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## Truth in the abstract and in the particular

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Truth in the abstract and in the particular

Senior project submitted to

The division of social studies

Of Bard College

By

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## Dedications/Acknowledgments

This work is dedicated to my parents Richard and Caitilin. Both of whose work and loving support made my education possible.

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# Introduction

**Abstract** (which is the first paragraph) - In this project I will discuss the relationship between two questions about truth. The first question is the problem of *how* it is that we can know particular claims to be true? The second question is what is the definition of truth (or the true)? It may seem to many philosophers that there is no necessary connection between how one answers these two questions. However, the thesis of my project is that the way in which someone answers the question of the definition of “truth” (or the word true), has logical implications for how that same thinker would have to conceive of his or her methodologies for finding particular truths. My own philosophical arguments, and not the arguments of the four thinkers I will interpret, will demonstrate this claim. In order to illustrate the connection between the two questions I will explore the ways in which they are handled in the thought of Plato, Aristotle, Rene Descartes, and Ludwig Wittgenstein. I will compare and contrast these thinkers in terms of their positions on these issues.

For the purpose of helping the reader to understand the claims of this work I will describe with greater detail what is meant by “the definition of truth,” and “one’s methodology for finding particular truths.” A word can exist in a context which is designed purely to explicate the universal meaning of itself. Or a word can be used in a context to say something specific about a thing, or play a specific role in a sentence. For example, thinking about the universal meaning of the word “chair,” is different from thinking about a particular chair in the living room of an apartment. When we speak of particular claims as being true, or as being examples of truths we are making statements which relate the particular cases of truths back to the universal definition of the word, or concept, of the true. This idea, of the universal definition of the word true will be regarded differently by the four great thinkers whose views are described in the project. And the

definition of this concept, for Plato, is about the idea of truth as it exists in the world of forms, whereas with the other three thinkers, their definitions of the concept is articulated as “true,” or “the true.” In order to maintain the clarity of the project I wish to inform the reader that my own uses of several phrases are meant to convey the same meaning. These phrases include, “the true,” “truth,” “true,” and “abstract truth.” All of which are references to the universal definition of the word true.

During the section on Plato a rational interpretation of this philosopher's ideas on truth will be presented. This section will provide a description of Plato's epistemological worldview as well as the metaphysical position which he gives to the idea of truth. I will relate Plato's views on learning in Meno, and Theaetetus, back to his general theory of truth as it is presented in the Republic. Plato's dismissal of the empirical world as a firm source for securing knowledge will be discussed alongside his use of empirical visions of geometric patterns in order to inspire reasoning and recollection within the slave boy in Plato's dialogue, Meno. This example will be used to explain Plato's cohesive worldview in which internal ideas and abstract reasoning leads us to true conclusions. These examples will also be used to show how for Plato, one particular idea, the idea of the good, is particularly important within this methodological framework for finding particular truths. It will also emphasize the way in which truth, as an abstract thing, is caused by, or derived from, the idea of the good.<sup>1</sup> Thus the form of the good is highly important for Plato's views on both particular and abstract truth.

Plato's views will then be contrasted with the Aristotelian worldview, epistemology, and methodology. I will discuss the differences between Platonic forms and Aristotelian universals.

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<sup>1</sup> Plato Republic Book 6 508e “This reality, then, that gives their truth to the objects of knowledge and the power of knowing to the knower, you must say is the idea of good, and you must conceive it as being the cause of knowledge, and of truth, in supposing it to be something fairer still than these you will think rightly of it.”

The discussion will present Aristotle's position on the epistemological value of universals. Also, I will describe Aristotle's criteria for when a statement can be deemed true or false. And this description will itself provide key insights into Aristotle's views on how we are to know particular truths by examining his views on how truth functions within logic.

Furthermore, the project will continue by interpreting the thought of Rene Descartes with the aspiration of unlocking his positions in regards to the two questions of truth in the abstract and in the particular. Within this section on Rene Descartes, I will explore theoretical considerations with the intention of showing that implicit definitions of the true can be extracted from a philosophic system. After which will come the section on Wittgenstein in which his unique method of philosophy will be highlighted in relation to the two great questions which we are exploring.

## Section one- arguments and counter arguments

The introduction presented the thesis as well as the thinkers which will be explored throughout the work. The following section will involve arguments and counter arguments in regards to the thesis presented in the introduction. I will show that if a word has no meaning beyond serving as a label for one particular thing alone then it cannot describe the thing beyond serving as a label for it. What I mean by “describe” is that the word gives meaning to the object beyond serving merely as a label for the object. Which implies that calling a particular claim “true” is effectively meaningless if there is no universal definition of the word true.

In this section I will bring forth two seemingly powerful arguments against my position and then show why it is mistaken with an argument for my thesis. Perhaps the word truth does not at all correspond to the same meaning in the differing contexts of these two central questions. When we employ the term “truth” in reference to a particular thing we know to be true or a

means for finding such a truth perhaps the meaning of the word takes upon itself a radically different character than it does when it is being used to describe the definition or concept of truth. The philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein made a strong case (in certain but not all circumstances), against the practice of assigning unitary essentialist meanings to particular words. This conclusion came largely as a result of his methodological innovations in which he focused his reasoning not upon highly generalized attempts to directly solve philosophical problems, but as an alternative to the traditional Platonic method of attempting to answer broad questions by creating potential solutions with broad meanings which then must be tested with rigorous philosophical thought. Instead, for Wittgenstein, direct access into the meaning of the words which are used in philosophical discourse can end the linguistic confusions which for Wittgenstein are at the core of philosophical problems. From this perspective, the way in which philosophical issues have been traditionally framed and positioned can be deemed to be ambiguous oversimplifications of methods of communication which, when understood rationally in their most subtle and deeply contextual circumstances are often irreducible in their meaning to the simplistic paradigms of Platonic questions and Platonic answers.

Here is another objection to the claim that one's definition of truth affects one's epistemology. It is also an objection to the view that one's theory of truth influences questions about the application of the concept of truth. The objection is simply that there is a pattern in which debates over the theory and analysis of a concept is irrelevant to questions of the application of that concept. For example, debates over the nature of color don't affect or inform debates about which things are blue.

When we consider this perspective perhaps it is true that our notion of truth in the context of these two different philosophical questions may themselves not be intrinsically related to one



another in such a way that knowing about one would help define the other. There are situations in which symbols can be irreplaceable or arbitrary. When one considers that the meaning of a single algebraic variable is the same regardless of whether or not we call it X or we call it Y perhaps the same can be said about the word “true.” If we are given the equation  $X = 2 + 7$  or  $Y = 2 + 7$ , the same meaning is assigned to both X and Y *not* in virtue of the two *different* symbols themselves but in virtue of the *context* within the equation which they are each given.

Furthermore, the question, “what is truth?” is far more generalized than the question, “is it true that the time is 7:40 AM?” Because of the lack of contextual information in the question “what is truth?” answers are far harder to come by because it is harder to infer a clear meaning to the question itself as well as a specific method of confirming an answer to the problem. It is these highly generalized philosophical questions which Wittgenstein saw as often lacking the contextual precision which is needed to dissolve philosophical confusion by means of linguistic clarity. The second more particular question I can answer just by looking at the time on a cell phone or on a watch and checking for logical consistency between what I see and the time which I was asked to confirm. In this case it is a simple matter of correspondence between a claim and an external reality. But when I am asked the first question there is no particular empirical object for me to look upon that will give me an answer to the question. I can only use pure rational thought to try and devise an answer. Because the second question easily inspires a clear methodology for solving the problem it is true that the word truth has a clear meaning in the context of the particular context whereas it has an ambiguous meaning when positioned in the abstract and highly generalized question.

If one concept is said to predicate something about another concept then if a third concept is predicated about this first concept predicates something about the second. This principle can

be illustrated through an example. If A is B and B is C then A is C. But this is slightly different from the logic of the first sentence because it claims equivalence between the letters. If the word true says something about how we know particular truths then we would need a clear meaning predicated to the term “abstract truth” or “the truth,” in order for these terms to predicate something about something else. So if A has no meaning at all then even if A is B and B is C, A is telling us *nothing* about C because A itself has no meaning. So therefore it would seem that truth as a particular is meaningful whereas truth as an abstract totality is meaningless. A meaningless concept cannot predicate anything about a meaningful concept so therefore truth as an abstract totality has nothing to tell us about how to know a particular thing to be true.

However perhaps the meaning of the word truth in the generalized context is not entirely meaningless and perhaps the definition of truth in the particular context can be used to predicate something important about abstract truth in such a way that we could then formulate a definition of truth. The two problems both employ the same word. But one word can correspond to very different if not entirely different definitions. Perhaps this thought experiment can provide a useful solution. How would we define truth if all particular truths were summed up in a particular expression? Because every particular truth must by definition be true. How can the truth include within itself a falsehood? Perhaps in the same way that the concept red may accurately correspond to an image which is red and yet there may be elements of blue within this color which is perceived as red because it is predominantly red. What if, in the same way, there is no absolute truth, but only particular truths and ambiguous concepts which we use to generalize about true things into a cohesive mix?

I will now argue against these objections to my thesis presented above. Then the next part of the work will focus on the thought of Plato and Aristotle in regards to these two questions

about truth. My interpretive thought will attempt to unlock the implications of the way in which these two figures try to address these differing problems of truth.

Why is it useful for a philosopher to try and reveal the unspoken implications of a great thinkers positions? No thinker no matter their intellectual caliber will have the time and the will to answer all possible problems let alone even attempt to answer all philosophical problems. However, it is important to take note that philosophical problems which may not intuitively seem to have important implications for one another often do have such important implications. And yet philosophical problems are in fact deeply interrelated. The question of theism may seem to have little to do with ethics and yet both ethics and theism are part of a cohesive worldview in which each has implications for the other.

This is because Theism typically includes the notion of God as perfection or the sum of all perfection in which moral perfection must also exist. To believe in a morally perfect being then creates a belief in a perfect standard of some kind. And then because ethics deals with moral worldviews then moral imperatives would naturally be influenced by such a belief. Doing the right thing, under such a belief, would have to include acting in accordance with such a standard and this standard is itself defined by the nature of the concept which defines it. This is an example of the way in which worldviews constitute cohesive wholes in which beliefs about one philosophical question has implications for beliefs about other philosophical problems. In the same way, how does assigning the term “true” to some particular truth I have learned have any meaning if the terms meaning is utterly particular to this one case of me finding a truth. Let me illustrate this thought more clearly. Say I discover that  $4 + 4 = 8$  and then I deem this conclusion to be true. How does this truth claim have any meaning if this is the only thing which I can deem to be true? If the word true can only be assigned to one particular truth then how does the term

have any meaning? I can say that the statement is true because the conclusion follows from the symbols. However, if this is our definition of truth, then  $2 + 2 = 4$  is also true in the same way according to the same rule. But now we have moved past applying the term as something which only works in one particular situation. Now we have a definition of truth that is more than knowing a particular truth. And if we deny any universal meaning to the word truth then how can we make meaningful claims about particular statements being true or false? Now we have a standard which influences the way in which we think of all particular truths. And only under this condition can we make meaningful claims about particular statements being true or false.

Therefore it could be that truth is an Aristotelian universal. It can be described by some definition that it accurately describes all cases of true claims and true understandings. Above we tried to define truth as a totality without any inductive process for attempting to do so. We simply thought about truth as a totality without context and we found that we could not use this highly generalized concept to make any clear inferences about particular truths. However, what if we take the definitions of how we know each and every particular truth as a medium for constructing a theory of truth in its totality? We could use each definition as a starting point for further investigation in which we rationally search for the common qualities within all these definitions so that we can present these common qualities as a cohesive definition of truth.

If it is true that we can create a definition of truth which can be used to predicate things about particular truths and our methods for understanding these truths then we have shown that the questions do indeed have important implications for one another. It may seem to some philosophers that having a definition of truth as an abstract whole is unnecessary for understanding particular truths but because we cannot meaningfully call a singular statement true without appealing to some broader notion of truth there is a mutual dependency which exists

between the two concepts. The claim that the word true may not have an essentialist meaning is contradicted by the reality that some unified meaning must be constructed out of the usage of the word if it is going to be capable of functioning in more than one claim.

