

Assignment 1

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Annotated Bibliography

1. DESCARTES, R., & COTTINGHAM, J. (1986). *Meditations on first philosophy: with selections from the Objections and Replies*. Cambridge [Cambridgeshire], Cambridge University Press. (First published 1641) Meditations 1 and 2.

In a series of six philosophical meditations originally written in Latin in 1641, 'Meditations on First Philosophy' became one of the most prominent works of philosophy of the 17th century. Rene Descartes was a French mathematician, and philosopher. He came to be known as the father of modern philosophy, and the word 'Cartesian' was created to describe works that correlated to those of Descartes.

'The meditations on First Philosophy' have been one of the most influential texts in Western philosophy; after the six meditations, there are a series of objections from different distinguished men from the 17th century. Each objection is followed by a reply from Descartes.

Although the text may seem redundant, 'Meditations on First Philosophy' is dense and the concepts that are presented are done so in a very fast pace. The reader may have to go over the text more than once to fully comprehend what is being said, because it is not going to be easily comprehended and the concepts won't be grasped entirely in the first reading of the text.

The book has displayed Descartes' thought process as a guidebook for the reader, as he expands his philosophical system and explores skepticism. Descartes makes a distinction between beliefs that are possibly true, and things that can be known with complete certainty. As for the beliefs that cannot be proven to be true, Descartes mentions that he is going to treat them as if they were false.

In the first meditation Descartes develops a method he calls the 'Method of Doubt': he explains that once he discerns that the basic principle of a belief is undermined, he will then withhold believing it and anything that may be correlated to that same belief. On the first principle, Descartes examines the fallibility of knowledge he has acquired empirically; he goes on to say that our senses may be deceiving us. Descartes then takes it a step further and says that when we are dreaming, we're not entirely aware of the fact that we are dreaming, therefore all our empirically derived knowledge is undermined, and we should not trust our senses.

Some of the beliefs that Descartes has not doubted up to this point are that colors exist, bodies and material things are 'extended', a term that Descartes uses often in the book, and lastly arithmetic and geometric truths. Descartes believes that mathematical principles are not empirically derived; they are not supported solely by our senses.

To conclude the first meditation, Descartes calls into question whether he may have been deceived by an all-powerful malicious demon, leading him to doubt everything he has mentioned thus far, including what he initially believed to be certain truth, such as, the fact that colors exist, that material and corporeal things stretch out in space, and mathematical principles. It has been argued that Descartes may not actually believe in an all-powerful malicious demon, and that he is going beyond historical skepticism to test the limits of what can withstand skeptical doubt.

In the second meditation Descartes reiterates that he has called everything into doubt and that a malicious demon may be deceiving him. He comes to the realization that, even if he's being deceived, then he must exist, in order to be deceived. If he can't doubt the fact that he exists, then he categorizes that belief into a certain truth. Descartes concludes that he is a 'thinking thing'¹. Descartes believes that sensory perception and everything else is derived by our thoughts, by thinking that we see, hear, or smell something. Therefore, the fact that he exists can survive skeptical attacks and it cannot be refuted.

Descartes explores skepticism in an extreme and methodical way. *Meditations on First Philosophy* is proof of that. Although his work is extremely influential, some of philosophers have tried refuting his arguments. For example, Kant does not agree with Cartesian dualism, he believes that the mind is not separate from the body². Although I don't agree with Cartesian dualism, I think Descartes deserves appraisal for his ability to assess his core belief; nevertheless, I think that once he claims to have proof of the existence of God then he loses a lot of his credibility. Overall, the book is captivating and leaves the reader with so many ideas to ponder.

784 words, excluding title and footnotes

¹ See for example: Kahn, L. (1914). [Review of *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, by E. S. Haldane & G. R. T. Ross]. *The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods*, 11(7), 189–192.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/2013718>

² See for example: Longuenesse, B. (2008). *Kant's "I Think" versus Descartes' "I Am a Thing That Thinks."* In B. Longuenesse & D. Garber (Eds.), *Kant and the Early Moderns* (pp. 9–31). Princeton University Press.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt7t9tx.6>

2. Moore, A. (1959). Rationalism, Empiricism and the A Priori. The Philosophical Quarterly (1950-), 9(36), 250–258. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2216919>

In this article the author seeks to clarify the misinterpretations that often arise while discussing rationalism, empiricism and the *a priori*. Moore examines the possibilities that are contained within *a priori* propositions, suggesting that they might either be about ideas, language, or that they may be empty. Moore gives us two definitions of empiricism. The first one regarding content, the view that *a priori* propositions tell us nothing about reality. The second definition is analyticity: the belief that an *a priori* proposition is analytic.

