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Proposal Paper

Philosophy is the rational investigation of truths of knowledge, being, or conduct (*Dictionary,* 2010). Though that is the overall concise explanation, the manner of which you present and go about the study of philosophy is what defines it. That is, what one does to explain or discover something is the definition of philosophy. Descartes explains philosophy as how you learn. Hume states philosophy is why we do what we do. Whether we learn those features through meditation or experience, each has their own explanation and method of retrieval. Because Descartes and Hume describe in some form how we know what we know, I will argue that philosophy, according to Descartes and Hume, is nothing more than epistemology.

Epistemology evaluates how we know what we know through investigating the origin, nature, methods, and limits of human knowledge. This theory of knowledge states that knowledge is the median between which truths and beliefs overlap. Epistemology can further be divided into two sectors: internal and external. Epistemological externalists believe that in order for a belief to be knowledge, it must be have causation from an outside factor. Internalists on the other hand, believe the exact opposite, living by the phrase, “Cogito ergo sum,” I think therefore I am. Hence, they believe all knowledge comes from within.

Descartes describes internal epistemology in that he believes all knowledge from clear and distinct ideas within us. What is clear and distinct does not involve contradiction i.e. the principle of non-contradiction, method of doubt, and clear and distinct ideas. To elaborate, it is important to back track to the origin of Descartes philosophical journey. He believes in the geometric method which states that one accumulates beliefs each year that build upon on another. However, he determines that these beliefs are based on opinion and therefore are wrong. Descartes then decides in order to correct this issue he cannot simply prove each wrong. Instead, he must stop believing anything consisting of the slightest amount of doubt and only believe what is true. To do this, he frees his mind and goes into solitude. This will allow him to clear his mind of all opinion and doubt. He will put beliefs into classes that have the same foundation. If he can discount a foundation, he can discount everything in that class. Opinions, beliefs, and senses can be discounted because it is possible you may be dreaming. Mathematical truths can be doubted because the evil genius may make you question. According to Descartes, for all he knows, there is a higher power, the evil genius (demon), of whom he is under the influence. Mainly, this is to prove that all truths may be what they appear to be. Descartes will only build a foundation of thought on something that is past the evil genius. Descartes life has been like a dream in that he believes in the world of seeming. One thing can be certain, the indirect proof. “If I don’t have a body, do I exist? If there is no body, there is no ‘I.’” Hence, I think therefore I am. Thinking can be broken into three sectors- sensing, imagining, and understanding.

In order for a foundation to be past the evil genius, it must come from clear and distinct ideas. What is clear and distinct does not involve contradiction. We can trust the natural light because it is consistent, mythological, and non-contradiction. The natural light is composed of clear and distinct ideas that lead to the method of doubt, which end with the principle of non-contradiction. The only thing that can contend with the evil genius is God. If he can prove there is a God, he will know God would not fool him and therefore believe what he sees on earth. Error from the world comes from judgments because judgments are what separate fact from fiction. Although it separates, judgment is also where error, the evil genius, comes in. Therefore, there must be a divine guarantee that judgment is correct. Through judgment, there are three places ideas come from; “Where do I get the ideas that come from inside of me… do not will, so they do not come from inside of me, but I can doubt they come from the outside world.” Thus, ideas must come from being fooled, taught by nature, or while dreaming. Representations are pictures of how we interpret images. We cannot be sure they not resemble something else and what we are seeing is really what we judge it to be. Understanding gives you more reality because with understanding comes substance. Substance is independent. Since representations come from our judgments, he must cancel the evil genius and have a divine guarantee that the representations are correct and not an error of his judgment.

Furthermore, since the only thing that can contend with the evil genius is God, Descartes must prove there is a God. He does so in the third meditation through three proofs. By determining the existence of God he can validate reason. The first before states that I could not of created god because he is Sui causa, self-generating. This axiom explains that it is impossible for something to come out of nothing. Additionally, it states that something must have just as much objective reality as formal reality. The second proof argue the causes of ourselves. The cogito cannot make up myself - I am not capable of creating clear and distinct ideas, I can only perceive them. My parents or other factors did not create me – that would consider an infinite regress, something more perfect must of created me. The third and final proof explains the overall idea of God. Something cannot come out of nothing. Hence, the idea of God must come from something. I am not my own cause so there must be something else. We know from the cogito that we are finite and imperfect because I already have an idea of the infinite in me. Therefore, the idea must be innate. Descartes clearly and distinctly perceives that God would not deceive him because he is perfect and has no defects. The idea of God must have been placed in me by God, insisting the God exists.