## Section two- Plato

The following chapter will explore the thought of Plato in regards to the issues at the heart of the thesis. Many of Plato's most influential dialogues will be explored. For Plato, truth exists in the world of idea or forms, and is specifically dependent on the idea of the good. And because of this stance on truth rational reflection on these ideas is the basis for finding particular truths.

In this section I will interpret Plato's views in regards to the issue of truth. In order to accomplish this goal I will analyze sections of Plato's most important dialogues. I will differentiate between the ways in which Plato addresses the nature of truth as a definition of truth and his description of the means by which we can know a particular thing to be true. The purpose here is to not presuppose that the entirety of the issue of truth can be understood from either angle. For if we are to invent a holistic notion of truth then such a concept would have to be capable of including all particular truths. For truth as a whole must contain all particular truths. Just as a particular truth cannot be part of falsehood. The manner in which we ascertain a claim to be true tells us something about the way in which we view truth as a whole. But the exact implications of these two different themes for one another must be examined more clearly. The implications of such an analysis of each will serve as an inspiration for the way in which we interpret the other.

In the *Meno*, Plato's writing examines the method in which we learn the truths of geometry. And in the *Theaetetus* Plato examines the way in which we learn language. Both

rational descriptions of these ways of learning particular truths are then used as foundations for generalized theories of truth or the rejection of certain descriptions of knowledge as a whole. In Meno a slave boy's innate ability to perform correct geometric reasoning is analyzed and described as an example of recollection in the immortals souls understanding. Is this justification an adequate method for defending the theory?

First let us describe the idea which Plato refers to before he interacts with the slave boy. Socrates discuss an idea presented by poets which are allegedly divinely inspired, "What they say is this- see whether you think they are speaking the truth. They say that the soul of man is immortal. At one time it comes to an end- which is called death- and at another is born again, but is never finally exterminated. On these grounds a man must live all his days as righteously as possible. For those from whom "Persephone receives requital for ancient doom, in the ninth year she restores again their souls to the sun above. From whom rise noble kings and the swift in strength and greatest in wisdom, And for the rest of time they are called hero's and sanctified by men." Thus the soul, since it is immortal and has been born many times, and has seen all things both here and in the other worlds. Therefore the soul has learned everything that is. So we need not be surprised if it can recall the knowledge of virtue or anything else which, as we see, it once possessed. All nature is akin, and the soul has learned everything, so that when a man has recalled a single piece of knowledge- learned it, in ordinary language- there is no reason why he should not find out all the rest, if he keeps a stout heart and does not grow weary of the search, for seeking and learning are in fact nothing but recollection" (section 81 b,c,d). Plato reasons that if we have experienced an infinite number of past lives then the amount of knowledge which we possess would itself be infinite. However, what if a dog has had an infinite number of past lives, as a dog soul, in other dog bodies in these previous lives? When I take my dog to the

veterinarian's office she does not understand why she is there. There is some fundamental limit on the inherent understanding capabilities of a dog which prevents the dog from being able to understand why she is at the vet's office. Likewise what is to prevent us from not believing that there are similar limitations upon human understanding and that therefore even an infinite number of past human lives would then not lead to total knowledge? A core part of the idea, however, is simply that human understanding arises from an unawareness being removed. Our contemporary moment in time does not include an awareness of all knowledge. But instead, ignorance is a matter of not encountering a reminder, a piece of information which stimulates the recollection of a particular truth. Therefore understanding is an internal process which exists within the human soul. As the human soul interacts with the world this is what arises. The process of drawing inferences is associated with this recollection. Interestingly, Socrates does two things to stimulate this alleged recollection of knowledge in the boy's soul. He draws geometric figures in the ground and he asks the boy questions about the figures and about how they would be different if they were changed in various ways. The implications of the questions and of the boy's empirical observation stimulate correct responses which are then used by Socrates as evidence in favor of the theory of recollection. Notice how empirical information plays a role in the process of understanding particular truths. However, it serves as only a starting point for rational investigation. Let us ask ourselves, why does Plato view this as evidence in favor of his view that knowledge is recollection as opposed to a different explanation of this learning process? Does this example necessarily imply anything about the theories truthfulness?

Socrates sees his role in inspiring the boy's recollection as a process by which he makes him aware of his own ignorance. It is this awareness of ignorance which inspires the intellectual journey of discovery which leads to recollection, "Do you suppose then that he would have

attempted to look for, or learn, what he thought he knew, though he did not, before he was thrown into perplexity, became aware of his ignorance, and felt a desire to know?" (Meno, section 84 c). Despite the fact that the soul already possess all knowledge, it must be reminded that much knowledge is not held in a position of awareness. It could be compared to a situation where someone asks you about your date of birth. When the person asks the question we bring forth something which we remember which had not at that time been present in our minds. But the question itself makes us search through our minds for the answer which is needed. Is this searching itself a rational process? If we begin to think. Perhaps we think of dates which are significant to us and we find an association between one particular day and the concept, "day of birth." We do not directly remember our day of birth but the concept and the date were given to us by people which we trust. Our parents told us that we were born on such and such a day. Our birth certificates testify to the presence of our birth on such and such a day. And as we think through the question we realize that there is a web of social practices which confirm without a reasonable doubt that we were born on such a day. When we are asked the question we do not seem to think in this way. We merely draw forth the information needed by virtue of direct memorization. However what is the reason why we regard this piece of information as the answer to the problem? We regard it as such because it has never failed us as a response. It is the one date which is logically consistent with the multiple social practices which testify to the event as something which occurred on a particular date. And when the date is employed in a practical situation, it never contradicts one's government and other official documents. In fact, the date is so consistent with the socially constructed evidence of our birth date, that it can be used to look up a variety of other truths through corresponding documents, about you, in which we find our names, addresses, and educational records. We do not think it through as a logical problem when



asked and yet it can be treated as such. And in fact it is the product of a rational process. All of this originates from memory. And for Plato, the memory of an infinite amount of past lives creates the mind needed to remember any truth when inspired to do so.

Socrates continues to describe his teaching role in the following manner, “Now notice what, starting from this state of perplexity, he will discover by seeking the truth in company with me, though I simply ask him questions without teaching him. Be ready to catch me if I give him any instruction or explanation instead of simply interrogating him on his opinions” (Meno, section 84, c d). Socrates points out that answers are not passed along directly from his mind to the boy's mind. Instead, he merely creates in the boy a position of perplexity. And this perplexity positions the mind into its correct method. However, unlike many teachers, Socrates does not even provide a method of thought for the boy to use but merely inspires the boy to think. Therefore there are two things which Socrates does not give to the boy presumably because the boy possess these understandings in his soul. Socrates gives the boy neither answers nor methods of thought. So these two things are implied in the dialogue, as understandings possessed in the boy's soul.

So the ability to make inferences is given a mystical quality in this passage from Meno. What I mean by mystical is that it shouldn't work without the extraordinary presupposition that the conclusions are truth remembered by the inspiration of their context. This constitutes a very specific notion of reason itself. This theory of understanding and of reason could be used as a potential solution to the problem of induction. This mystical process of recollection is described directly as the means by which the boy infers geometric truth, “Then if he did not acquire them in this life, isn't it immediately clear that he possessed and had learned them during some other period” (Plato Republic, Meno 85 e).

I will argue that reincarnation is not a necessary explanation for mathematical reasoning. If we take the fact that a triangle must have 180 degrees. And then we know that two angles are 60 and 30. Therefore the unknown angle must be 90 degrees. And this is because any other answer besides exactly 90 degrees would *contradict* what we know about the triangle. If we were to say that the unknown angle is 91 degrees then we would have to add 60 and 30 to 91. The result would be 181 degrees. But this answer contradicts our *knowledge that* a triangle possess 180 degrees. And therefore the reason for our conclusion is because our answer is the only one which does not contradict our premises. Because all that is needed is knowledge of the premises there is no need to remember the conclusion from a past life. All one must remember is the truth of the premises. And the truth of the premises can easily be learned in this life.

But could the theory be useful for resolving the problem of induction? The problem of induction is the question of the rationality of inductive reasoning. So for example, is it reasonable to infer that all dogs have long snouts after observing five hundred dogs which all possess long snouts? This is an example of inductive thinking. The obvious flaw to such thinking is that it presupposes that all unperceived cases will be the same as the observed cases. Where does such a belief originate from? How can it be justified? Can we make generalizations about the nature of the universe from our small number of empirical observations?

If an infinite amount of knowledge exists from a limitless number of past lives then perhaps inductive thinking can remind us of a universal which we possess within the human soul. The nature which is held in common to all people. A universal claim about humans would be far easier to validate. Let us take the dog example. If we reason from observing five hundred dogs with long snouts that all dogs possess long snouts this could be validated if we remembered from our past lives that all the other dogs which we haven't observed on this particular occasion

possessed the quality of long snouts. If we are thinking about this issue under the assumption that abstract forms exist then one person with infinite past lives could observe limited particulars and understand the similarity between these particulars and a universal, and then infer that these particulars belong to that universal. This process of inference could then be described as a recollection where the five hundred dogs reminded me of a quality which I had observed in the features of all dogs.

At the core of Plato's philosophy is the idea that truth exists in its highest form in the world of abstract ideas or forms. It does not exist in the empirical world. But exists in the world of ideas.<sup>2</sup> More specifically it exists as the form or idea of truth<sup>3</sup>.<sup>4</sup> And the method by which we ascertain these truths is through rational dialectic thought which proceeds from hypotheses which bear and possess no assumptions or allegedly self-evident axioms. From these starting points truths are determined through reason by testing the logical validity of the hypothesis in question. Reason, and not empirical observation or experience, is the means by which we find the truth. And the truth, as a metaphysically existent thing, consists not of empirical visions of the world but instead the truth is certain abstract realities known as forms. The highest of these forms is the form of the good. The good is the idea which illuminates all

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<sup>2</sup> "This reality, then, that gives their truth to the objects of knowledge and the power of knowing to the knower, you must say is the idea of good, and you must conceive it as being the cause of knowledge, and of truth, in supposing it to be something fairer still than these you will think rightly of it" (Republic VI 508 e).

<sup>3</sup> "Apply this comparison to the soul also in this way. When it is firmly fixed on the domain where truth and reality shine resplendent it apprehends and knows them and appears to possess reason, but when it inclines to that region which is mingled with darkness, the world of becoming and passing away, it opines only and its edge is blunted, and it shifts its opinions hither and thither, and again seems as if it lacked reason" (Republic VI 508 d e).

<sup>4</sup> "Understand then, said I, that by the other section of the intelligible I mean that which the reason itself lays hold of by the power of dialectic, treating its assumptions not as absolute beginnings but literally as hypothesis, underpinnings, footings, and springboards so to speak, to enable it to rise to that which requires no assumption and is the starting point of all, and after attaining to that again taking hold of the first dependencies from it, so to proceed downward to the conclusion, making no use whatever of any object of sense but only of pure ideas moving on through ideas to ideas and ending with ideas" (Republic VI 511 b-c).

other ideas. It is an abstract reality that can be employed in the action of human rationality in such a way that the other ideas are illuminated by the means in which the idea is employed in this reflection. The world of change and empirical reality is only a weak and ambiguous reflection of the world of truth which is found in abstract ideas. There are a few core reasons to believe in this description of Plato's view of truth. One is that forms are non-empirical and the highest realm of clarity for Plato is the non-empirical world of rationality and ideas. Ideas and forms both possess the quality of being abstract. The ideas which are the conclusions of the highest level of thought embodied clarity to the greatest extent and therefore are the best truths which we have access to.

The following passage from Plato's Republic captures this method elegantly, "Understand then, said I, that by the other section of the intelligible I mean that which the reason itself lays hold of by power of dialectic, treating its assumptions not as absolute beginnings but literally as hypothesis, underpinnings, footings, and springboards so to speak, to enable it to rise to that which requires no assumption and is the starting point of all, and after attaining to that again taking hold of the first dependencies from it, so to proceed downward to the conclusion, making no use whatever of any object of sense but only of pure ideas moving through ideas to ideas and ending with ideas" (Plato's Republic, VI sect 511 b-c). In Plato's writing this method of investigation is contrasted with mathematics which possesses the rational and abstract nature which reason also possesses. However, reason allows us to understand reality in an even greater and more excellent way because the method of philosophical thought above begins with hypothesis creation rather than with axioms.

