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Paper 1: Epistemology

The philosopher I choose is Plato. Born in Athens, Greece, he is probably known as the most important and influential philosopher in history. He was Socrates' learner and Aristotle's master. His philosophy was mainly based on the following points: ethics, politics, and epistemology. In this paper, I will focus on his view of epistemology. For Plato, knowledge was not in the real world, the world that we can see, touch, or smell. He thought that our senses could make us understand knowledge in a very subjective way.

His idea about the existence of an immortal soul has an important meaning on how he understood knowledge, he thought that apart from being immortal, our soul had the ability to keep all the knowledge that an individual could learn during his existence. For Plato, our body would die one day, but when that happened our soul would leave it and join another newborn human "The soul, then, as being immortal, and having been born again many times, and having been born again many times, and having seen all things that exist, whether in this world or in the world below, has knowledge of them all"

For Plato, this means that when we are born, we already have knowledge in our body, but we don't know it unless our immortal soul remembers it.

Going on from this statement that Plato makes, do we then acquire or recollect knowledge? Plato thought that knowledge is the result of recollection "I can teach you, when I am saying that there

is no teaching, but only recollection” this is because he thought that an individual who already knows something, cannot learn anymore. But if on the other hand, an individual does not know something, he will not be able to learn it because he does not know where to start investigating. “If he knows, he has no need to enquire; and if not, he cannot; for he does not know the very subject about which he is to enquire”

Going back to the part of knowledge recollection, it is important to highlight that this process of “remembering” knowledge is not passive or happens spontaneously, it occurs while we ask or receive questions from people, while debates, analysis, or conversations with other people that already know about the study field we are interested in.

The dialogue in Meno works as a perfect example to illustrate this idea, we see how Socrates demonstrates to Meno how knowledge is already in our bodies. Socrates chooses randomly a boy that was next to them and starts asking him questions about how to expand and divide the area of a square. The boy answers all the questions, thus showing how he indeed has the knowledge, he just simply had to remember it. Meno is surprised because all the boy answers are correct. I believe that the fact of using a random boy emphasizes Socrates' idea of knowledge attaching itself to the soul and joining a new body in a new life.

However, it is true that this belief of the immortal soul that Socrates is showing could be false. The main reason, referring to the example of the conversation between the boy and Socrates, is that the boy could be just affirming every question that Socrates was making without really understanding him. In the end, Socrates is just making questions that can only be answered with yes or no because of how they are asked. Socrates could be influencing the boy's decision forcing him to accept what he was asking. “Though readers may feel that Socrates is leading the boy in the direction he wants, it should be clear that the result of the exchange is quite different

from what happens in spoon-feeding, where the learner simply accepts what the teacher imparts”

Once I explained that and after analyzing the reading more times, I know how to position myself about this view shown about knowledge and soul.

Starting from the beginning, I think that our senses play a big role in understanding knowledge, there are some cases where they help us understand a situation better. For example, gravity; when Isaac Newton discovered gravity it was through a situation where his sense of touch allowed him to feel how the apple fell on his head. Also, if we want to demonstrate gravity in a physical way, our site will allow us to see how objects fall into the ground if we let them fall. I think our senses provide us the opportunity of reaffirming knowledge with more evidence, creating then what we called facts.

Also, I do not agree with the paradox that Plato made about how people that already knowledge have can not learn more, and people that do not have knowledge can not learn new things.

Mainly because this cancels the idea of progressing, how were we able then to invent all the technological devices during the past decades? If nobody did it before.

Continuing with this idea, I do not believe in the existence of an immortal soul either, referring to a different example than technological devices. A few months ago, we were facing an extreme situation because of Covid – 19, and governments are expecting to have an effective vaccine in the next few years. How do scientists know the components that the vaccine would have in order to cure the virus if we never experienced it before? I think that even though we are born with some type of natural instinct, knowledge is not innate, and that is what makes us able to learn and discover new things through investigation, but also using our senses to perceive and analyze information from the world.

I liked reading about Plato's view of knowledge, it made me think about the concept of knowledge from some perspectives that I never thought of before. I think it was interesting to learn about knowledge and the soul from his point of view.