

Nicole Blanch

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Professor Louis Sanchez

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### Epistemology Paper

Throughout history there have been philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle, that have been on their own journey for the true idea of what knowledge really is and where it comes from. Plato has his own theory that all people somehow and somewhat get their knowledge innately, in that we all have some type of knowledge when we are born. On the other hand, Aristotle, a student of Plato, obtained a theory that knowledge is all based on our senses, what we can feel, touch, taste, etc. However, one philosopher I want to take a deeper look into is, René Descartes, a rationalist from the early modern period. He along with John Locke and others come from the Modern Philosophy time zone, which happens to be between the 17th and 18th century. Descartes' writings had a vital effect on philosophy's development, specifically the concept of epistemology.

To start off, Descartes began by seeking new foundations for knowledge and the reconstruction of what it means to know something. He was in search of certainty, in specific, the clear and distinct ideas of knowledge. Reasons for him doing this were initiated by realizing that all his childhood opinions on certain ideas happened to be proved debatable. All the beliefs he was taught as a student in school became more and more unstable, or 'unreliable', is the term he used. Another concept he viewed as unreliable, was the idea of senses being the driving force of true knowledge. Picking up that senses can deceive the human mind into thinking something is

reality when there is a possibility that it's not, struck René Descartes. Also the idea of dreams versus reality and that we can't always be certain that what we are dreaming is a dream and not reality is another reason as to why he doubts what he knows. Coming to notice all of this and the fact that other sciences were basing their principles off of philosophy, Descartes had this to say, 'nothing solid could be built on such shaky foundations'.

With that said, he was determined to wipe out all the opinions he accepted as truth and start from scratch. In doing so, René formulates a plan, a method of doubt that systematically discards anything that can be questioned. Things like mathematics, geometry, and other abstract sciences happen to be more certain than all the other sciences that are based on senses and experience. Truths like these are still able to stand, regardless of what is perceived about them or any type of experience. Although, Descartes does even point out that mathematics can be doubted. He comes to this conclusion by questioning if God or this imaginary demon is trying to deceive us into believing that two plus two equals 4. Descartes goes into detail by describing this fictional demon as a 'malicious demon of the utmost power who employs all his energies to deceive me.

However, Descartes did identify one truth that is absolutely certain and cannot be doubted. That is that he himself does in fact exist in this world. '*Cogito ergo sum*', meaning 'I am thinking therefore I exist', in Latin. He believed that if he was able to doubt something that meant he was able to think, and if he was able to be a human being that thought, that meant that he existed in this world. Which in fact set up mind-body dualism, where the thinking substance is different from the actual material substance. This, in itself, became the very first principle of Descartes' new philosophy.

Nevertheless, there can be some questions or concerns in regards to Descartes' new thinking method. To help aid Aristotle's theory, there has to be some type of sense being utilized to figure out that some things can be doubtful. For example, in the textbook, it states, "I see plainly that there are never any sure signs by means of which being awake can be distinguished from being asleep". Well the first two words of that statement give it away, "I see", obviously this means that is observing the reality of dreams with the use of his very own eyes. On the other hand, Plato can defend his position in a way as well with the use of innate knowledge. Like, if your were to doubt something that you have already been taught wouldn't have happened to know in some way it was wrong from the beginning? Knowing that each philosopher's theory of the meaning of knowledge and where it came from is not absolute truth, just continues the conversation as to what the justification of truth really is.

All in all, my belief in epistemology kind of accumulates each of the philosopher's theories into one big idea of truth. For instance, in Plato's case, the idea that we all come into this world with some type of knowledge is a very unique approach to the topic at hand. As babies, we tend to differentiate between the right and wrong things without even noticing that we just did so. And in that we bring in Aristotle's thoughts with the use of senses as our driving force for knowledge. Experiencing certain things while utilizing our senses can aid us in determining whether something is right. However, what if everything we experience and everything we get to know, is this big falsehood? That's why I think Descartes really has a valid point in what he is uncovering when it comes to the systematic method of doubt.