Is it really true that hypotheses have no assumptions? The reason one would prefer the way of thinking described by Plato above is that it does not presuppose truths which are not yet

known and therefore the thinker will not be lead into false conclusions from the influence of false axioms. But this is true under the assumption that there are no self-evident truths which can serve as first principles. Interestingly, even rational investigations starting from arbitrary starting points are deemed to have a superior epistemological value than empirical studies. So even if the study begins with observation, and the observation is an act which collects data and does not construe what is being observed with any presuppositions, because of the shadowy and inconsistent nature of the empirical world this is still an inferior source of understanding relative to rational investigations with unjustified starting points.

In the Theaetetus Plato points out that our understanding of language is not entirely dependent upon perception. One can hear a totally foreign language which one has not learned and not understand the meaning of the sounds. And likewise one can observe the symbols and words of an unlearned language without understanding their meaning.<sup>5</sup> And so therefore the process by which we understand the meaning of language is through an internal mental process as well as an empirical experience of the expression of language. This means that our understanding is dependent upon previously developed mental links between experiences. For our ability to use and construe language is itself the product of many years of exposure and practice. These capabilities which connect ideas need the ability to connect present experiences with past experiences. Through rationality we can differentiate symbols from other symbols and meanings from other meanings which contradict the interpretations which we previously learned. Just as reason interprets language so understanding language is more than an empirical process.

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<sup>5</sup> "We shall say, Socrates, that we know just so much of them as we do see or hear. The shape and color of the letters we both see and know; we hear and at the same time know the rising and falling accents of the voice. But we neither perceive by sight and hearing nor yet know what a schoolmaster or an interpreter could tell us about them" (Theaetetus 163 c b).

Plato takes note that the understanding of language is not merely in the perception of the symbols whether spoken or written. Because such perception exists without necessitating an understanding it cannot follow that all perceptions of language imply that the perceiver understands the language. The one case of people perceiving a foreign language which they have not learned is enough to negate this universal claim. In fact, understanding of language requires a set of rational tools creating links between symbols and meaning, as well as a process of deriving meanings by using logic. On a higher level, that rationality which proceeds by reasoning upon ideas alone is deemed to be a higher method than this understanding of language in the Republic. So how can we reconcile these divergent understandings of truth in Plato? One way is to point out that the Theaetetus never positively defines knowledge but only defines what knowledge is not. In contrast the Republic seeks to provide a positive definition of truth and knowledge. Therefore, the view that knowledge is not perception is compatible with the views of the Republic. However, in the Theaetetus and the Meno there is a subtle affirmation of the empirical as a shadowy starting point for rational investigation. But rational investigation is the true means for higher understanding, and the ideas which are drawn from the conclusions of un-presumptive rationality are themselves the truth.

In the Meno and in the Theaetetus two examples of learning a particular thing to be true are presented to us. Whereas in the Republic a general theory of truth is given to us. As was discussed above. It is important to take note that knowledge of a particular truth in the Theaetetus and the Meno occurs by means of rational or internal thought, which is merely inspired by empirical signals. It is not empirical signals which are themselves the understanding that is gained. But in both cases it is memory and the rational process of employing memory which is the source of understanding the particular truths. These two cases present a cohesive

understanding of how to understand linguistic and mathematical truths. One is first exposed to an empirical inspiration. An awareness of one's ignorance may occur before recollection occurs. Or the empirical insight will simply inspire recollection directly as in the case of language.

However, in both cases understanding of a particular truth is obtained through recollection.

Let us analysis the actual text of the Theaetetus, “Socrates: Well, are we going to agree that, whenever we perceive something by sight or hearing, we also at the same time know it? Take the case of a foreign language we have not learned. Are we to say that we do not hear the sounds that foreigners utter, or that we both hear and know what they are saying? Or again, when we don’t know our letters are we to maintain that we don’t see them when we look at them, or that, since we see them, we do know them? Theaetetus: We shall say, Socrates, that we know just so much of them as we do see or hear. The shape and color of the letters we both see and know; we hear and at the same time know the rising and falling accents of the voice. But we neither perceive by sight and hearing nor yet know what a schoolmaster or an interpreter could tell us about them” (Plato, Theaetetus, section 163 b-c). Here Theaetetus points out that empirical insight into written language can give us insight into the shape and the color of the language that is presented to us. What cannot be understood in this case is the meaning of what is written. The color or the shape of the language *can in fact* help us understand aspects of what language communicates. But cannot indicate the full meaning of a piece of writing. For example, by making a statement **bold** one puts an emphasis on the intense emotional overtones of the statement to make the statement more direct and aggressive. For example, if I were to write, “Do not kill”. The statement does not possess the same level of severity as a statement like, “**DO NOT KILL**”. The later of the two statements communicates a seriousness and aggressiveness which challenges the reader to imagine the possibility of punitive retribution for breaking its

command. It does not explicitly communicate such a concept and yet the possibility is certainly clearer in the later statement than in the first. However, if both statements were written in an ancient language which no one understands we could not know what the statement prohibits nor could we even know that the statement is a prohibition. Yet still we could understand that the meaning of the second statement was intended to be more aggressive and intense in its intonations. What is the difference between the meaning which can be understood and the meaning which cannot be understood?

Plato depicts reality as consisting of four realms which possess varying degrees of truth and clarity. Two of these four realms deal with the concrete world of empirical reality. Whereas the other two realms deal with the intelligible world. The empirical world consists of the reflections of empirical objects, which are the most ambiguous visions of reality. Not only are they merely a distorted reflection of objects other than themselves, but they are also reflecting objects which themselves are transient and therefore inconsistent. In the higher intelligible world the two realms possess the same ratio of relative truth and obscurity as the ratio between the realms of the empirical world. The abstract thought of the arts and sciences (geometry is given as an example), is a shadow of the realm of dialectical reason in the same way in which shadows of actual objects reflect those objects. This passage from the Republic summarizes these views, “Represent them then, as it were, by a line divided into two unequal sections and cut each section again in the same ratio- the section, that is, of the ratio of their comparative clearness and obscurity you will have, as one of the sections of the visible world, images. By images I mean, first, shadows, and then reflections in water and on surfaces of dense, smooth, and bright texture, and everything of that kind, if you apprehend” (Republic VI, sections 509 d and e). Notice how the section of the line which represents the intelligible world is greater in size than the section



representing the empirical world. This likely represents the inequality of clarity between the rational and empirical worlds.

Plato's thought presents truth as something which exists in the world of abstract ideas. More specifically, it is the idea of the good which is the ultimate idea which, like the sun provides light by which we see, indirectly influences our thoughts and reasoning process so that we can ascertain the truth of the other forms (among these forms is truth). Therefore, the composition of truth is fundamentally moral and also fundamentally abstract. Ascertaining an understanding of righteousness, as it exists in its pure spiritual totality, is like a vehicle which propels human thought forward. Reason which is unhindered by the ambiguities of the empirical world is the means for ascertaining truth. And this form of reasoning is Plato's methodology for obtaining individual truths. This method follows from his definition of truth as an idea existing in the world of ideas. This is the case because if the truth is a non-empirical idea or set of ideas then the search for truths must use the world of pure ideas. If truth does not exist in the empirical world but in the world of abstract ideas then why would thinking about or observing a realm without truth gives us access to individual truths? That would be like looking for truths of history in a work of fiction. And although an empirical vision may serve as an inspirational spark for abstract thought, such as the geometric figures presented by Socrates to the boy in *meno*, ultimately it is rationalities ability to search through the wisdom of the eternal human soul that gives us answers to problems which may arise from observation. The empirical world lacks the clarity and consistency necessary to be a source of truth.

## Section three- Aristotle

This new section will explore Aristotle's more empirical orientation in relation to the core issues of the project. For Aristotle the true is those existential claims which correspond to how

things actually are. For example, to claim that a horse is brown when the horse is in fact, empirically brown, is an example of a true statement. Aristotle's logic allows for us to find particular truths by categorizing premises into universal affirmative, universal negative, particular affirmative, and particular negative. He also categorizes words into quantitative and qualitative words. These categories allow for the systematic and discriminatory classification of claims about the world which will allow us to draw inferences successfully and objectively. This categorization of linguistic claims about the world is itself a method which is rooted in an understanding of the true as claims which make existential claims about the world in ways which correspond to actuality. How can we make true claims if we cannot clarify our language so that we know precisely what kind of claim is being made about the world? Because without this clarity we will not be able to verify the correspondence between our existential claims and the world itself.

In comparison to Plato Aristotle's thought possesses a much more empirical orientation. By following in Plato's footsteps he posits the existence of abstract entities similar to forms known as universals. However, his notion of universals is that their nature subsists directly within empirical objects.<sup>6</sup> The importance of this intellectual transition lies in the fact that this way of thinking about the world helped create a connection between learning about the empirical and the abstract. The abstract forms could be understood *through*, and not despite the empirical. Reason's new role was largely not to transcend the empirical but to be an instrument of interpretation of that same empirical world which had been disregarded by Plato. The question of

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<sup>6</sup> "For Aristotle, the real world is one of individual substances which are distinct from each other, yet which are characterized by qualities or other types of being held in common with other individual substances. This commonality, however, does not signify the existence of a transcendent Idea from which the common quality is derived. The common quality is a universal recognized by the intellect in sensible things, but it is not itself a substance. Plato had taught that things like concrete things in which they might appear, but for Aristotle that doctrine was untenable" (The Passion of the Western Mind by Richard Tarnas, p. 56).

how it is that the ever-changing empirical world can ever be a source of unchanging wisdom is at the core of philosophy's struggle. For Aristotle's observation of multiple particulars can lead to a process of induction in which a concept is abstracted from these observations. The concept itself must not need a context to have meaning but must possess an innate self-referential meaning which can be used to understand certain abstract truths across any context. The truths of geometry are given by Aristotle as an example of this. Aristotle's systematic formalization of logic reflects his fundamental intellectual temperament. In his study of logic he uses categories which are related back to the quantitative. If one thinks of describing the qualities of all the chairs in a room. Then the universal claim about the chairs would include the quantitative fact about the number of chairs in the room. If there are six chairs in the room. And all the chairs in the room are white. Then the six chairs in the room are white. In this case, the concept of a universal has a direct quantitative meaning. Aristotelian logic systematized human thought and language with the purpose of removing ambiguity by means of categorization.

What are the similarities and differences between Aristotelian universals and Platonic forms? One important distinction to make is that Aristotelian universals allow us to make correct inferences about concrete particulars. Whereas a Platonic form, although similar in its metaphysical structure, does not make such inferences possible. A similarity is that neither universals nor Platonic forms can be reduced to a given empirical insight. In fact a Platonic universal cannot be observed within a particular empirical object whereas a universal can be in some sense observed within a particular object but it is not reducible to the object itself. Aristotle did claim that universals possessed higher epistemological value because they could be used to draw conclusions about particulars, and thus they are capable of providing a wider range of true knowledge claims. If one understands a Platonic form one does not use this understanding as a

means to understand anything concrete, particular, or empirical. For such objects are not where truth subsides. Instead, understanding a form can help to lead to understanding of other forms by means of logical thought. For example, in the Republic Plato presents the form of the good as an idea which aids logical thought in such a way that it helps us to ascertain knowledge of the forms of truth and knowledge.

However, is it reasonable to think that one abstract idea is a firm basis for making inferences about other abstract ideas? What do the forms logically imply about one another? Aristotelian logic breaks away from Platonic thought through the insight that we cannot deem singular terms to be true or false.<sup>7 8</sup> One cannot claim that the statement, “red”, when given without any relevant context, can be deemed to be a “true” statement. And this can be held in contrast to the way in which Plato describes his forms as abstract truths corresponding to singular terms, such as the good, the beautiful, the just, truth, and knowledge. This insight from Aristotelian logic is a great precursor to many of the insights of Ludwig Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein’s philosophy often emphasized the inability to successfully define singular terms according to singular essences because of the lack of contextual enrichment which is present in Platonic thought. Aristotle, like Wittgenstein, is interested in relating the concrete and the particular back to language. And using language as a means of analysis of that same empirical

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<sup>7</sup> The expressions ‘of Philo’, ‘to Philo’, and so on, constitute not nouns, but cases of a noun. The definition of these cases of a noun is in other respects the same as that of the noun proper always does, under these conditions. Take the words ‘of Philo is’ or ‘of Philo is not’; these words do not, as they stand, form either a true or a false proposition” (Organon, On Interpretation, Ch2.).

