CHAPTER FOUR
Epistemology, Metaphysics and God

General Overview:

As the student has now gained a comfort level with respect to her/his own personal philosophical worldview (Weltanschauung), and has amassed some of the fundamental logical tools required to think critically, it is time to move on to some of the more thought-provoking, esoteric, and to the uninitiated, more bizarre matters of philosophical inquiry. Be gentle. Much of this will be totally foreign to the introductory student.

In this chapter the student will be introduced to three major areas of philosophical deliberation. The first area deals with the subject of epistemology, or the study/theory of knowledge, and students will learn about the nature, sources, limitations and validity of knowledge. The second section deals with metaphysics - or as we like to call it, those things that take us beyond nature and the realm of the physical - and includes discussions on such subjects as the study of being, identity and causality, ultimate/transcendental reality, and our systems of knowledge about what is meant by ‘real.’ The last component of this chapter deals with issues surrounding the nature/existence of God.
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Knowledge is the mother of all virtue; all vice proceeds from ignorance.

-- Proverb

The Graphic Illustration of Adam and Eve
Eating the ‘forbidden fruit’ was the ‘dawn’ of human awareness of connection between epistemology (knowledge) and metaphysics (God and dualistic separation).

Preliminary Questions and Definitions:
1) Epistemology -- The study/science of knowing.
From Greek: episteme = knowledge; logos = study of
• Epistemologists want to know what we mean when we say we know something.
• Interested in the nature, sources, limitations and validity of knowledge.

2) Metaphysics – sub-discipline of philosophy that studies issues beyond nature and the realm of the physical.
• Attempts to present coherent picture or reality, and ultimate reality.
• Studies the nature of being, and the characteristics of the universe.
• Critical examination of underlying assumptions employed by systems of knowledge in their claims about what is real.

Influences on Plato’s Metaphysical Epistemology
Parmenides of Elea (c. 500 B.C.)
As monist, stated that being is singular, eternal and indivisible (things do not come into or out of being).
• Variety and change in world are only appearance of change, not true reality.
• True being is recognized by reason alone.

Heraclitus of Ephesus (c. 500 B.C.)
• In an opposite stance states, ‘change alone is unchanging.’ Beneath apparent permanence lies the hidden reality of continuous movement (constant flux).
• Atoms are forever bouncing around causing expansion and contraction in response to variations in temperature and humidity.
The seen is changing, the unseen is unchanging.
-- Plato

Plato’s Metaphysical Epistemology
Plato accepts both ideas of permanence and impermanence (appearance and reality).

- Change and impermanence perceived by senses (visible world) belong to Plato’s metaphysical realm of becoming, permanence (unchanging) belongs to intellectual realm of being.

Divided Line Theory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Forms</th>
<th>(eternal, unchanging essence underlying reality)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intelligible World</td>
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<tr>
<td>Objects of Mathematics</td>
<td>(eternal abstract concepts behind material shapes)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Physical Objects/Perception</td>
<td>(decay/unstable)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Imagination (Illusion/Shadows)</td>
<td>Representations, Drawings, Reflections, Emotions</td>
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Plato's Forms
- Mental models of all 'things' that exist - nonmaterial, eternal, perfect, absolute and immutable.

Hierarchy of Forms – Like His Allegory of ‘the Cave’
- Forms are not material or divine nor do they exist in spiritual plane, they are nonmaterial, eternal, absolute and immutable.
- Forms are only 'reality' that are unified and stable -- material reality is an imperfect, unstable 'shadow.'
- Physical objects are 'lower' than abstract ideas, concepts, and qualities like Justice, Beauty, Fairness, and Equality.
• Highest form is 'the Good' - *the essence of perfect goodness.*
René Descartes (1560-1650): Development of Rationalism

Descartes breaks with the medieval world including the authority of church-controlled scholastic philosophy dependent on dogma and ‘recognized authorities.’

- True knowledge can only be attained through intuition and deduction – self-evident principles are known intuitively as absolutely true by faculty he calls the “Light of Nature.”
- Deduction is orderly, logical reasoning solidly established from self-evident propositions (axioms and postulates).

Analytic Statements of the Rationalists

a) Knowledge comes from logical, rational deduction.
b) Innate forms/ideas form the only secure basis for knowledge.
c) Analytic propositions come from a priori knowledge; i.e., knowledge coming purely from reason, independent of experience.

