

Theory of Knowledge: Plato and Aristotle

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## **Theory of Knowledge: Plato and Aristotle**

### **Introduction**

Knowledge has a wide range of definitions; to others, knowledge is wisdom and the ability to think and solve complex situations. Locke, one of the famously known philosophers, defines knowledge as having a connection, agreement, or disagreement of ideas. Locke's definition is tied to the objective of knowledge. In the doctrine of recollection, knowledge is said to exist within every human being (Hill, 2006). Plato equates knowledge to perception. On the other hand, Aristotle believes that knowledge is the ideas and opinions a person has, and people gain knowledge with the help of educators (Aristotle, 1976).

Additionally the doctrine states that this knowledge is brought to life by recollection. According to Plato and Aristotle, Knowledge is recollection. They also emphasize the need to distinguish real knowing from the professors and experts who sell information to the highest bidder. In this paper, we shall discuss the beliefs of these two philosophers and the reasons for their beliefs. We shall also explain why people may have access to information but have little understanding of their knowledge.

The Phaedo theory of recollection is a theory of learning; it explains that for one to understand any subject, they must tell the kind of learning. On the other hand, Socrates believes that recollection is only possible if we have the form in mind through our senses and perceptions. Socrates, therefore, is of the view that all human beings are capable of recollection. Phaedo divides the theory of recollection into ordinary interpretations or learning and complicated interpretations. The detailed understanding is only possible for philosophers, while the ordinary one applies to all human beings. In the complicated

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interpretation, there is philosophical and supports the understanding and reflection of an argument.

In the doctrine of recollection, Plato recognizes that learning requires common sense and that recollection is achievable by all. Through the discussion between Cebes and Simmias on the theory of forms. In this discussion, Socrates clarifies that he is interested in the origin of knowledge claiming that he and Simmias have equality. The doctrine of recollection supports Cebes claim that knowledge is achieved from previous experiences. Plato explains that when people are faced with problems and trying to find solutions to the problems, they always recall on previous experiences to determine what the right way of solving that problem is. Plato draws this theory from the Learners paradox. In the learners, paradox explains how someone can learn something even when the concept is new to them. The theory of recollection solves the learner's paradox. The paradox is when someone knows something they cannot learn; therefore, a person cannot know what they do not know, and they can neither look for it nor find a way to learn it. Looking at the paradox, one notices the challenges it introduces to learning. Learning involves inquiry of knowledge of something we are not aware of, and when such a person cannot learn, they are likely not to learn anything at all (Franklin, 2005).

On the other hand, Aristotle believes that when only stops learning if they realize their potential. He called the process of realization of potential to actualizing it as causation. According to Aristotle, human beings are always in search of good things in life such as happiness to realize their potential. Happiness can only be achieved through the decision-making process. It is for this reason that a person attends school in their childhood to realize their potential as an adult. Aristotle believed in the human soul emphasizing life experiences. He was of the view that experience guarantees knowledge about different aspects of life. In



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his paper, *Nicomachean Ethics* presents the ability of one to live a rational life. It is easy to tell people of good character by their previous encounters and associations (Aristotle, 1976). Through the incorporation of psychological notions Aristotle came up with distinct ideas, the first idea explains the rations thinker, and the other promotes reasonable emotions. Aristotle's theory of recollection of knowledge is more advanced because it emphasizes a balance between emotions and intelligence. Intelligence or knowledge is acquired through experiences and the right or wrong choices we have to make. In his theory, Aristotle believes that knowledge is a recollection of experience.

In my opinion, the theory of recollection supports learning and the acquisition of speech. Consequently, I agree that complicated or sophisticated interpretation and learning are achievable by philosophers. It is essential to compare ordinary learning to complicated learning for the purpose of recollection of knowledge. To understand best the theory of recollection, I would recommend that we distinguish between the philosophical arguments in the theory from the ordinary argument of learning. Plato's theory of recollection is more focused on the acquisition of speech, and how we think. Learning is important because it provides us with resources for philosophical learning and reflection. From the theory of recollection, we can conclude that there exist two kinds of learning the ordinary and complicated learning. We, therefore, need to distinguish real knowing from the knowing exhibited of professionals.

This section shall discuss the importance of distinguishing 'real knowing' from the knowing professed by experts who sell useful information as a commodity to the highest bidder. Plato explains real knowing as the understanding of ideas. Real knowing is achieved through soul searching. Plato adds that real knowledge is only achievable by philosophers and, for this reason, can transform themselves into gods unique from normal human beings.



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Plato quickly points out that it is possible for the ordinary human being to attain knowledge even if he has a deficiency in the platonic ideal. To explain this concept, he uses an example of a prisoner who takes photographs of the real world. This clouds his mind has to free from the illusions and brought to light. The problem is that the prisoner is so trapped in the fake world that they cannot help themselves and have to be assisted. A teacher is then brought to ask the prisoner questions jolting them to reality (Goldberg 2009).

Consequently, human beings have emotions and desires that cloud their judgment. The teacher's work is to guide the prisoner and prepare him to make and accept rational arguments. In this way, he will realize right from wrong.

In his Socratic works, Plato explains that true knowledge only exists with those capable of realizing the actual reality of life's experiences. He adds that to understand the world, people must go through a difficult education. For leaders, he says, must perceive the world forms of goodness to be well informed. Learners must be taught the need to recall the knowledge they acquire in school in all forms. This kind of interpretation is important and applicable to day-to-day life. For example, if one wants to be a good surgeon, one must master all forms of surgery and understand the essential tools in surgery.

Another example would be for an individual intending to study architecture; they must recall knowledge of all forms of building designs, road designs, and the kinds of brick to use. It means, therefore, recalling the necessary knowledge in the field one is interested in is important. If one has no such knowledge, then it is only appropriate if they do not study that particular course. We are all different; some are good in mathematics while others are best in languages.

In this regard, Plato emphasizes that only certain people are fit to be leaders. These, he says, are the people who understand the complicated interpretation in the theory of



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recollection of knowledge. Since Philosophers are the only people he places in this category, he explains that they are the only ones capable of being leaders. Philosophers have the capability of separating their emotions in decision-making situations and have the ability to differentiate the forms of knowledge.

It is, therefore, imperative to make a distinction between real knowledge and the knowledge of experts. Onora O'Neill, in his paper titled Experts, Practitioners, and Practical Judgment, recognizes the need for this distinction stating that experts have the capability of failing to make the correct decision (O'Neill, 2007). Experts are prone to incompetent judgments in principle and rule situations. For example, he says that a jurist and physicians, who have done well in school, cannot give practical solutions. This means that they have only mastered the body of theory but have little or no practice knowledge.

### **Conclusion**

The Platonic theory explains that knowledge is acquired at birth and is developed through learning experiences. Plato explains that sometimes when faced with difficult situations, we have to make the right decision, but we do not know if we have the knowledge to do so. The Aristotle theory is of the view that knowledge is obtained from life experiences. When one is faced with a difficult situation, they draw from their previous experiences through a comparison mechanism. It is important to distinguish real knowing from the kind of knowledge by experts. This is because real knowledge, as per Plato's definition, has ideas. We are only capable of achieving real knowing through soul searching. The theory of recollection has both philosophical and ordinary learning theories. The Philosophical interpretation explains the ability to separate emotions from ideas and opinions and is only achievable by philosophers. The ordinary interpretation, on the other hand, is possible by all human beings. In this paper, I have defined knowledge from the perspective of Plato and



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Aristotle. I have also explained the meaning of the theory of knowledge recollection from the standpoint of both Philosophers. In the paper, I have also discussed the importance of differentiating actual knowledge from the knowledge of experts.

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