<sup>8</sup> As there are in the mind thoughts which do not invoke truth or falsity, and also those which must be either true or false, so it is in speech. For truth and falsity imply combination and separation. Nouns and verbs, provided nothing is added, are like thoughts without combination or separation; ‘man’ and ‘white’, as isolated terms, are not yet either true or false. In proof of this, consider the word ‘goat-stag’. It has significance, but there is no truth or falsity about it, unless ‘is’ or ‘is not’ is added, either in the present or in some other tense” (Organon, On Interpretation, Ch1.).

world. But whereas Wittgenstein is interested in particular situations, the thought of Aristotle is interested in particular objects.

If we consider the original question of the preceding paragraph. If the forms are interrelated then we can make inferences about one form on the basis of other forms? But what if the forms are not relevant to one another? How do we even begin to think about forms except through the process of asking questions about them? And does this process itself involve a method of thought which forbids inferences resulting in conclusions in the nature of a singular essence? Let us assume that we know that the form of truth must possess the quality of goodness. Then if we know goodness to involve love, or benevolence. Then we can say that the form of truth is itself benevolent. But is it not true that many things which we learn to be true are on the contrary cruel, brutal, and malicious? So it would seem that truth cannot possess the qualities of goodness. However, all these thoughts are the result of errors arising from overgeneralized concepts which are not precise enough to be used as foundations for correct inferences. For example, some elements of the truth may be cruel, whereas other elements may be benevolent. So to make inferences in which simplistic categories hide the complexity of reality is to lead the mind into error. Let us say that within truth there is four elements, A, B, C, and Z. Now, one of these elements may be held in common with goodness. Let us say that goodness possesses both K, H, R, and Z. We cannot reason from these two premises that it is necessarily true that every quality of truth is also a quality of goodness. If we happen to discover that A is K, and B is H, and C is R, then we would know that all qualities of truth also exist in goodness. Under these conditions then if Q is true of truth then it would be true of goodness because the two concepts share all qualities. But then what if the qualities within the two forms are themselves ambiguous in their meaning? And what if their meaning changes based upon the way in which they are

positioned in a particular context? For instance if someone states that they are healthy and I respond with the statement, “good”, then I am not implying that this person has necessarily done something morally good, but that I deem their condition to be a positive thing. If I say that someone has “done good” I mean to imply that they have done something morally good. So how do we know if Plato meant that the form of the good was morally good or if he meant it was good in the sense of being positive? Furthermore the qualities associated with the forms can be differentiated into more particular categories as well. The logic of highly generalized concepts is weak and ambiguous.

All of this reinforces the truth which is being pointed out in Aristotelian logic. That one cannot deem isolated terms to be true or false. The phrase, “all good things” is an Aristotelian universal. Whereas the phrase, “the good” corresponds to a Platonic form. With the understanding that isolated terms cannot be true or false, does the idea of a Platonic form become meaningless? Platonic forms do not subsist in particular empirical objects like Aristotelian forms. When we think of this understanding it begins to make more sense to construe forms as things existing within the concrete world. And not within the world of pure abstraction. Because meaning is created through the relational impact of terms upon each other it makes sense to construe forms as commonalities between concrete entities for two reasons. One is that empirical objects themselves only exist in relation to other objects as well as the senses through which they are perceived. This relational nature parallels the relational substance of composites which can be deemed true or false. Also, these forms would exist as relations between objects in the sense that all triangles would relate to one another through the universal which subsists in them all.

Aristotle's understanding of what it means to make a true statement is to make existence claims in a way which corresponds to the actual world. “This is clear, in the first place, if we

define what the true and the false are. To say of what is that it is not, or of what is not that it is, is false, while to say of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not, is true; so that he who says of anything that it is, or that it is not, is true; so that he who says of anything that it is, or that it is not, will say either what is true or what is false; but neither what is nor what is not is said to be true or what is false; but neither what is nor what is said to be or not to be” (Metaphysics, 1011 b25). So Aristotle’s understanding of truth requires the idea that true and false applies only to composites and not to singular terms. Because in order to make an existence claim one must have a composite of words in a given sentence. Let’s give an example of this. In order to make the claim “the chair is red”, I need the word “is”, to express an existential claim about the redness of the chair. This statement meets the criteria of something the potential to be true or false because it is predicating the existence of redness to the chair. If I were to look at the chair and observe a color on the chair which corresponds to my concept of “red,” then I can verify the truth of the claim. When the word, “red,” is left to hang in a vacuum with no context, then nothing is predicated of anything else. And neither can there be any claim about existence. Nonexistence, or existence, must be predicated of something in order for the claim to fall within the realm of claims which can be true or false.

What about the claim that God exists? This is an example of a claim which involves predicating existence to a given concept or object. For Aristotle, this meets the criteria of a claim which may be true or false. And yet this claim refers to the alleged existence of something which possesses no empirical existence. How can we verify this if the existential claim is true? One of the ways in which philosophers have tried to address this problem is to analyze the structure of the physical world and see if it would imply the existence of a creator, or of some perfect existent thing. Or, they have developed arguments on the basis of the concept itself. How can we

reconcile the fact that Aristotle's criteria for true statements includes statements about non empirical objects with the empirical nature of Aristotle's own philosophy?

“True reality, he believed, was the perceptible world of concrete objects, not an imperceptible world of eternal Ideas. The theory of Ideas seemed to him both empirically unverifiable and fraught with logical difficulties. To counter that theory, Aristotle put forth his doctrine of categories. Things can be said “to be” in many ways. A tall white horse is in one sense “tall,” in another sense “white,” and in another sense a “horse.” Yet these different ways of being are not equivalent in ontological status, for the tallness and whiteness of the horse depend for their existence entirely on the primary reality of the particular horse” (The passion of the Western Mind, The Greek Worldview, 56).

So the existence of the universal is entirely dependent on the primary reality of particulars. So if the particulars did not exist then the universal would not exist either. This idea can be held in contrast to the Platonic understanding of existence in which forms would certainly exist regardless of the existence of particulars. It is the ability to abstract common properties from particulars which leads the mind to the understanding of universals. Therefore, In Aristotelian thought, abstract entities cannot be understood without observing particulars. And so, understanding of the non-empirical world would come through observation of the world itself. This is how Aristotle constructs his argument for the existence of God (or the unmoved mover), on the basis of the nature of the empirical world itself.

So what, for Aristotle, does it mean to claim that a statement is true? A true statement is one which claims that makes existence claims which correspond to reality. If the question is an empirical one then the claim will be one which makes an existence claim which can be verified by observation. If the claim is a non-empirical one, then it must be made by abstracting a



universal from particulars, or by making an inference about what is necessary for the structure of the empirical world to be the way it is.

Aristotle's understanding of the philosophical definition of truth is that it is language which conveys correct existential claims about things. Things that are, are said to exist. So, if through language I predicate the quality of whiteness towards a dog, and then I turn around and observe the dog, and it is in fact white. In this case my language corresponds to the actual object. I made a claim about an existing quality which was shown to be true by observation. This particular situation reflects an understanding of truth which is very empirical. Because it claims that statements are true when they convey the same understanding of existence as does our empirical observation. And this reflects the claim made above that true reality exists in perceptible concrete objects. So therefore, in the same way that Plato sees true conclusions as the result of reasoning based upon ideas, Aristotle sees true conclusions as the result of describing an empirical process. One process is non empirical and the other empirical. Aristotelian thought presents a method for particular truths which includes the clarification of language in order to describe the universals which subsist within observable particulars. The universals are given a high epistemological value because they can be used to make correct deductive inferences.

Aristotle's understanding of truth contains three qualities. One is the idea that language should correspond to empirical observation. Two is that universals which subsist in the concrete particular world should be found in these observations and included in the linguistic descriptions of these concrete realities. And three, that these universals can then be used to make clear inferences that lead to true conclusions. Let's say that by observing human nature we see that all human bodies eventually must die. Here we have accurately used language within a classification scheme which accurately depicts reality. The division of categories into universals and

particulars aids logical thought by providing rules for the further interpretation of the consequences of the premises. We can then use observation again to create the statement that Socrates is a human. Then we can conclude that Socrates will eventually die. This Aristotelian process of finding a particular truth, that Socrates is mortal, is the result of the use of language to accurately describe what is there in terms of claims about what is seen, as well as the use of logic to make clear inferences to clear conclusions based on this process.

This understanding of how to find a particular truth is directly influenced by the understanding of what truth is. If truth was defined differently the process would lose its intellectual power. If truth is not the correspondence of language with objects but is instead a Platonic form, what then would happen to the process of finding particular truths which I described in the preceding paragraph? Because empirical reality does not give us access to the forms, an accurate, categorical use of language, which includes corresponding existential claims, will merely be a reflection of a shadow of the truth which subsists in abstract forms. This application of language which Aristotle uses, cannot, within a Platonic understanding of the definition of truth, vindicate the Aristotelian method for finding the particular truth listed above. The observation that all people die, under these Platonic conditions, may in fact be an illusion. It is a perception of how things seem to be, but this perception only exists within a whirlwind of flux and change where nothing can show us truth, because what appears to be one thing may later be something fundamentally different to such an extent that one's claims about the object may easily become false. The claim that all humans are mortals may not be true because it is only an apparent truth based upon the empirical observation that human bodies always become weaker until the point of death. But this empirical observation may not be a fixed, stable truth. And if our observations are based upon empirical observations which themselves are

fundamentally deceptive, then our foundation for affirming the truth of the syllogism is destroyed. If humans are not necessarily mortal then we cannot conclude that Socrates is mortal. We may hold this belief to be true but we cannot know it with complete certainty, whereas this would be the case if the Aristotelian definition of truth (which is a definition which applies to the empirical world) were correct. In this way, Aristotle's method for finding particular truths, through syllogism, would be untrue if it were not for his understanding of truth. If it were not true that truth is correct existential claims about reality which can be used to abstract universals then the method presented above would not guarantee the truth of its conclusions.

## Section four- Rene Descartes

The following section on Rene Descartes will include important theoretical considerations for defining a thinker's implicit definition of true. It will also explore Descartes positions, whether explicit or implicit, on the definition of the true as well as methodology for finding particular truths. For Descartes, the true is thought and perception which is clear and distinct. And his method for finding particular truth is to find those truths which are undoubtable, divide problems into as many parts as possible, to approach the smallest problems first, and to make enumerations so complete and general that nothing is omitted. This method relates logically to the definition because every aspect of that methodology for determining particular truths serves to increase the clarity and distinction of the premises and the conclusions.

Now let us apply these two central questions to the thought of Rene Descartes. How does Descartes deal with the question of how we know a particular thing to be true? What is his position on the nature of truth as a whole? And what is the method that Descartes uses to address these core epistemological issues? In the beginning of discourse on method Descartes discusses his early life and education. In this section Descartes reviews the many subjects which he had

studied while receiving his education, including philosophy, theology, and mathematics. The subject in which he found the least questionable truth was in mathematics, “I delighted most of all in mathematics because of the certainty and the evidence of its reasoning’s” (Discourse on method, 4). And so Descartes uses this as a foundation for establishing a method of thought which will serve as a foundation for finding particular truths to be true, “For ultimately, the method that teaches one to follow the true order and to enumerate exactly all the circumstances of what one is seeking contains everything that gives certainty to the rules of arithmetic” (Discourse on method, 12). And this same method is then used to answer the big questions of epistemology in a systematic inquiry.

This method of thought for determining particular truths involves four fundamental rules. One is to never accept anything as true which is not plainly known to be true. The second is to divide problems into as many parts as possible in order to resolve the problems. And the third rule is to conduct one's thought in such a way in which the simplest of things to the most composite of things. The fourth rule is to make enumerations and reviews so complete that I have omitted nothing.