Descartes’s Method of Doubt:

René Descartes is best known for method of radical doubt.

- Truth must be certain and unshakable, and Descartes asks these questions:
  - Does the mind accurately represent reality, or does it distort reality in the very process of knowing it?
  - How do I know if what I'm experiencing is real or an illusion?
  - Is it possible that I'm being deceived by God or by some evil-genius 'Master Deceiver’?

Descartes's Conclusion:

Even though there may be a deceiver of some very powerful and very tricky, who bends all efforts to keep me perpetually deceived, there can be no slightest doubt that I exist. Since he deceives me, let him deceive me, as much as he will, he can never make me nothing as long as I think that I am something. Thus, after having thought well on this matter, after examining all things with care, I must finally conclude and maintain that this proposition: I am, I exist, is necessarily true every time that pronounce it or conceive it in my mind.

(Cogito ergo sum - I think, therefore I am) -- Meditations I
Descartes's Conclusions on God

God must exist as a logical prerequisite for having the idea

a) something cannot be derived from nothing – all effects (e.g., including ideas) are caused by something;

b) there is as much reality in the cause as there is in the effect;

c) idea I have of God as a perfect/infinite being was caused by something;

d) I am finite and imperfect, I could not be the cause of this idea;

e) therefore, God, understood as an infinite and perfect being, exists and would not use deception to fool us into believing that an outer reality does not exist when it does not.

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British Empiricism

British Empiricism – a belief system that all knowledge is based on ideas developed from sense data or sensory experience -- departs from the system of Rationalism.

John Locke (1632-1704): Epistemology as Tabula Rasa (Clean Slate)
When children are born, their minds are like blank slates, there is nothing on them which is not put there by experience.

• The mind contains nothing that does not come first through our senses. Innate ideas are not self-evidently true – even if all people could agree to certain ‘universal truths,’ this does not prove their innateness.

• Anything in our heads is the result of 'sensations' (perceptions) or 'reflections' (our thinking about our perceptions).

• The mind does not distort reality, but passively 'copies' it.

We do contribute something to our perceptions of the world.

• Primary qualities are fundamental/essential properties of an object (these qualities exist in that object).

• Secondary qualities (reflections) are sensations like color, sound, smell, and taste that arise out of our body/mind response to an object's primary qualities.
Bishop George Berkeley (1685-1753): Berkeley’s Epistemology

Berkeley takes Locke to task, contending that both primary and secondary qualities reside within the mind of the perceiver – objects do not ‘act’ on our minds to ‘produce’ ideas.

- The ‘reliability’ of Locke’s primary qualities used to prove that a world outside the mind exists is called into question.
- Both ‘quality types’ are produced in the mind of the perceiver -- they cannot prove an external reality beyond the mind exists at all.

Berkeley argues that physical substances exist only insofar as they are perceived – they cannot be known to have any existence other than in the qualities we perceive.

*Esse est Percipi – To Be Is To Be Perceived.*

**Berkeley: God the Perpetual Perceiver**

**Question:** If Berkeley is correct, wouldn’t the world disappear if we were to fall asleep or fall unconscious?

**Answer:** No, God is the perpetual perceiver and guarantees existence without your being present there to perceive them.

- Through God’s infinite mind, we can trust in the uniformity of experience and the continual dependability of scientific laws.
- God perceives everything including our perceiving minds and thus assures their existence.

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David Hume (1711-1776): Hume’s Epistemology of Radical Skepticism

We have no certain knowledge about the world; only beliefs that we feel are true.

- We have no innate ideas or Platonic Forms to discover – there is no ‘higher’ metaphysical knowledge base in reason.
- Our minds are in no position to create or uncover immaterial, intuitive, spiritual, or mystical 'truth' – mind is an illusion of misguided rationalist and metaphysicians.
**Hume On the Origin of Ideas**
We have human understanding because of the perceptions of the mind:
- *Impressions* - include all perceptions during an experience (strong, forceful, and vivid), including hearing, seeing, feeling, love, hate, desire, or will.
- *Thoughts or Ideas* - include the less lively perceptions after an experience, when we reflect on our initial impressions.