Moore notes that the issues concerning rationalism versus empiricism in relation with *a priori* propositions constitute a disagreement where one shouldn't exist. He states that a fallible doctrine is constructed, one that is not held by any of the traditional philosophers, and thus it is labelled as rationalism and empiricism is then presented as an alternative.

To elaborate on the first definition of empiricism, content: Moore highlights the difference of opinions that exists within the rationalist and empiricist camps. The issues that are said to divide philosophers are not about the synthetic *a priori* knowledge that has been put forth by Kant; but rather ones that have been discussed since the beginning of philosophy: the issues of monism vs. pluralism and realism vs. idealism.

Moore explains that Hume's theory of atomism is that everything that is different is separable.³ Kant shared this ideology insofar as things-in-themselves. Kant argued that humans are merely observers of phenomena and that they are incapable of penetrating noumenon. Atomism, while true about things-in-themselves, is not true about phenomenon. This deals with the first definition of empiricism.

The second definition is analyticity: the belief that an *a priori* proposition is analytic. On one hand, empiricism may determine that *a priori* propositions are analytic, meaning it doesn't express a synthetic connection between two distinct things. *A priori* knowledge is like analytic statements, in the sense that it is something that can be known without experience or sense data.

In common with most contemporary empiricists, Kant believed that there is necessary *a priori* judgments. Thus, he divided the truths into two: analytic and synthetic. Analytic propositions are true by definition; the predicate is contained within the subject of the proposition. An example of an analytic proposition would be 'bachelors are unmarried men'. Synthetic judgements, on the other hand, assert a connection between two different facts. An example of a synthetic proposition would be 'all bachelors are unhappy'. Atomism accurately describes

³ " Whatever is clearly conceiv'd may exist; and whatever is clearly conceiv'd, after any manner, may exist after the same manner. This is one principle, which has been already acknowledg'd. Again, everything, which is different, is distinguishable and every thing which is distinguishable, is separable by the imagination." existence " (Treatise: ed. by Selby-B Oxford, 1946, p. 233).

things-in-themselves but not phenomena. Whereas synthetic judgements assert a connection between two distinct facts that concern the phenomenal world, Moore notes that often analytic propositions are about things-in-themselves.

Furthermore, contemporary empiricists deny the theory of synthetic *a priori*, and this deals with the second definition of empiricism: analyticity. Hume believes that important propositions are about ideas, not about matters of fact. Whereas Locke says that all propositions are about the relations of ideas with each other, Kant explains that some *a priori* propositions are synthetic because the predicate is not contained in the subject. For example, $2+3=5$ is a synthetic *a priori* because the ideas of "two," "plus," and "three" are not contained in the idea "five." Contemporary empiricists, unlike Kant, believe that matters of fact are independent of the mind. In other words, matters of fact are independent of our cognitive act.

Rationalism has often not held that *a priori* knowledge is made of judgments that cannot be penetrated. Moore states that according to rationalism *a priori* knowledge is not made prior to all analysis, but it is made prior to sensuous observations. He further explains that reason for rationalists means rational observation or intuition.

Moore defines rationalism as the view that there are non-sensuous observations. He then states that empiricism limits acquaintance to sense experience. Moore explains 'sensationalism' as the only 'original' sources of data that are collected via sensation and introspection 'ideas' and then developed by compounding and abstracting the 'original' data. This shows that the disagreements between rationalism and empiricism concerns the structure of consciousness.

Moore explains that for empiricists sensory data is collected and reason is a faculty to make judgements about the correlation between ideas on one hand and Platonic realities on the other hand. Therefore, it is an empiricist verdict that these non-sensuous realities, such as God and Pegasus cannot be scrutinized.

In conclusion Moore has provided the reader with an in-depth look at both rationalism, empiricism, and the *a priori*. Moore refuses to choose between rationalism and empiricism and says that he will not cast judgements on which side is the right one. However, he explains that the goal of writing the article was to show that the misunderstandings of the two camps have led a lack of fruitful conversations. Overall, the article is an interesting read, it's mentally stimulating, and it serves as a reminder for the reader to be wary of misconceptions when it comes to the two camps and their associations to a priori propositions.

880 words, excluding title and footnotes

3. Hume, D., & Millican, P. F. (2007). *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Part 1, Section 4 (p.18-23) and Part 1, Section 7 (p.42-51)

An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding is a book published in 1748 by David Hume, a Scottish empiricist philosopher. The book was an extremely influential piece of work and is considered to be a classic in modern philosophical literature. The book followed Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature*, with which he was unsatisfied, and so his ideas were developed, and *The Enquiry* followed a few years later.