But what is the specific vindication of this method? Before presenting these four rules Descartes explains that these rules are justified by his intellectual experience which had shown that the laws of logic had not presented new truths but had merely explicated things already known. Descartes decided to create his laws upon this model because mathematics was the only science in which he found demonstrations that possessed certainty. The success of this model in solving mathematical problems led Descartes to believe in the methods validity, “In fact, I dare say the strict adherence to these few precepts I had chosen gave me such facility for disentangling all the questions to which these two sciences extend, that, in the two or three

months I spent examining them, having begun with the simplest and most general, and each truth that I found being a rule that later helped me to find others, not only did I arrive at a solution of many problems that I had previously found very difficult, but also it seemed to me toward the end that, even in those instances where I was ignorant, I could determine by what means and how far it was possible to resolve them” (Discourse on method, 12).

Mathematics is generally composed of a fundamentally different language system than is written language. Descartes saw the philosophy that he had been taught as something which did not contain the complete certainty of mathematical proofs. His solution to this issue is to compose rules for thought both mathematical and philosophical which is an imitation of the nature of mathematical thought. The clarity of linguistic thought then is dependent on a need for it to resemble mathematical thought to a greater extent and therefore medium of communication itself must change. Cartesian thoughts emphasis on un-doubt-ability is related to the emphasis on clarity for the following reason. How can someone know for certain that an ambiguous claim is true? What does it mean to understand that a claim is ambiguous? One could say that an ambiguous claim is one which can have a wide variety of possible meanings. Or one could say that an ambiguous claim is one in which the exact meaning of a claim is unknown. Or one could define an ambiguous claim as one in which the true or complete meaning of the claim cannot be known. All three of these possibilities are very different definitions and any intellectual approach applying these three concepts to an argument must have fundamentally different outcomes because these three definitions would predicate very different meanings about the subject. Now that we have these possible understandings of ambiguity multiple possibilities about the nature of the relative clarity of mathematics becomes possible. This is because of the understanding that it is more clear depends on the relative ambiguity of philosophical language. So therefore there are

many meanings which we can assign to the notion of clarity under this condition in which we have many understandings of the meaning of the word “ambiguous.” How then can we determine which is the appropriate use of the word ambiguous? If, for instance we say that a statement written in an ancient language which cannot be translated into any contemporary language then we call this statement “ambiguous,” the context provided in which this claim exists shows that the term means that the precise meaning of the statement cannot be known. Perhaps the emotional content of the statement can, in fact, be understood, just by the structure of the symbols, in the same way in which, a bold word has a different meaning than the same word in a non-bold format. So under this circumstance we can interpret the word ambiguous, as it is applied to this circumstance, as meaning that the meaning of the statement cannot, actually be understood. And if clarity is the opposite of ambiguity than under this circumstance clarity is when a statement can be understood in its entire meaning. If we think of a circumstance where someone says, “my heart is strong,” without any context, then we have multiple possible meanings of this statement. The statement could mean that this person has a significant amount of emotional courage. However, the statement could also mean that the person's heart is physically strong. If we provide a context for the statement then we could know which of the two possible definitions is correct. If the statement was made in the context of a doctor's office then it would be true that the meaning of the statement would be that the person's heart is physically strong and healthy. But if it was said in the context of a soldier leaving home for war then the earlier of the two meanings would be true and the statement would refer to the person's emotional courage.

This circumstance is one in which the ambiguity of the statement is the result of a lack of context and this very ambiguity means that, in this case, that there are multiple corresponding

definitions to the term and any of these terms could be true depending on the context. Therefore the ambiguity is the result of the lack of context, and the clarity is the result of the context. This emphasis on clarity in Cartesian thought is related to the emphasis on contextual understanding and breaking down problems into their smallest and simplest elements. If problems are divided into their smaller constituent elements then one's understanding of the whole is refined and improved. Context is a form of this clarity because it creates a greater understanding of the whole by means of understanding the relations between the parts. When the parts are interpreted into a greater position of clarity then so is the whole illuminated by this process. A core mistake, which Descartes points out, is to try and understand the complex whole when one has yet to understand all the particular elements of this whole. This relates back to my thesis that a philosopher's understanding of truth in the particular has important implications for how a philosopher thinks about truth in the abstract. This is true, in the case of Descartes, for two following reasons. One is that the clarification of small particular problems is the essential stepping stone for later thought about the larger problem. The problem of what truth is, is itself a very large philosophical problem. In order to answer a problem of such a magnitude, from a Cartesian perspective, smaller problems must be addressed first. However, this argument is dependent upon a key assumption which is that the question of truth as a whole even has constituent parts? Perhaps the problem of truth is so abstract that it has no real meaning or no reference points for the further clarification of the meaning of the problem itself? What smaller problems would one need to first address to answer the problem of truth?

What reference point would one use to understand the question, "what is truth?" Clearly we can differentiate this question from the problem of "what is the truth about x?" The question is looking for an all-encompassing definition of the word truth. Or it is looking for the

refinement of a concept which may already be conveyed, in its meaning by the word truth. If one were to propose a solution to the question of “what is truth?” how would someone test a solution to this problem? One could test the internal coherence of the answer as well as the applicability of the definition to individual cases of truth. This resembles the way in which particular sub problems are used in Cartesian thought as foundations for solutions to larger problems. However, examining the coherence of the definition itself is an analysis of the whole itself and not of the coherence of a definition to a particular case of that definition. However, if we are refining our understanding of truth as a whole based upon a philosophical analysis of truth in all its particulars then the definition which we are testing for internal coherence will itself be the result of our thinking about the particulars.

If truth as a whole cannot be understood in any other way than an analysis of the way in which it is used in each particular case then we must trust the understanding that our particular truths do in fact meet the criteria of being truths. What if the mathematical demonstrations which Descartes deemed to be true are in fact false? The nature of the mind presents these mathematical truths to us so clearly that we cannot disagree with them. But what if the very structure of our most basic truths is itself a deception? This is the thesis which Descartes tests in the meditations when he considers the possibility that an evil demon is deceiving us in all our thoughts and in all our perceptions.

No matter how deceived Descartes may be he cannot be deceived about the fact that he is thinking and because he is thinking he must exist. Descartes expresses this clearly in the following statement, “What about thinking? Here I make my discovery: thought exists; it alone cannot be separated from me. I am; I exist- this is certain” (Meditations two, section 27). So clearly a truth of reason still exists even under the hypothesis that reason is a deception because



even if it was a deception it cannot be denied that Descartes is thinking about this possibility.

The fact of thinking implies the existence of a thinking thing.

Even under this circumstance, a thinking thing may still be deceived about everything else. However, this thinking thing possesses the idea of God. God is a perfect, infinite being. However, if God is unreal then how can a finite thinking thing possibly possess the idea of something so much greater than itself?

Does this line of argumentation represent a method of thought where smaller problems are used as foundations for larger problems? The very presentation of the problems in the series in which they unfold do in fact come from the Cartesian method of solving problems. The idea that you must use only that which you surely know as an intellectual foundation for further inquiry is reflected in the beginning hypothesis of the inquiry. This is because the hypothesis is designed to rule out the possibility of false assumptions becoming part of the thinker's worldview as well as their thought process. Because the hypothesis proposes the worst of all epistemic situations the attempt to find a truth within this worst of circumstances for knowledge is a way in which one can find a worldview where the foundational truths for finding all other truths is something which must be true even under the worst possible epistemic situation. If  $x$  is true under the worst possible epistemic situation then it makes sense to treat this truth as a foundation for further inquiry. It is the best possible starting point because it is true in the worst possible situation for knowledge. If we were to begin an inquiry with claim  $y$ , which is true under the most optimistic epistemic situation then there is a good chance that this claim may be false because the epistemic circumstance may very well be false. If the situation is false then claim  $y$  is not necessarily true. However, if  $x$  is true under the most negative of all possible

epistemic situations, then why would it not also be true under any possible circumstance? The likelihood of anything being true depends upon the context in which it exists. For example, the likelihood that an object will fall to the ground will depend upon the circumstances involving gravity itself. This reflects the way in which only composite statements can be true or false and not singular utterances, like saying the word “red” without any context at all and without the word being part of a composite statement or sentence. Truth, as a concept, does not apply to pieces of information utterly without context. So, if something is true under the least positive epistemic situation then it must be the most un-falsifiable of truths. Because it is within context that truths are either validated or invalidated if the situation is such that it is the most difficult to validate a claim then this claim is a firm foundation for further inquiry. This understanding reflects the Cartesian way of thinking.

How can we argue that Descartes has a definition of truth when the question of truth is not directly addressed by Descartes? Since Descartes does not directly try to define the word truth we must try to salvage a definition from his understanding of what it means for a statement to be true. However, why is it necessary for us to have a definition of such a broad concept? Can we not successfully determine various truths in a set of given problems without any reference to the definition of the word truth? Whereas Plato posits the idea of truth as a form the Cartesian approach to philosophy does not assign truth to any particular form. So, if a philosopher has no concept of abstract truth as a whole, then what need is there for discussing the issue of the meaning or definition of truth? If we say that there is no need for a discussion of truth we would have to be committing ourselves to the position that truth as a totality is not a necessary concept for doing the kind of explanatory work which is done by a philosopher without a platonic

understanding of truth. Truths exists. And there is no need for a cohesive understanding of the idea of truth, or the meaning of the word truth.

However, what if I were to claim that a particular dog is brown to a room full of fifty people, and no one in the room, including myself, understood the meaning of the word brown, then I would not be making a real claim in multiple ways. I would not be making a claim which can transmit information in such a way to the other persons in the room in such a way as to give them any understanding of the color of the dog I am describing. Also, I myself do not understand the claim that I am making. I understand that it is a claim about the color of a dog but I have no understanding at all of what kind of claim I am making about the color of this dog.

In the same way, let us say that forty math problems are presented to the same room. All of them are able to solve the problems successfully but then they are presented with a multiple choice sheet for them to record the answers to the questions. The questions are presented to them in the following way. Which of the following numbers, 40, 50, or 75 is the true answer to problem 5? All of the questions then are dependent upon an understanding of the word true. What is the meaning of the word true? Those who have no understanding of the term will not be able to solve the problem. If they have no definition of the word true then the word true could potentially mean many different things to them. It could mean, the answer which contradicts the results of a rational processing of the numbers in the problem. And if it does, then the false answers would be true, and the true answers would be false. There is therefore no correct answer to the question because there is such a wide range of possible meanings inherent in the question that it is not an answerable question. The question is therefore the equivalent of utterances which cannot be deemed true or false, such as uttering, "ocean", without any context. The question itself is not connected to any definite answer. And the reason for this is the question does not

contain enough information for it to be an answerable question. There is no criteria for determining whether or not an answer corresponds to the definition of true.

This shows that we cannot meaningfully ascribe a word to a statement without having some understanding of the meaning of the word which we are using. Therefore, in order for a philosopher to have a position about how it is that we can determine whether or not a statement is true the philosopher must have a definition of the word "true". Often time's philosophers will not explicitly define the meaning of the word true or truth. Nevertheless, their understanding of what constitutes particular truths constitutes an implicit definition of the word true.

How are we to determine how we can gain an understanding of a philosopher's implicit definition of the word true? If a philosopher has a criteria for all true statements then the philosopher would have an effective implicit understanding of the word truth. However, we must recognize that there may be true statements which we cannot *know* to be true. For instance someone may guess what hour of the day it is, without successfully knowing what the hour of the day is. In this case a true statement would have been made. This true statement is not however, a statement which can necessarily be known to be true. If the person has no access to any measurement of time then it cannot necessarily be known to be true. What are we to do with this broader understanding of the word true? This word would indicate a class of statements, some of which do not fall within what is needed to have a successful epistemological system.

This is because epistemology is the study of knowledge. And knowledge does not need to include true statements which cannot be known to be true. However, it must have an understanding of what it means to ascribe the word true to statements and claims which can be known to be true. As was demonstrated above with the thought experiment regarding the situation involving math problems which the person's solving the problems had no understanding

of the meaning of the word true. Therefore, some understanding of the meaning of the word is necessary for epistemology. Although not all statements which are true fall within the range of study that we find in epistemology.