**Rejection of Metaphysics and the Notion of Self**
Descartes’s and Locke’s notion of mental or physical *self* and Berkeley’s God as ‘perpetual perceiver’ are completely meaningless, because there are no corresponding sense experience impressions of such hypothetical entities.
- First identify *impressions* that produce the *idea of self*, then identify actual objects that produce the *impressions of self*.

Hume argues, we have *impressions* that come from experience of actual objects, but our imagination combines these *impressions* to create *fictitious idea* that we call *self*.
- We may think we know our *self*, but we cannot prove it according to empirical criteria.

Where's the physical evidence of a *self*?

**Hume’s Association of Ideas and Critique of Causality**
We truly know (knowledge) something about the world through the process of *impressions* and *ideas*.
- This knowledge lets us make *synthetic statements* about the world.
- We can test validity/accuracy of *ideas* by re-experiencing *certain impressions*, or comparing to other people's *ideas*.

**The Problem According to Hume**
- Our minds sometimes imaginatively join ideas that in reality do not go together (contiguity) – it’s a habit of mind that assumes a connection between events.
- We make errors in interpretation of 'secondary qualities' when our minds interact with the objects we encounter (feelings/psychological impulse).
Hume’s Fork and Conclusion
Human inquiry (i.e., philosophy) should be two-pronged.
Objects showing:
(a) the relations of ideas (geometry, algebra and arithmetic) and,
(b) those describing matters of fact (propositions about the world).

Matters of fact are expressed in propositions derived from impressions and ideas.

• If we cannot find anything in the real world that we can physically correlate with an idea, we must say the idea is fiction -- even in our concepts of causality.
• Cause-and-effect (causality, priority in time, necessary connections) and ideas of self are simply products of our imaginations (steady stream of consciousness).

Problem Provided by Hume
We have no basis for providing explanations or predicting events – we cannot with justifiability infer from events of yesterday what will happen today or tomorrow.

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Immanuel Kant (1724-1804): Kant’s Synthesis of Rationalism and Empiricism
Initial Concerns
• Concerned that Rationalism failed in its claims that only the mind provides absolute certainty - it failed to critically assess the power of human reason.
• Also concerned with Empiricism’s inability to demonstrate how experience becomes knowledge - accepts Empiricism's claim that knowledge starts off with sense data, but disagrees with Hume’s explanation of tabula rasa (and argues for causality).

Kant on the Roles of Reason and Experience is Knowledge
The mind is not a passive tabula rasa, rather it orders, arranges, and gives shape and meaning to all of our sense perceptions (matter, content, or ‘sensible intuitions’).
• Mind acts as filter through which sense impressions pass.
Kant as the Copernican Revolution in Epistemology
The mind does not conform to objects but that objects must conform to the mind. That is,

1) Without the senses (empiricism) we will not become aware of any object(s), but without understanding (rationalism) we will form no conception of the object(s).

2) The process of gaining knowledge is a unified process involving perception (senses), imagination, and understanding: sensibility and understanding are in interaction.

Kant on A Priori Elements of Knowledge
1) The mind molds things.
The mind gives sense data a spatial and temporal dimension.
   • Space (outer sense) and time (inner sense) are not properties of reality, but characteristics the mind imposes on reality – everyone possesses them as *a priori* intuitions.
   • These are absolute – independent of, and preceding sense impressions.

2) As well, the mind establishes *faculty of understanding* or 'categories of thought' in which to grasp reality.
   • Basic *a priori* conceptual apparatus for making sense of the world – twelve categories divided under four headings: 1) *quantity*, 2) *quality*, 3) *relation* and 4) *modality*.

Kantian vs. Platonic Forms
*Plato* argued that forms or ideas in this realm have an independent ontological status apart from all individual minds (*ultimate structures of reality*).

*Kant* argued that forms are not structures of metaphysical reality, but structures of human consciousness – ordering principles of mind that combine with sensations to make experience possible.
Kant’s Categories of ‘Substance’ and ‘Cause’
Unlike Hume, who states that there is no coherent notion of substance because ideas have their origins in impressions; unlike Locke and Descartes, who state that substance is some kind of property or quality inherent in objects; Kant states that substance is an a priori category of the understanding by means of which the mind selectively groups sensations from the manifold of experience and unifies them into meaningful and coherent units we recognize as objects.

- We also have knowledge about causality, necessary connections and universally true propositions.