The book is a series of twelve chapters and is an attempt to determine the science of man, also known as philosophical anthropology. Hume suggests that all the sciences are correlated to human nature, which is why he thinks it is important to explore the science of human nature, which he claims is the foundation of other sciences. Hume is a radical empiricist and a sceptic, and he commits himself to empiricist methodology. He believes that human knowledge stems from empirical data, and that we should examine it before pondering metaphysical speculations about the nature of human existence. This observational method limits our capacity of knowledge because Hume states that the majority of our beliefs and predictions are not rational and that we should doubt all our former opinions, principles and faculties.

In the section titled 'Sceptical Doubts concerning the Operations of the Understanding' part 1, Hume divides human reason into two: Relations of Ideas and Matters of Fact. Relations of Ideas, as Hume explains, are affirmations that are either intuitively or demonstratively certain, such as Geometry, Algebra, and other arithmetic principles, which can also be called deductive reasoning. He states that these propositions are discovered by operation of thought and that these types of propositions are independent of phenomenal reality. On the other hand, Matters of Fact do not retain similar qualities; they are learned through experience and however great our evidence of them is, their opposites will not imply a logical contradiction; this may also be called inductive reasoning. In other words, they are not demonstratively or intuitively certain⁴.

Hume believes that what he calls implicit faith and security are hindrances, especially philosophically, which is why he is known to be a sceptic. He thinks that all our inductive knowledge is nothing more than probable, and that it is therefore uncertain. Hume explains experiences can only assure us of what has taken place in the past, and that cannot always guarantee that the same thing will happen in the future.

Furthermore, Hume describes Matters of Fact to be founded on the relation of Cause and Effect. He provides a couple of examples demonstrating the cognitive process humans undergo when trying to connect the present fact and whatever is being inferred. Hume states that propositions of cause and effect are not realized by *a priori* reasonings; they arise entirely from

⁴ See for example: Henderson, L. (2018, March 21). *The Problem of Induction*. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Retrieved April 3, 2022, from <https://plato.stanford.edu/cgi-bin/encyclopedia/archinfo.cgi?entry=induction-problem>

experience. He explains that cause and effects are only discoverable by experience and not by reason, for the effect can never be found in the cause. The effect is in no way similar to the cause, which to Hume means that the effect cannot be discovered in the cause. Thus, Hume says that cause and effect are learned by experience and observation, not by reason.

In 'Of the idea of necessary Connexion,' part 1, Hume describes the clear and determinate nature of mathematical sciences; he explains that shapes cannot be mistaken, because the distinct nature of each shape is evident. Further, he explains that more detailed sentiments of the mind are fleeting and impermanent, and that's how vagueness becomes a part of our reasonings. This leads to conclusions being, as he states, wide of the premises. He argues if power or energy were discoverable solely by the mind, then we would be able to predict how something would play out before ever experiencing it. He states that therefore nothing in the phenomenal world, as they appear to the senses, give us any idea of power or necessary connection.

Hume explains that even after we think that we've understood the principles of the human mind, nature reduces that assumed knowledge into acknowledgment of how little we know in reality. He says that the chief problems that we face when trying to improve in moral or metaphysical sciences is the anonymity of ideas and the ambiguity of definitions.

Hume leaves the reader with questions such as: Is experience and empiricism the only true way to gain knowledge? Is inductive reasoning merely probable and not logical? They certainly are philosophically invigorating things to think about. These are some of the issues philosophers deal with when trying to provide a certain definition for knowledge, especially in the face of scepticism.

786 words, excluding title and footnotes

4. Williamson, T. (2002). *Knowledge and its limits*. Oxford Scholarship Online. Retrieved April 2022, from <https://oxford.universitypressscholarship.com/view/10.1093/019925656X.001.0001/acprof-9780199256563>

Timothy Williamson is known for his work on vagueness, he has also written a series of exceptional papers on epistemology in the 1980s and 90s. *Knowledge and its Limits* concludes a lot of his work on epistemology.⁵ The book seeks to analyze the components of knowledge, and that it is not made up of varied factors, such as truth and belief, but is a mental state. In the introduction of the book Williamson quotes Aristotle's claim that 'everyone by nature seeks to know'⁶. He states that the main goal of the book is to thoroughly explore epistemology in a way that knowledge is not necessarily contingent on belief. The main argument of the book is that knowledge is as Williamson puts it a mental state.

