

Mia Espinoza

Professor Sanchez

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### Epistemology Paper

Plato is one of the world's most widely known and studied philosophers to this day. He studied under Socrates in ancient Greece during the 5th century BCE. And he later taught another famous philosopher Aristotle. As a student of Socrates, Plato was heavily influenced by his teachings and yet was still able to form his own philosophical stances and writings where he speaks of ethics, political philosophy, moral psychology, epistemology, and metaphysics and all connect them perfectly with each other. He is also known for his ideas concerning the theory of Forms, according to which the world we know through our senses (sight, hearing, touch) is only an emulation of the pure, and unchanging world of the Forms. Plato's works also included much about love and romance. But not the love you might expect, instead the ideas of purely "Platonic love and Platonic Realism" are credited to him. Along with his teacher, Socrates, and his student, Aristotle, Plato is an important central figure in the history of philosophy. Plato's works have consistently been read and studied and even have influenced the philosophies of both Christian and Islamic religions. Two very different religions are connected by the ideas of this great philosopher.

Plato believed that truth is objective and that it results from beliefs that have been rightly justified and proven through reason. This is what makes knowledge a true belief. This draws the separation between belief and knowledge even though they are related. An idea may stem from

logical reasoning but this idea must be supported by reason in order for it to become common knowledge. Plato has assumed that knowledge is attainable and that for knowledge to exist it must be infallible and "of the *real*." True knowledge must have both these characteristics or it cannot be considered true knowledge. But how do these statements relate to Plato's philosophical doctrines, more specifically his concept of forms? Knowledge is based on real things in real life, these ideas or objects are universal in that they can be applied and or described as real-life objects. According to Plato, Forms are the real essence of what a substance or object truly is. This answers the question "what is that?" He goes on to say that what we experience through our senses is a mere image of the true essence of the substance. He acknowledges that this is of no fault of our own and that this world is flawed and prevents us from seeing these true Forms. For example, using the concept of Beauty. Plato would say that Beauty in itself is a real, and eternal essence that isn't just a characteristic of an object. Instead, Beauty is both a characteristic and an essence in itself. In this illustration, Beauty itself is utterly and solely beautiful and exists separately from any object that is perceived as beautiful. This separated form is an object of knowledge.

In *Meno* by Plato a dialog on the nature of virtue between Socrates and his pupil Meno is recollected. They discuss how virtue can be recognized, how it came to be and whether it can be taught. Socrates suggests that there are plenty of virtues in this world and that each one is very different. Among these many virtues, Socrates asks for examples, and Meno suggests courage, temperance, wisdom, and magnanimity. Eventually, the two face a problem with the many virtues that Meno is describing and if any of them can even be taught. He turns to Meno and asks if he has found any gentlemen who offer to teach virtue. Meno replies that his own teacher, Gorgias, laughs at the notion. They agree that there is a great deal of controversy among

philosophers, teachers, and poets as to whether virtue can be taught at all. Socrates then asks how correct behavior can be acquired. He suggests experience and opinion which then spirals into a talk of knowledge. The two agree that if opinions aren't grounded in knowledge, and if knowledge cannot be taught then virtue itself can't be taught either. Therefore, Socrates and Meno conclude, virtue must be a "gift of God", and that great leaders act and speak greatly, not because of what they know, but because of a quality of the divine within them. This was a surprising conclusion for me because usually Plato has strayed from talks of the divine or just accepted that there is not one true answer and that it must be an act of the spirit.

This view mirrors and differs from Plato's student Aristotle greatly who believes the object of knowledge must be objectively true and necessary. The most striking difference between the two views is the objective of necessity which is not brought up in Plato's writing.

Plato's view of knowledge is one of the most clear of any philosopher. I think that's why his work is as renowned as we now know it to be. The unique distinction between a beginning thought or idea which comes to us after perceiving things in the real world and actually acquiring knowledge and it being contrasted as such makes perfect sense. It has made me wonder if every idea we have is based on what we already perceived. And in the Meno discussion if those ideas they said were "God given" if they were just normal passing ideas. It has definitely made me question when I have so many ideas and where exactly might I have acquired them throughout my day.