Every epistemology, therefore, must have some definition of the word true. Because knowledge, as a word, is defined in ways which are always predicated on the notion of the true. However, if we consider that all true statements are not epistemologically testable then we must specifically have an accurate understanding of what knowable truths are. However, this question itself requires us to think in a circular manner. And this is true because if we are attempting to define knowable truths with a presupposition that truth is predicated of the word knowledge then we are using a preconceived idea of truth to define itself. Instead we must search for some definition of the word truth before we can compose a definition of knowledge.

The question still remains. How are we to determine the implicit definition of truth which a philosopher must have? As we have demonstrated above, a philosopher only needs to have a definition of knowable truth in order to have an epistemology. However, one must have an understanding of the word true in order to even solve the problem of knowable truth. If a criteria is developed for understanding how we can determine knowable truths then we must predicate certain qualities about these knowable truths. These truths would all be testable according to the same standard. And this standard would then define why these statements are in fact knowable truths. Truth as a concept is itself then predicated. Because by predicating certain qualities for known truths we are predicating these same qualities for truth as known truth is predicated on truth.

What would make an unknowable yet true statement true? In the example of guessing the time without any access to a measurement of time the statement would still be true because the

statement corresponds accurately to the actual hour which is used to measure that moment in time. If there had been a watch available to that person he would have had a criteria for determining the truth of the claim in the same way he would determine any other true statement about the time. If a truth is unknowable can we still imagine it being known according to our criteria for knowable truth if somehow we had the ability to apply that criteria to circumstances which we cannot presently apply the criteria?

Or perhaps the idea of unknowable truths is itself a perversion of the real meaning of the word truth. If I have an understanding of the meaning of the word dog and then I ask myself about the qualities of unknown and unknowable dogs I may initially convince myself that I do not truly understand the meaning of the word dog because of these unknowable dogs which I cannot ever define. However, couldn't we do the same with any given concept, word, or idea? What if one argues that the meaning of the word is itself created by the knowable versions of what that word indicates and that appeals to unknowable versions of that word are merely attempts to redefine concepts in ways that are superfluous. For example if I were to reason that the unknowable dogs are themselves abstractions that fall outside of the scope of languages descriptive capabilities because the descriptive capabilities of language are developed only within the limitations of human consciousness and social interaction. We cannot transcend ourselves to have meaningful words which are predicated of unknowable entities. The words that we possess to describe things which we know, therefore, are themselves creations which cannot be used to define unknowable things because these things are not themselves part of the process which developed the original meaning of the word.

What if there exists a series of unknowable 4's which are themselves fundamentally different from the 4's which we know? If the unknowable 4's are so fundamentally different

from the 4's that we know, to such an extent that we cannot use these unknowable 4's in our mathematical reasoning, then why should we even bother to call these unknowable 4's 4's? If an entity is so unknown that it may contradict the definition of the known entity of which it is named after then why should we bother to name this entity after the thing from which it is named? Therefore, in the same way, unknowable truths are not helpful for our task of defining the word true.

Therefore, it is the truths which we can know which we ought to use as our foundation for defining the word true. The distinction which is being drawn here is between unknown truths and unknowable truths. If one has a given methodology about how to find particular truths then this methodology would have to be applicable to explaining why we know the truths which are known as well as how it is that we can come to know those truths which are now unknown to us. If it does not complete these two tasks, then it is not a comprehensive method for finding truth. Unknowable truths, however, are themselves not relevant to defining the word truth because the meaning of the word was invented in a context which precluded the inclusion of the unknowable within its descriptive facilities.

One way in which someone could attempt to extract the implicit definition of truth from a given philosopher would be to define what makes a statement true within the philosopher's system. Then one could define the word truth as statements that have a given list of qualities. However, this position assumes that truth, or the word true, can be reduced to statements. But is it not true that propositional content of any kind can be true and that propositional content is not merely reducible to statements but any given form of communication? But regardless of the means of communication there must be some meaning to the communication and it must be processed by the mind. Having an understanding of the word true is necessary even in the case of

the Platonic understanding of truth. Plato, unlike Descartes, posits the existence of truth as a Platonic form. Does this position imply that truth is a thing which can be understood apart from the linguistic or philosophical definition of the word true? Is a forms nature dependent upon the words that are used to make reference to it?

Platonic philosophy attempts to create definitions of important terms and concepts apart from their meaning within a particular situation or context. The explication of this process can be described in the following way. If a word such as time is presented in the context of the problem, “what is the time?” the word's meaning can lead to a very precise method for solving the question as a whole. Platonic thought, however, is interested in abstracting the word time so it is situated in its universal form when it is not predicated of a particular thing or context. The question then changes to, “what is time?” The meaning of the solution to this problem may be the universal definition of the word time. And then philosophical reflection would in this case consist of the search for the one definition of which includes the common quality which subsists in every case of the application of the word time. Or perhaps the question is instead the search for the form of time. Forms are ideas. They have, in Platonic thought, a nature which transcends the material world itself, of which the material world is a reflection or a shadow of. Reasoning is the method which gives us access to the forms. If this is true then it is intellectual content which is predicated of the idea of a form. And yet it is not empirical content which can be used to define a form. Therefore forms are not understood from the meaning of words which themselves describe nothing save the empirical.

When we consider that forms correspond to nothing save a definition of a word corresponding to a given form then the word must be defined in such a way that transcends particular empirical realities. The definition of time does not in itself give us a mental image of



anything empirical. And the definition of this universal should be applicable to all potential correct usages of the term. Including those usages which do not refer to realities which we have empirical access to.

Let us present an objection to the view that unknowable truths are not relevant to the definition of the word truth. Let's suppose someone were to flip a coin, put one's hand down on the coin just as it lands, and then throw away the coin without anyone seeing whether or not it landed as heads or tails. In this case we can see that it is either true or false that the coin landed with the heads side up. So therefore it seems that we can meaningfully and correctly apply the word and the concept of truth to this given situation. And yet the answer is unknowable. This directly threatens the claim that unknowable truths are irrelevant to our understanding of the word truth. It also challenges the idea that unknowable truths are not present in the process of learning, or developing, the meaning of the word truth.

However, it should be pointed out that this example is not a definite application of the word true. It cannot be said that it is definitely true that the result of the flip was heads. The only statement that can be made is that it is true that the result *might* have been heads. We could also say that the president of the United States *might* be impeached. Or that it is possibly true that intelligent life exists on another planet. But what is the exact usage of the word "true" when it is predicated of possibilities? And what vindicates these statements as themselves true?

I can successfully claim that it is false that the coin flip definitely resulted in heads. And yet it is true that the result may have been heads. What is present in both claims is the understanding that I cannot know with certainty the result. In this case the only truth present is uncertainty. But how is this uncertainty itself vindicated? Why is this uncertainty true? The criteria for knowing the answer about the result is unavailable. And what is the criteria that is

unavailable? An empirical vision in which one can look at the coin after it hits the surface and see if the side facing up is in fact heads, or tails. This empirical vision then gives us the ability to make an existential claim that corresponds to this vision. And because of this correspondence we can deem the statement to be true.

So in saying that it may be true that the result was heads are we making a claim about our lack of access to justifying evidence, or are we making a claim about the only two possibilities that are available? Even before we throw the coin in the air we can know that the result will either be heads or tails. This is similar to knowing that the result was either heads or tails. In both case we know of the two possible outcomes. And we know that the outcomes are restricted to only two possibilities. But how do we know that there are only two possible outcomes? We know this on the basis of the structure of the coin. We know from empirical experience that the coin is flat, and that it is two sided, so that if it lands, it is not like a cube, which may land on four different surfaces, but that there are only two possible surfaces that it may land on. So it is empirical experience of the coin that justifies our understanding in both of these two situations. So by saying that we know that the outcome of this unknowable result of a coin flip was either heads or tails, we are not making a claim about the actual outcome of the flip, but instead about the preconditions of the flip. Therefore what is being said is not about the unknowable fact. Instead, it is about the restrictions which we can place upon that unknowable fact. For example, the statement, “aliens either do or do not exist,” this statement is true not because it claims anything new about aliens, but because it claims something which is categorically and logically true of any given entity because the two possibilities exclude one another. The two possibilities of the coin flip likewise exclude one another. This fact can be understood by understanding the visual-spatial nature of a coin. The claim that, “it is either true

or false that the unknowable result of the coin flip was heads,” follows directly from the fact of the nature of the coin.

So therefore we can infer truths about what an unknowable truth might be from a truth which is clearly known. This is similar to discovering a variable in algebra. From the truth which we know about the coin we know that it can only, if flipped, result in a heads or a tails. We cannot know the answer and yet we know the limitations of what the answer can be. However, is this truth a truth about the object of the coin when it hit the surface? Or is it a truth about the nature of the coin itself? If we were to think of countless other coin tosses where the result is unknowable we would be able to draw the same inference, it is either true that the result was heads, or it is not true. Therefore this truth is not solely about the possible results of the flip but also about the nature of coins as a whole.

We can sometimes gain limited access to objects which are themselves unknown by means of the objects which they are surrounded by. We can look at a car and make judgments about the maximum number of people who might be in the car, and understand this maximum, even if it is impossible for us to know how many people are actually in the car. Therefore what is actually unknowable is the exact number of people in the car, and not the maximum number of people who might be in the car. In the same way, with the case of the unknowable result of a coin flip, we can only know that the result was either heads or tails, we cannot know what the exact result was. In both of these cases we can know the possibilities of what the answer might be. But this is not the same as knowing the answer itself. So the fact that the result is either heads or tails is not an unknowable truth. In fact, it is a fundamentally knowable truth. So therefore we can still maintain that unknowable truths, when properly defined as subtly distinct from truths

about the possible answers to these unknowable's, is itself not able to contribute to the definition of truth.

For the reasons expressed above we can successfully attempt to find Descartes understanding of the word true, without having this definition apply to unknowable truths. This is true because the word true only develops its meaning in reference to the knowable truths, as well as the truths which can be known. The Cartesian method applies to the vindication of both knowable as well as unknowable truths. So how can we establish a definition of Descartes understanding of truth as well as his method for finding particular truths?

In the Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy on Rene Descartes, the Cartesian understanding of truth is described in the following way, "At the beginning of the Third Meditation, Descartes declares "I now seem to be able to lay it down as a general rule that whatever I perceive very clearly and distinctly is true" (7:35). Clarity and distinctness of intellectual perception is the mark of truth." \* <sup>9</sup> What does the word "mark" mean? This question is useful for interpreting an authoritative interpretation of Descartes thought in regards to the definition of truth. A mark, maybe called a symbol, indicating some meaning. It may be definitive. Or it may be indicative of something with explicitly defining it. What if I think of a mark in relation to a path through the wilderness? In this case the mark designates the continuation of a path in a given direction. However, does this mark indicate the entirety of where the path leads? No. Instead it merely gives enough information for the walker to proceed from confusion towards an understanding of where to move, merely to the extent needed to find where the path picks up again. This is one understanding of the word mark. Which is that the

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<sup>9</sup> Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy, Rene Descartes, 3.2

word refers to a symbol, indicating a general direction or understanding, and not a precise or complete definition.

What if we consider the word independent of this context and within the logic of another situation, what kind of result would follow? If I were to think of a mark such as the dollar sign. If I perceive the dollar sign (\$) next to a number then what logically (or culturally) follows from this observation is that the number is being predicated as the amount of dollars which is being defined as some kind of price. So in this case, a mark, directly defines the meaning of the sign following it.

So if we apply the first understanding of a mark to the interpretation of what is meant by “mark of truth?” This would mean that the mark is indication of the truth. It is not of necessity of it being a full truth within itself, but indicates that the claim has some measure of truth, or is perhaps a metaphor for a greater truth which is not directly available to a person from the statement itself.

This means that, according to the Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy, clarity and distinction of intellectual perception is truth, or at least a sign that something is true. The goal of this section of this work on Descartes to show that A), Descartes understanding of method for discovering particular truths is not equivalent to his definition of truth. And B), that his method for finding particular truths has an influence on his understanding of truth, and vice versa.