In all, Descartes describes internal epistemology in that he believes all knowledge arrives from clear and distinct ideas within us. By proving the existence of God, he proves that it is possible to believe in truths. Our essence is being a thinking thing. We have understanding. Though there are accidents from imagination and sense perception, all that we know comes from within us. From the cogito, extension, imagination, memory, and understanding, arise; therefore insisting that all knowledge come from within us.

Contrary, Hume elaborates on a world of external epistemology in that all knowledge comes from sense expressions. All probable reasoning is nothing but a species of sensation. Though Hume was harshly judged for having this skepticism, he provides extensive support on why this must be true. The basis of Hume is that all we have is ourselves. From this arrives the origin of ideas. Impressions lead to ideas through sense and reflection. Hence, impressions are not ideas and in fact, have distinct differences. Impressions consist of sensations, emotions, and passions. Ideas consist of reason, understanding and thinking. Nothing inside us determines ideas are based on impressions that are primary. For example, when looking at shades of blue, you will notice if one is missing. You have an idea of the missing shade because of the impressions you have of the present shades. However, that shade will have less vivacity than the ones you actually see. Hence, impressions come first to form ideas. Series of impressions are organized by relations to give us ideas we live by.

Impressions turn into ideas through memory; a series of observations one remembers with a certain amount of vivacity. Ideas then, can be separated into three categories: simple, complex, and abstract. Simple ideas are those which consist of basically no imagination – red. Complex ideas are those that differ per person depending on their experiences – dog. Abstract ideas are those that rely on experience and possibly a degree of imagination. Since imagination has less vivacity, it is not limited and is able to mix impressions. Abstract ideas still have uniting impressions that relate an idea – love.

While the mind relates ideas, imagination associates ideas freely. This occurs through resemblance, contiguity, and causation. Ideas come through the way we relate, resemblance. We then assume similar cases will produce similar results. Nothing in an object implies the existence of something else. For example, one can imagine a door with without picturing the room the door is attached to, None the less, we are in habit of picturing a door with a room. We transcend our impressions and ideas and furthermore embed them together. We have never seen cause and effect so it is contiguity and causation that lead to what we believe to be knowledge. We have seen the same action happen so many times that it becomes habit to say “a” caused “b” therefore “a” will always cause “b.”

As stated, the mind relates ideas philosophically. This occurs through resemblance, contrariety, quality, and quantity – which depend on the idea and produce objects of knowledge and certainty – identity, time/place, and causation – which are the relations of probabilistic reasoning. Something present is conjoined with something not yet experienced. The mind does not produce these automatically or from objects. Instead it produces ideas from previous impressions; that is constant conjunction or the assumption that the same act will happen again and again. Constant conjunctions of sensory impressions activate the mind. Therefore, impressions create thought, not the mind.

Furthermore, causation does not depend on an object. Instead, it depends on the relations- contiguity, succession, and necessary connection- among objects. Contiguity insists that an impression leads to an idea. For example, an impression of smoke will give you the idea of heat. Succession is conjunction in that an action always repeats itself. For example, the sun always rises in the morning; therefore, it always will. Necessary connection on the other hand does not have impressions, but creates probable reasoning based on experience.

Predictive conclusioning is based upon belief. Belief is the foundation for all reasoning. Since necessary connection does not have an impression from which it came, we must move to inductive inference, experience of constant conjunction, existence, and belief and opinion. Constant conjunctions of sensory impressions activate the mind. That is, impressions create thoughts – not the mind. Repetition of belief comes to be customary of the world. There is no need to jump to illegitimate cause. That is why it is only important to focus on the effect and eliminate the cause. There are many things in the world we have yet to see, or will ever see, yet we still believe in. All we have are a series of impressions about these ideas; conclusively, demonstrating that all knowledge comes from sense expressions.

In essence, philosophy, according to Descartes and Hume, is nothing more than epistemology. Philosophy is defined by how one goes about it. Therefore, in terms of Descartes and Hume, philosophy is epistemology – the evaluation of how we know what we know. Descartes explains epistemology internally, stating we gain knowledge through clear and distinct ideas from within us. Hume explains epistemology externally, stating we gain knowledge externally through sense impressions from outside. Whether we learn those features through meditation or experience, each has their own explanation and method of retrieval.