To introduce the book Williamson highlights the distinction between knowing and acting. He explains that although they are both central relations between the mind and the world, they differ in the following way: action is the world adapted to the mind, and in knowledge the mind is adapted to the world. When there's a discrepancy between the two then there's a residue of desire in the first case and false belief in the second. The author believes that contemporary accounts of mind overlook, as well as marginalize the category of knowledge, making it less central than the category of action. He also mentions that on contemporary accounts of mind a belief is true if it fits the world, and false if it doesn't. Although beliefs can be true by chance, that shouldn't mean that the concept of knowledge should be relegated in the understanding of the mind. Williamson often refers to Gettier in the book. The book develops a notion of the place of belief in the mind depending on its connection with knowledge. He defines this accepted theory of knowledge as an odd kind of true belief.

Following the introduction of the book, Williamson states a few arguments that have been presented as to why we should think that belief happens prior to knowledge. The first argument given is that knowledge involves belief, but he acknowledges that this argument that has been presented is circular. Williamson writes that belief can be a necessary yet insufficient condition of knowledge. He suggests that the inference from knowledge to belief comes from the idea of belief in terms of knowledge and not knowledge in terms of belief. Williamson points out that the book will make no attempts to survey the analyses of knowledge that have been put forth in more recent times. It will however observe the outcome of that debate, and that it holds no adequate analysis of knowledge in terms of belief. In that sense, the conceptual importance of knowledge over belief will not be appealed by an exact analysis of knowledge in terms of belief.

⁵ DeRose, K. (2002). [Review of *Knowledge and Its Limits*, by T. Williamson]. *The British Journal for the Philosophy of Science*, 53(4), 573–577. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3541825>

⁶ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* A1 980a21 (modernized)

He mentions that in the philosophy of the mind, one cannot overlook knowing, and what he calls truth-entailing attitudes such as perceiving and remembering. Williamson thus believes that knowing, perceiving and remembering can be classified as mental states.

One's mental state would look identical whether the belief that is held is true or false. Which is a common sceptic objection to Williamson's view of knowledge. *Williamson's response

In the first chapter, there are four sections. The first section familiarizes the reader with Williamson's claim that knowing is a mental state. He suggests that Descartes' mistake might have been that one must always know what mental state one is in, that is if he held that view.⁷ Williamson notes that Prichard who also believes that knowing is a mental state, thought that one is always in a position to know whether one knows or just believes.⁸ However, Williamson claims that one is not always in a position to know whether one knows or not. He then presents the reader with an example that supports his claim. He expands further and says that one may fail to know a proposition without being aware that they fail to know that proposition. Williamson notes the problem of transparency in knowing one's mental state.

In the second section, 1.3 Knowledge and Analysis Williamson provides the reader with the distinction between knowing and believing truly. He states that believing a proposition truly does not equate to one being in a mental state. Williamson then provides several arguments to support his claim that believing truly is not a mental state. He distinguishes between a metaphysical contrast and a conceptual contrast. He says that one knowing is a mental concept, on the other hand truly believing is not a mental concept. He defines the concept of a mental state as it can only be a mental state if there could be a concept of that mental state. He adds, that does not exclude the chance of a non-mental concept of a mental state because different concepts can be of the same state.

Section 1.4 Knowing as the Most General Factive Mental State looks at knowing as a concept that is not an analysis of it in the traditional sense. Williamson highlights that *knowing* as the most general factive *stative*, meaning it does constitute states. He illustrates this by detailing the central role of the concept of knowing. He explains how one may grasp the concept *knows* without the disjunctive concept, such as seeing or remembering.

The last section of Chapter 1 is Knowing and Believing. Williamson states that throughout history, knowing as a mental state, does not entail belief. Prichard is proof of that. However, Williamson says that on standard analyses of knowing it does entail believing. Intermediate views hold that knowing is consistent with believing and not believing. Williamson discusses the details of two different schemas, following up with the grammatical divergence between the words knowing and believing. He reiterates his argument that knowing is the most general

⁷ "Did he not seek a mental state sufficient for knowing p? Was not clearly and distinctly conceiving p his candidate?" (Williamson, 2002) State of Mind, p.3

⁸ Prichard, H.A. (1950). Knowledge and Perception. p.86

factive state, and that many processes such as perceiving and remembering aim at some kind of knowledge. His final statement suggests we may presume that nothing could have a mind without having a capacity for knowledge.

To conclude, my thoughts on the book are that it is extremely detailed and technical. It's definitely not an easy read and requires a substantial amount of concentration and understanding. Beyond those points, I still found the introduction and the 1st chapter of the book enticing. Williamson presents a new understanding of knowledge, at the very least it's one that has not been proposed by the epistemological books that I have read. In many ways, I support the main argument of the book which is: knowledge is a mental state.

1148 words, excluding title and footnotes

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