Two examples can be given of Descartes defining truth as clarity and distinction. One is from Meditations. “But do I not therefore also know what is required for me to be certain of anything? Surely in this first instance of knowledge, there is nothing but a certain clear and distinct perception of what I affirm. Yet this would hardly be enough to render me certain of the truth of a thing, if it could ever happen that something that I perceived so clearly and distinctly

were false. And thus I now seem able to posit as a general rule that everything I very clearly and distinctly perceive is true” (Meditations on First Philosophy, 70). And the other is from Discourse on Method. “For first of all, even what I have already taken for a rule, namely that the things we very clearly and very distinctly conceive are all true, is assured only for the reason that God is or exists, and that he is a perfect being, and that all that is in us comes from him. It follows from this that our ideas or notions, being real things and coming from God, cannot, in all that is clear and distinct in them, be anything but true” (Discourse on Method, 22).

For Rene Descartes, truth is thinking with clear and distinct ideas, as well as experiencing the world clearly and distinctly. Unlike with Plato and Aristotle, both the empirical and rational activities are given the potential to give us truths along the lines of the same qualitative criteria of clarity and distinction. Descartes thought uses a method in which the simplest of problems is used as a basis for further reasoning. This reflects the understanding that truth is clarity and distinction because when the smaller and more basic elements of a problem are thoroughly analyzed, the whole is understood with greater clarity and distinction. This can be shown by the way in which context refines the meaning of particular statements. If we consider the meaning of a statement to be a problem, the clarity, or meaning of the statement can be determined by an analysis of the context.

Descartes uses the existence of God as his basis for affirming the truthfulness of sense perception. Descartes views sense perception in the following way, “Descartes finds in himself a passive power of receiving sense-impressions. Corresponding to this passive power, there must be an active power to produce or make these impressions. In theory these could be produced by God himself, but there is not the slightest clue to suggest this: God has given me no faculty at all to detect their origin; on the other hand, he has given me a strong inclination to believe that these

ideas produced from corporeal objects; so I do not see how it would make sense to say that God is not deceitful, if in fact they produced from elsewhere, not from corporeal objects. Therefore corporeal objects must exist. (AT VII. 80; CSMK, II. 55). Since God is the author of nature, and God is no deceiver, whatever nature teaches is true” (A New History of Western Philosophy, 594-595). Later in the same passage on Descartes, his position on sense perception is further explicated, “Only what we clearly perceive and distinctly perceive is really taught us by nature, and if we wish to achieve truth we must carefully restrict our beliefs within those limits. Only thus will a sound science of material objects be built up to replace the superannuated physics of the Aristotelian establishment” (A New History of Western Philosophy, 595).

For Rene Descartes, is the definition of truth the same as the methodologies for finding particular truths? On one hand, it is true that clear and distinct ideas and perceptions are true, and that these ideas and perceptions are fundamental building blocks within Descartes method. However, is it not also true that elements of Cartesian methodology involves more than just clarity and distinction? The Cartesian rule to accept only that which is undoubtable is a fundamental principle of Cartesian thought. This means that there is a highly important element of his method which is not equivalent to his definition of truth. Because un-doubt-ability is not equivalent to clarity and distinction. I may be able to doubt that a clear and distinct idea is true. For instance, if I imagine a sailboat and I describe it with the most clear and distinct of all possible terms, I am still able to doubt whether or not the sailboat exists. Or I may see a photograph, which is very clear and distinct, of a sailboat, and yet his photograph is not necessarily something which corresponds to a real object, it may in fact be artificially generated.

If we think of two films and compare the clarity of a very grainy film as opposed to a much clearer film, as we observe both moving images, if they are both of the same object then

the clearer film will better represent the object. But if the two films do not explicitly define themselves as being about real objects then we cannot know of necessity that the films refer to actual objects. I can in this case doubt the existence of the object being depicted in the films even if the clearest possible version of the film is invented. However, if the object depicted in the film is real, then clarity and distinction of the film can give me a greater justification for not doubting the truth of my conception of the object.

What this shows is that although clarity and distinction of perception can contribute to one's ability to hold a claim as undoubtable, there are some claims which clarity and distinction alone will not justify. An example is whether or not the object depicted in the film exists if it is not explicitly articulated that it does exist. I can doubt this claim even if the moving image is as clear and distinct as possible. Therefore Descartes definition of truth is different from his methodology for finding truths. This is also evident from his own writing. In which his first truth which arises from his method of doubt is the proof of his own existence. And yet even after he proves this very first truth he does not yet clearly understand what he is. He only knows that he exists, without having a clear and distinct idea of what he is. This shows once again that his method is not equivalent to his definition of truth. But rather, truth emerges from his method. From his method emerges clarity and distinction, but it is not equivalent to its outcome.

Descartes rules for finding truths is to never hold anything to be true unless it can be held with such clarity and distinction that it cannot be doubted. To divide problems into as many parts as possible. To commence one's thoughts from simplest to most complex. And to make enumerations so complete and general as to leave nothing omitted. Clearly Descartes definition of truth is embedded in his first rule and yet this rule is not equivalent to it. For clarity and distinction can, but does not always, resolve ambiguity in the way which would naturally lead to



undoubt-ability. The rule itself is the application of the way in which it can work when clarity and distinction can make a claim undoubtable. Such as a clear version of a film showing that the film does refer to a chair. Whereas a very distorted film may not provide an un-doubtable understanding that the object is in fact a chair. So Descartes definition of truth influences his method because the search for clarity and distinction is embedded in his method for finding particular truths. And his method influences his definition because his definition was formulated as the result of an analysis of epistemic problems rooted in his method for particular truths. The particular truths, that Descartes exist, and that Descartes possesses an idea of God, that God exists, are the foundations for affirming that his clear and distinct thoughts and perceptions are true. And this is an example of how finding particular truths leads Descartes to his definition of truth. Neither are equivalent. And yet both play a fundamental role in shaping the nature of the other.

## Section five- Ludwig Wittgenstein

In this section Wittgenstein's unique methodology will be highlighted and discussed. His thinking on the clarification of language will be related back to his definitions of true and false. His definition of the true is correspondence of language with the world which we have inherited. And his methodology for finding particular truths is through linguistic clarification. This relates logically to the definition of the true because clarification is needed to demonstrate that the claims of language correspond to the actual world.

Wittgenstein's thought represents a unique approach to philosophy. His thought is the embodiment of a desire to not answer philosophical questions in the traditional way. Instead, philosophical problems are said to dissolve through the clarification of language. This process, is thought to be the correct approach to these issues because philosophical problems are thought to

be the result of linguistic confusion<sup>10</sup>. So, the problem of the definition of truth from this angle, can be seen as a philosophical issue which is the result of a lack of linguistic clarity in regards to the meaning of the word truth in the context of the question. For Wittgenstein, many words do not correspond to one given meaning. Instead, they correspond too many possible usages, just like how many tools can be applied in many different ways. The question then arises, under what circumstance would the word have a particular meaning?

What is the difference between essence and the meaning of a word? Essence can be understood as the defining characteristic of something, or perhaps as the ultimate, or intangible nature of something. The meaning of a word is typically expressed through definitions. Or in other words, short collections of words explicating the meaning of that word in a statement. Or, meaning can be assigned through pictorial representations. If essence is defined as the defining characteristics of something then the term is synonymous with meaning. However, the intangible element of something may not be in accordance with a definition. It certainly wouldn't correspond to a definition using words referring to concrete objects. Clearly, the term refers to the abstract. The term ultimacy itself has an abstract meaning. So essence could be understood as the abstract nature of a thing.

Does this mean that the non-empirical aspect of language exists in grammar? This would mean that the abstract exists not in particular words within themselves but in the rules which

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<sup>10</sup> "All explanation must disappear, and description alone must take its place. And this description gets its light - that is to say, its purpose- from the philosophical problems. These are, of course, not empirical problems; but they are solved through an insight into the workings of our language, and that in such a way that these workings are recognized- despite an urge to misunderstand them. The problems are solved, not by coming up with new discoveries, but by assembling what we have long been familiar with. Philosophy is a struggle against the bewitchment of our understanding by the resources of our language" (Philosophical Investigations, 109).

dictate the relations between the words. Wittgenstein, in his book *Philosophical Investigations*, writes, “Essence is expressed in grammar” (*Philosophical Investigations*, section 371). So, for Wittgenstein, the communication of essence is found in grammar. Therefore, from this point of view, if grammar did not exist in a statement then no essence would be conveyed in that statement. Grammar is understood to be the rules which dictate the formulation of sentences. An example of a grammatically incorrect statement would be “my friend are coming to the dance.” The reason for the incorrect nature of the statement is found in the subject verb disagreement. The subject “friend” is singular. Whereas the verb “are” is plural (with the exception of speaking from a second person point of view). The statement can be corrected in the following manner, “my friend is coming to the dance.” This statement contains no contradiction between the subject and the verb which is saying something about the subject. When we try to understand the original mistaken sentence we find ourselves confused as to whether or not one, or multiple people are coming to the dance. In this sense the greater meaning of the statement is missed. Whereas we can know that the statement is making a reference to people (or persons) as well as a dance. So meaning clearly still exists. And yet what is the exact relationship between these smaller clusters of meaning? Wittgenstein’s understanding of essence would claim that the relationship cannot be understood without grammar. As a relationship is not reducible to one concrete object it is in some sense more total and more ultimate. Words, are like tools, and can be applied with diverse meanings. And yet the diversity is not unlimited, just as there are limitations to the applicability of any given tool. And yet some words correspond directly to a given meaning. Essence, in contrast, is not like a tool, but is in grammar. Perhaps, for Wittgenstein essence represents higher meaning, and words represent lower meaning.

Let us think more about the usage of the word “are.” The word is a plural verb in all cases save those in reference to someone in the second person. So the meaning of the word is like a tool. Which in all cases possesses the nature of a verb. But only in certain very particular circumstances does the word take the meaning of a singular verb. I may ask the question, “how are you?” And yet I cannot say of myself “my life are good.” This recognizes that language functions in accordance with social conventions. And these conventions are not always known explicitly but are rather understood implicitly within certain linguistic subcultures.

Another example is the word deer. If one were to see a group of deer running through a forest and say, “I saw a group of deers running through the forest.” One must forgive such a person for their error if they are unaware of our linguistic conventions. And this is because the word which is in form singular takes upon itself a social convention in which its meaning is plural in a given circumstance. This testifies to Wittgenstein's idea that particular words are like tools, which have different meanings in the same way that singular tools can have many different usages.

Grammar, by creating a structure of rules for the interpretation of words in relation to one another, dictates not merely the meaning of a particular word, but the meaning of the statement as a whole. The meaning of this statement can then provide contextual support for the interpretation of a word within that statement. So therefore, the meaning of a particular words often functions as different things in differing circumstances. Whereas the greater or more total meaning which one can find from language is expressed in the grammar of language.

Why is a discussion of Wittgenstein's understanding of meaning and essence relevant to this project? We are attempting to unlock Wittgenstein's understanding of the meaning of the word true. As well as his understanding of methodologies for determining particular truths. The

word true itself is a word. And because it is a word, Wittgenstein's understanding of the meaning of words would apply to his understanding of the meaning of the word true. We have already described how in Wittgenstein's thought particular words can correspond to a wide range of applications and uses that are like the multiplicity of ways that tools are applied. And also how words can correspond to singular meanings. If this is true then the word true, for Wittgenstein, can have either a contextually relative meaning, or a precise, singular, determinate meaning. If Wittgenstein has a passage of writing which clearly articulates a position on the meaning of the word true then we can determine with which of these two possibilities Wittgenstein regards truth. But understanding how Wittgenstein regards true, as a word, we must understand that his method for interpreting this word would be relative to the way in which he categorizes words. Because if Wittgenstein sees the word true as one possessing a wide range of contextually dependent meanings then when the word true appears in a sentence, greater attention to the contextual content of the sentence will have greater significance for understanding the words meaning. Also, if the word true, is relative in its meaning, then it can mean many different things to claim that a sentence or claim is true. So therefore understanding how Wittgenstein sees the meaning of words is highly relevant to core questions of the project, such as the meaning of the word true, and the methods for finding particular truths.

