Nile Global Academia

Course Title: Logic and Critical Thinking

Course Code: Phil101

Module Prepared by: Ministry of Education (the then Ministry of Science and Higher Education)

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Core Fields of Philosophy

Lesson 3: Metaphysics and Epistemology

Part 2: Epistemology

Lesson 3: Metaphysics and Epistemology
Part 2: Epistemology

- ***Epistemology*** (Theory of knowledge) is the branch of philosophy that **studies about** the nature, scope, meaning, source, possibility and validity of knowledge.
- It **deals with** issues of knowledge, opinion, truth, falsity, reason, experience, and faith.
- **Etymologically**, it is derived from two Greek words ***"episteme"***, meaning "knowledge, understanding', and "**logos**", meaning "**study of**". Accordingly, epistemology is the study of knowledge.

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- **It deals** with issues related to the dependability of knowledge and the validity of the sources through which we gain information.

➢ ***Epistemology*** raises **questions** such as:

- What is knowledge? What does it mean to know? What is the source of knowledge? Experience? Reason? Or both? How can we be sure that what we perceive through our senses is correct? What makes knowledge different from belief or opinion? What is truth, how can we know a statement is true?

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- Can reason really help us to know phenomenal things without being informed by sense experiences? Can our sense experience really help us to know things beyond our perception without the assistance of our reasoning ability? What is the relationship and difference between faith and reason?
  - ***Epistemology*** seeks to answer whether reality can be known or not.
- ***Skepticism***, in the narrower sense, claims that people cannot acquire reliable knowledge and that any search for truth is in vain.

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- **Gorgias** asserted that **nothing exists**, and that if it did, **we could not know it**.
- A **full-blown skepticism** would make intelligent action impossible.
- **Agnosticism** is a profession of **ignorance** in reference to the existence or nonexistence of God.
- If reality can be known, through what sources can we know and how to judge the validity of their knowledge?

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- Another foundational issue is whether all truth is relative, or whether some truths are absolute. Is all truth subject to change? Is it possible that what is true today may be false tomorrow?
- If there is absolute truth, such truth is eternally and universally true irrespective of time or place.
- Is knowledge subjective or objective, and is there truth that is independent of human experience?
- If there is truth, how can human beings comprehend such truths? How do they become human knowledge.

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- ***Empiricism*** (knowledge obtained through the senses)

- Empirical knowledge appears to be built into the very nature of human experience. **Sensory knowing** for humans is immediate and universal, and in many ways forms the basis of human knowledge.

However, the danger is:

- **Data** obtained from the **human senses** have been demonstrated to be both **incomplete and undependable**.

⇒ **Contradiction** of seeing something in different circumstances differently.

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- Fatigue, frustration, and illness also distort and limit sensory perception.
- There are **sound and light waves** that are inaudible and invisible to unaided human perception.
- It is impossible to ascertain the exact dependability of scientific instruments since no one knows the total effect of the human mind in recording, interpreting, and distorting sensual perception.
- **Confidence** in these instruments is built upon speculative metaphysical theories whose validity has been reinforced by experimentation and prediction have been verified through theoretical construct.

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- Many **sensory experiences and experiments** are open to both replication and public examination (**advantage**).

❖ ***Rationalism*** (reasoning, thought, or logic is the central factor in knowledge).

➢ **Senses alone** cannot provide universal, valid judgments that are consistent with one another.

➢ **Sensations and experiences** are **raw material of knowledge**, and must be organized by the mind into a meaningful system before they become knowledge.

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- In less extreme sense: ***rationalism*** claims that people have the power to know with certainty various truths about the universe that the senses alone cannot give.
- In extreme sense: it claims that humans are capable of arriving at irrefutable knowledge independently of sensory experience.

- Formal logic is a tool
  - ***Intuition***: a direct apprehension of knowledge (immediate feeling of certainty).
- Not safe method to use alone (**disadvantage**)

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- It is able to bypass the limitations of human experience (**advantage**).
  - ***Revelation*** (prime importance in religion).
- It presupposes a transcendent supernatural reality that breaks into the natural order.
- **God's communication** concerning the **divine will**.
- **Omniscient source** of information that is absolute and uncontaminated.
- Distortion of revealed truth can occur in the process of human interpretation.

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- Cannot be proved or disproved empirically (**disadvantage**)
  - ***Authority*** (not a philosophical position).
- Comes from experts or has been sanctified over time as tradition.
- A text book, teacher…

Next course is Lesson 4: Axiology and Logic

Thank you for watching!

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