Kantian Types of Judgments
Knowledge claims come in form of judgments in which something is affirmed or denied. A judgment is a mental operation where we connect a subject and a predicate. Subjects and predicates can be related to each other in a variety of ways:

1) analytic (predicate contains subject of concept; i.e., a triangle has three sides and three angles)
2) synthetic (predicate is not contained in subject; i.e., the bookshelf is tall)
3) a priori (do not depend on experience; i.e., 1+1 = 2 whether we experience it or not)
4) a posteriori (based on observation; empirical experience)
5) or a combination of these categories.

Kantian Metaphysics and the Regulative Function of Transcendental Ideas
- It is possible to make meaningful statements about the world, but there are limits to knowledge.

We can never know the nature of reality as it truly is.
- noumenal reality/things-as-they-are-in-themselves have not been structured by the mind’s a priori categories.
- We can only know what appears to us in experience -- phenomenal reality/things-as-they-appear.

Knowledge is grounded in the data of our senses.
• Because knowledge is result of mind's operations on empirical data, it is impossible to have any knowledge of such ultimate, intangible things like the soul, immortality, and God.

Kant does not reject metaphysical speculation outright, he only says absolute knowledge of them is impossible.

• Therefore, traditional attempts of metaphysics to understand such concepts as a Cartesian self, the cosmos, or the nature of God are doomed to failure. Transcendental ideas perform a regulative function, but do not expand our knowledge.

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Proofs for the Existence of God

St. Anselm (1033-1109): Anselm’s Ontological Argument
Anselm’s argument for the existence of God does not begin from empirical data, but from position of pure logic.

1) Contained within my understanding is some notion or idea of God.
2) God can be understood as ‘something-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought.’
3) Even the atheist understands what is meant by the concept or idea of God, when they hear it.
4) Something (or any being) is greater if it exists in reality than if it exist only in the understanding.
5) If God (the greatest conceivable Being), something-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought,’ exists only in the understanding, then it is possible for a greater being to be conceived, that is, one that also exists in reality.
6) However, premise 5 must be contradictory for it allows us to conceive a greater being than the greatest conceivable being. (Anselm’s assumption here is that actually existing in reality is ‘greater than’ existing only in the understanding.)
7) So, if I have an idea of the greatest conceivable being, since a being must exist both in my understanding and in reality.
8) Given premise 7, God must therefore exist in reality.

The divine rights of grace do not abolish human rights of natural reason.

-- Thomas Aquinas

Aquinas rejects Anselm’s ontological argument because he does not accept proposition, ‘God Exists’ is self-evident.

- We cannot know God’s nature through reason, and to argue from the idea of God to his existence is incorrect because it jumps from concept to existence, from idea to fact.

The Proofs
1) The Argument from Motion/Change (Cosmological)
   - Motion and change are all around us – i.e., transformations for one potential state to another actual state.
   - Something causes each change and reaction to change.
   - Ultimately, there must be a first cause or something like Aristotle’s Prime/Unmoved Mover.

2) The Argument from Cause (Cosmological)
   - It is impossible for natural things to be the complete and sufficient sources of their own existence.
   - There must be an Uncaused Cause capable of imparting existence to all other things – a cause which is complete and the sufficient source for its own existence – i.e., God.

3) The Argument from Necessity/Contingency (Cosmological)
   - It is impossible for all things to always exist – they had a beginning.
   - Therefore, there was a time when nothing was in existence – in which case, nothing could have begun to exist and nothing would exist.
   - However, the fact that things do exist now confirms that there must exist a necessary being which always existed and will always exist.
   - This being causes all things to come into being, and is the cause of itself – this being which require no other being other than itself to exist is God.
4) The Argument from Perfection and Degree (Henological – both Cosmological and Ontological)
   • We notice degrees of excellence and perfection in nature (e.g., goodness, truth, nobility, etc.).
   • In order for lower degrees of anything to exist, the maximum must also really exist.
   • This implies the notion of perfection, which in turn implies a perfect being – this being is God.

5) The Argument from Intelligent Design (Teleological)
   • The natural world displays an order, purpose and design (e.g., fish need to swim so they have fins and tails, birds need wings to migrate so they have wings).
   • Natural phenomenon cannot act intentionally with purpose or design in mind.
   • We can argue that all this order is merely accidental or we can argue for ‘design’ – the manifestation of a grand Designer or Master Intelligence that Aquinas concludes is God.