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Phil 101 Introduction to Philosophy

Epistemology Paper

## **Epistemology**

Epistemology by definition is the theory of knowledge, especially with regard to its method, validity, and scope. In further detail it is the investigation of what distinguishes justified belief from opinion. Plato was one of the few philosophers that's theory is pretty sound. It all starts with Plato talking to Socrates. Plato is referring to Socrates as a "torpedo fish". He means it both appearance wise ( Socrates snub nose) and to his numbing effect on those who come into contact with him. Socrates' response to this is that he doesn't intend to confuse people, but has genuine questions. Plato then presents a problem about inquiry, which is the learners' paradox. The Learners Paradox seems like there is no learning. If you know, you don't need to learn, if you don't know, you can't learn, or you won't know what to look for, or when you've found it. Plato gives an answer to this puzzle. Knowledge is ultimately innate in further detail, learning is just recollection. In other words the ultimate truth is eternal, transcendent, and we have an immortal soul that is connected to ultimate truth. Recollection involves questioning, inquiry, logic, debate, analysis, defining, and clarifying the ideas. Socrates in return tries to demonstrate this theory about recollection and inquiry with Plato's Servant Boy. At first, the kid thought he knew, but he was wrong. Socrates questions and confuses the boy, but in order to move him past

his prideful errors and to develop a thirst for truth. Through questions and intellectual humility and hard work, the boy gets closer to the truth, and discovers and recollects answers that are right.

In comparison, Aristotle theory on epistemology revolves around three main ideas: induction, deduction, and intuition. Aristotle was actually a student of Plato, but he was different from his teacher on many things. Induction is building general understanding through the senses and from particular experiences, which could be sensory experience, memory, comparison/contrast/difference, experience, logos, understanding, scientific knowledge and skill. Deduction is logical demonstration of argumentation analysis and application. Argument is a set of reasons (premises) given in support of a claim (conclusion). Syllogism is a special kind of argument to establish a relationship between two things by connecting them each to a third thing. For example, All A's are B's, All B's are C's, Therefore, all A's are C's. So if, All dogs are mammals, All mammals are animals, Therefore all dogs are animals. Truth is a property of statements. Premises can be true or false. Validity is a property of arguments. Arguments can be valid or invalid(not true or false). An argument is valid if and only if. It's premises imply its conclusion. It's conclusion follows from its premises. By assuming its premises were true, its conclusion would have to be true. Demonstration involves forming logical arguments. True premises lead to knowledge about the world. On the other hand, Intuition grasps the starting point of knowledge of logic, of the senses, of memory etc.

Descartes also had a theory on epistemology. Descartes epistemology is an example of Rationalism. His theory is quite common. It involves knowledge as certain, systematic, foundational, self evident, also downplaying experiences and the senses. Also involves looking inward, analysis, systems, math, prior knowledge usually tends to be held by Continental European thinkers. Rene Descartes searched for a new foundation of knowledge. His method was systematic doubt, you must find foundations that don't have cracks in them you can't build science and subsequent knowledge if the foundations aren't secure. Searching for certainty is incumbent. Even if something has a hint of doubt in it, it can't serve as a foundation and should be treated as if it were false or untrustworthy. There were 4 reasons why Descartes had doubts. Starting with childhood opinions, things he had been taught, all turned out false or conflicted. Secondly he doubted the senses, because they can deceive, they are sometimes unreliable. Thirdly, crazy people don't know they are crazy. Fourthly, what about dreams? You are not always able to tell dreams apart from reality. While the senses and sensory experience and even sensory based sciences aren't entirely reliable, math, geometry, and more abstract sciences are more certain and are better foundations. Despite this Descartes finds a way to even doubt MATH!!! He makes a funny analogy "What if an evil demon, a malicious spirit, were messing with my head, making me do wrong even with math and geometry". And yet after all this, there is something Descartes realizes he cannot doubt. Cogito ergo sum is a Latin philosophical theory made by Rene Descartes which means I think therefore I am. He says I must exist at least as a "thinking thing"/ a "mind". This sets up dualism between mind and body. Descartes' epistemology is an example of "Rationalism".

In conclusion, all these philosophers had different but essential viewpoints. They are part of the reason why we understand reasoning. In my opinion, Plato's theory on epistemology makes the most sense. "If you know, you don't need to learn, if you don't know, you can't learn, or you won't know what to look for, or when you've found it." This statement seems quite cryptic but the underlying meaning is quite clear. The experiment with his servant boy put everything in perspective for me. The knowledge we have has to come from somewhere.