



Plato vs Aristotle

Western Philosophy (University of South Africa)



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Discuss Aristotle's response to the following questions

"What can we know and how do we arrive at knowledge of the world?"

Aristotle, a pioneer in the history of western philosophy grappled extensively with questions regarding the nature of knowledge and how it is acquired. He believes that knowledge is a justified true belief that is obtained through rational understanding and demonstration. He believed that knowledge is characterized by its certainty, truthfulness, and justification, which distinguishes it from mere opinion or belief. Aristotle emphasized that knowledge is not just a collection of information or beliefs, but rather a justified true belief that is based on rational understanding and demonstration. In response to the question, "What can we know and how do we arrive at knowledge of the world?" Aristotle provided profound insights that have endured through the centuries.

In this essay, we will look at Aristotle's approach to epistemology, namely the interplay between perception, reason, and the quest of truth. We'll look at his ideas on empiricism and rationalism, as well as how he dealt with the seeming dichotomy between sensory experience and abstract thought. Furthermore, we will consider the consequences of Aristotle's epistemological framework for current philosophical debate, notably in terms of scientific investigation and the pursuit of objective knowledge.

As a student of Plato, Aristotle's approach to knowledge acquisition can be characterized as systematic and empirical, emphasizing careful observation, classification, and logical deduction. Unlike his teacher Plato, who relied heavily on dialectic and intuition, Aristotle believed that knowledge should be grounded in the concrete realities of the natural world. Aristotle was greatly inspired by his philosophy, yet he also critiqued many parts of Plato's epistemological framework. One of the main grounds of conflict between Aristotle and Plato is their methods to knowledge acquisition. Aristotle saw many flaws in Plato's reasoning for attaining knowledge.

Plato proposed the presence of innate ideas and forms the soul embodies prior to it manifesting in real life. These forms are everlasting and immovable, serving as the foundation for genuine knowledge. Aristotle, on the other hand, questioned the concept of innate knowledge arguing that understanding is acquired through actual experience and sensory experience, this approach, empiricism challenged Plato's reliance on pre-existing ideas, advocating instead for a more grounded approach to knowledge acquisition. 'Empiricism' emphasizes Aristotle's belief that knowledge or science is essentially derived from perception. That is the root of the notions we use to interpret reality. Both Aristotle and Plato believed thoughts were superior to the senses. However, whereas Plato believed the senses could fool a person, Aristotle stated that the senses were needed in order to properly determine reality.

Also, according to Plato he believed that senses were flawed and not actual representation of the physical world and there is more to reality than how the material world depicts however Aristotle rejected the idea of a separate realm of Forms separate from physical

existence, as he believed that each individual entity possesses its own form or essence that determines its nature and properties. These forms are not separate from the objects they characterize but are rather immanent within them.

Aristotle had two reasons for rejecting Plato's theory of recollection. Firstly, he felt that universal concepts could be achieved through firsthand experience, thereby rendering recollection unnecessary. Secondly, Aristotle opposed Plato's theory of Forms, which serves as the basis for the theory of recollection. Nevertheless, Aristotle did believe in the acquisition of a priori knowledge during our lifetime, which can be attained by comprehending the necessary concepts and gaining understanding through experience. This knowledge does not require empirical validation.

Aristotle also credited gaining of knowledge and a true understanding of reasoned fact is that we know by intuition which he called nous. it is more reliable than deduced, scientific knowledge since truth is known directly. Aristotle's philosophy of nous underscores the importance of intuitive insight in the acquisition of knowledge. Though deductive reasoning is an essential tool in scientific inquiry, Aristotle recognized that intuition can directly grasp fundamental truths and principles. This emphasis on intuitive understanding enriches Aristotle's epistemological framework, providing a complementary mode of knowledge acquisition alongside deductive reasoning and empirical observation. By acknowledging the value of intuitive insight in gaining knowledge, Aristotle's teachings remain relevant and applicable to modern-day research and learning.

Aristotle's contributions to epistemology emphasized the importance of rational understanding, empirical observation, and logical demonstration. He defined knowledge as justified true belief, obtained through rational understanding and demonstration. His insights into perception, reason, and the quest for truth continue to inspire philosophical discourse and scientific investigation. By reflecting on his legacy, we can engage critically with his ideas and contribute to the ongoing pursuit of truth.

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