treat the belief as if it were false (can't be a foundation)
 - o The senses have failed sometimes... can't be completely trusted
 - o Dreams aren't always easy to tell from reality
 - Senses seem to function even in dreams! Yet another reason to doubt them
 - o Crazy people don't know they're crazy... how do I know I'm not crazy?!

Descartes pauses... it DOES SEEM like math, geometry, and abstract sciences are more certain and more knowable than our senses, or opinions, or perceptions about the world... those beliefs and any science based on them are more susceptible to doubt, but math and abstract science is not so easily doubted

- o And YET... even math can be doubted!
- o What if an EVIL DEMON were tricking me even about adding one plus one?!!!!

Despite all these doubts, one thing emerges as certain...

- I think, therefore, I am! = *Cogito ergo sum*
- Thinking (even doubting) confirms at least the mental existence of the thinker

Descartes' epistemology is indicative of a general approach to knowledge called RATIONALISM

- Knowledge should be based in certainty, systems, concepts, logic, math, analysis
- NOT so much in experience or the senses, which in themselves aren't rock solid
- *a priori* knowledge... separate from experience, prior to experience
- Rationalists tended to come from continental Europe

John Locke (1632-1704) represented EMPIRICISM

- EXPERIENCE is the source of knowledge
 - o Locke thinks there are two kinds of experience:
 - SENSATION
 - REFLECTION
 - All knowledge is *a posteriori* - FROM experience
 - NO innate ideas or knowledge
 - Your mind is born as a *tabula rasa* (blank slate)
- Locke attacks the notion of innate ideas...
 - o If there were innate ideas, they would be universally known
 - o But, there are no universally known ideas!
 - Children and idiots don't know stuff!

- EVEN IF you could find a universally known idea, it would not prove it was innate
 - We all could have just experienced it the same way
- Basic capacities are things we are born with, like the senses and our biological instincts... but none of that counts as “knowledge”, which only arrives as we experience the external world and internally experience the processes of learning