Understanding how Wittgenstein sees the meaning of sentences is also relevant to the problem of truth. Because if the word truth is relative to its context, then the word may be explicated by the meaning of the sentence. Also, the meaning of a sentence is highly relevant to the question of whether or not we can deem a sentence to be true. So Wittgenstein's understanding that essence is grammar is relevant to the question of whether or not a sentence is true. Because abstract meaning exists in grammar according to Wittgenstein. It is impossible to

compose a sentence without using abstract words. Whereas it is possible to have a singular word which is nothing save concrete.

Wittgenstein says the following about truth in statements, “The truth of my statements is the test of my understanding of these statements” (On Certainty, 80). Does this mean that truth is something which fundamentally exists within statements? Or in other words, perhaps this statement means that part of the meaning of a statement is it being true or false. The word “of” typically means from, or belonging to. So the truth in a statement would refer to the extent to which a statement reflects the truth about things. And so the truth about things which exists in a person's statements, is equivalent to the test of one's understanding of one's own statements. What does it mean to test one's own understanding of one's own statements? Testing implies reevaluation in this case. And this is true because the initial evaluation would be in the original composition of the statement. It implies seeing the rank or value of a given epistemic process. By questioning the meaning of one's own statement one can refine the meaning of what they had said. Perhaps this process of refinement of statements. Or the process of making statements more precise. Adds more content to the statements. Perhaps this addition of more content and refinement allows the sentence to describe the objects it relates to with a greater level of clarity.

Wittgenstein also says the following of the process for determining truth, “But I did not get my pictures of the world by satisfying myself of its correctness; nor do I have it because I am satisfied of its correctness. No: it is the inherited background against which I distinguish between true and false” (On Certainty, 94). In other words, the world cannot be removed from one's self, and cannot be vindicated by the self. But the world itself is the criteria against which true and false is determined. So true and false is a matter of determining consistency against the world

and testing if my claims are consistent with the world. By this standard, a process of doubting or of vindicating the world, as is the case in the philosophical doubt of Rene Descartes, is itself not where one's vision of reality originates. This idea corresponds to the thought that universal doubt is untenable because it would include doubting the words of which the doubt is composed. This is another idea Wittgenstein presents in his work, on certainty.

Wittgenstein's thought in regards to truth differentiates itself from that of Rene Descartes in the following ways. Wittgenstein's thought does not presuppose that doubt is the most rational approach to understanding the world. The idea that doubt, rather than belief, is the most secure foundation for an inquiry into truth is not present in Wittgenstein's thought. Wittgenstein critiques doubt from a number of different perspectives. One is that he questions if doubt is linguistically consistent. Does it make sense to doubt all things when one of the things which is being doubted is the language which is used to express this doubt?

It is often thought that one ought not to believe something unless there's a reason to believe it. However, Wittgenstein presents the idea that we need not doubt something if there is no reason at all to doubt it. For example, Wittgenstein says, "What we call historical evidence points to the existence of the earth a long time before my birth; - the opposite hypothesis has nothing on its side" (On Certainty, 190). There is a long series of reasons, or sets of information, which support the idea that the earth existed before I was born. For one reason there are large numbers of old, or even ancient buildings which still exist to this day which employ architectural and artistic styles that are no longer in use. There are also historical records of events that occurred a long time ago as well as books and manuscripts which testify to different ages, with different linguistic cultures. When has any evidence emerged that the earth did not exist before I

was born? So therefore what reason do I have to doubt that the earth is older than my own existence?

Wittgenstein's thought also contrasts with Descartes in that he does not see the beginning of belief as something starting with a single true proposition. Instead he sees it in the following way, "When we first begin to believe anything, what we believe is not a single proposition, it is a whole system of propositions. (Light dawns gradually over the whole)" (On Certainty, 141). This directly contradicts Descartes argument for his first truth. For Descartes, the first proposition, "I am, I exist," is a proposition which is the first truth which can be demonstrated, due to the fact that doubt requires thought, and thought, implies existence. The full statement is as follows, "But there is some deceiver or other who is supremely powerful and supremely sly and who is always deliberately deceiving me. Ten too there is no doubt that I exist, if he is deceiving me. And let him do his best at deception, he will never bring it about that I am nothing so long as I shall think that I am something. Thus, after everything has been most carefully weighed, it must finally be established that this pronouncement "I am, I exist" is necessarily true every time I utter it or conceive it in my mind" (Meditation ii, section 25).

What are the implications of this different understanding of how conviction arises? If we assume that convictions can begin with single propositions and that a single proposition is the first provable proposition, then our method for finding truths would be based on the idea that there is a need for undoubtable axioms. Let's call beliefs arising as systems of mutually implied beliefs, "belief sets". And these sets would be groups of propositions where, if one proposition is held to be true, all the other sets would have to be true. A different model for vindicating truth would then emerge. If two proposition sets included one common member then the vindication of that common proposition would mean that all propositions in both sets would be true. So the



progression of belief would be multiple claims proving other sets of claims to be true, rather than the Cartesian model of one truth being the foundation for all other truths. One could object to this interpretation of Wittgenstein by saying that he is merely referring to beliefs and not to the knowing of truths. And therefore vindicating one truth will not lead to a vindication of the truths that exist in that truth belief set. However, if we pay close attention to Wittgenstein's use of language at the end of the statement, we can conclude that he regarded this as being about truths and not merely beliefs. The parenthesis "(light dawns gradually over the whole)", reflects the idea that he is referring to clarity or understanding of the whole. Because light is something which allows us to see, and make claims about the truth about objects. It does not prevent us from making true claims about objects.

For Wittgenstein, the true is consistency of claims with the world we have inherited. And finding particular truths is found by testing one's understanding of one's own statements, as well as through the clarification of language in a given problem. By clarifying a given statement, and by clarifying its linguistic meaning, we are better able to establish whether or not it is consistent with the world. And therefore whether or not the statement is true.

If language is a part of the world then its role is not to vindicate the world. Instead, the question of the truth of language, in regards to particular problems, is whether that language is consistent with the world of which it is a part. If truth is consistency with the world of which it is a part. If truth is consistency with the world, and language is part of the world, then truth in language, is consistency with itself as well as the rest of the world which is not in language. It follows from this that the clarification of meaning is essential to finding particular truths. Because its consistency with the world cannot be known if its meaning is unclear. This is the way that Wittgenstein's views follow logically one from the other.

Linguistic clarification would itself be the clarification of the world because language is part of the world. Therefore, if language is clarified, then to some extent, so is the world clarified. Now the world is the standard against which we judge the true from the false, and if the world is being clarified then the standard for judging truth is clarified. And hence every particular problem, of particular truths found in linguistic clarification, contributes to the standard which defines the true. Hence particular truths, and the methods for finding them, directly help to define the philosophical definition of the true.

## Conclusion

Now that the section on Wittgenstein has been completed the final section will begin after this paragraph. I will discuss the way in which my thesis is true in each of the four philosophers discussed in the project. And then I will present my own final argument in favor of my thesis.

In each of the four philosophers which I have used in this project we have seen that their definitions of truth and their methods for finding particular truths are intertwined. However, this logical relationship between the two varies by the thinker in question. In the case of Plato, an abstract form, which is itself the form of the truth, exists. This differs from the other philosophers which I explored in the project. In contrast, Aristotle posits truth as a correspondence between existential claims found in language and actual things in the world. If a statement makes accurate claims about the world then the statement is true. In the case of Descartes, there is less of a clear definition of truth which is presented. However, clear and distinct thought or perception is the definition of truth which we can assign to the thought of Descartes. Wittgenstein describes truth as being consistency between language and the world which has been given to us. Of the four thinkers, only Plato posits truth as an abstract entity.

Only Plato posits truth as being a form. For Plato, the empirical world is not fully real. Instead, it is only a shadow of the world of forms. Forms, and not the ever changing empirical world, is the highest reality.

This differing idea about the definition of the true reflects differing metaphysical and epistemic commitments. The Platonic worldview stresses rational contemplation of ideas as being the highest method for obtaining the highest truths. If reality fundamentally consists of ideas as opposed to empirical content, then it would make sense that truth would be a form rather a correspondence between language and the empirical world. If reality fundamentally consists of ideas or forms rather than empirical experience, then what is the role of language in finding and articulating truth? If the truth exists in the world of forms then language ought to describe the world of forms if it is going to describe truth. Instead of observing the empirical world and then composing systematic linguistic descriptions of the empirical world language is used as part of a dialectic reasoning processes which attempts to find all of the necessary qualities which define a given term. An attempt occurs to define terms like, “knowledge”, “truth”, “beauty”, “justice”, etc. And this attempt includes the process of proposing definitions and then verifying these definitions for internal consistency. Ideas are also used as foundations for making inferences about other ideas and forms. The attempt to define these terms happens through the question of “what is the common definitive property which makes all members of the class part of that class?” Or in other words, “what is the common property which defines the term and exists in every individual case of the term?” So in the case of beauty, what is the common quality between all beautiful things? What is the quality which makes every beautiful thing beautiful? One generalized Platonic concept may be able to predicate something about another. For instance, the good may share something in common with the beautiful. Or, the truth may share something in

common with the good. The concepts of beauty and goodness, in philosophic thought, are often both predicated upon happiness. Happiness, is often said to emerge from experiencing beautiful objects. And goodness, is in some systems of thought, identified as that which produces happiness. So if goodness produces happiness as does beauty, then beauty, under this assumptions, would be an instrument of moral good. If we then construct an understanding of what produces beauty, we can gain an understanding of how to do a morally good thing by producing happiness. This is an example of how under the Platonic system, abstract concepts can be used to make inferences about other abstract concepts.

My thesis, that one's definition of truth has an influence on their methods for finding particular truths (and vice versa), is true in the case of Plato, in the sense that his understanding of truth and his methods for truth both reflect the same fundamental understanding that reality is ultimately ideal rather than empirical. And it is partly because of this common fundamental understanding that the two influence one another. Because truth is a form and exists in the world of forms then rational consideration of forms is the common quality of methods for finding particular truths. If truth was empirical then why would rational consideration of abstract ideas lead one to particular truths?

This contrasts significantly with Aristotelian thought. Aristotle's fundamental intellectual attitude is empirical. And his definition of truth as well as his methodology for finding truths reflects this empirical temperament. Truth is defined as language making existential claims corresponding to the world. Particular truths, are discovered by means of observing the world and categorizing the world by means of language and then using these categorizations as a foundation for logical inferences. Both his understanding of truth, and his understanding of

methodology for finding particular truths, both reflect an understanding of reality which is composed of empirical existence with abstract forms subsisting in these concrete objects.

In Cartesian thought, clear and distinct perception, as well as reasoning based upon clear and distinct ideas, is truth. Whereas, finding undoubtable premises for such reasoning's is the foundation for his methods for finding particular truths. Cartesian thought begins with rationality and uses this rationality to confirm empirical perceptions, which are clear and distinct, as being true. His own thinking is primarily rationalist. And yet the empirical world, unlike in Plato, is not fully dismissed as a source of truth within itself. Cartesian thought, is neither as idealist as Platonic thought, nor as empiricist as Aristotelian thought. The understanding that truth is clarity and distinction in both reasoning and in observation reflects this stance. In this way we can see that for Plato, Aristotle, and Descartes, their understanding of the definition of truth, as well as their understanding of how to find particular truths, are related to one another through their common metaphysical and epistemic outlooks.

In the case of Wittgenstein's thought, like Aristotle, he sees truth as the correspondence of language with the world. But a non-empirical element is included in different way. Which is his clarification of language in regards to issues or statements not referring to the empirical world. A greater emphasis is placed upon the understanding of the relativity of the meaning of certain particular words with their context. Linguistic clarification, as a way of understanding the world, is the position which holds Wittgenstein's thought together. And his stance that the differentiation between the true and the false is a matter of consistency with the world rather than a justification for viewing the world as true, is itself rooted in his method for obtaining particular truths by means of linguistic clarification. And we see this to be the case because his reason for disbelieving in totalistic doubt is due to the fact that, linguistically, such a doubt would have to

doubt the meaning of the language which is articulating and embodying the doubt. The doubt would consist of a stream of information which itself is doubting its owning meaning and is hence incomprehensible. His stance on both issues is rooted in an understanding that truth is found in the clarification of language.

In conclusion, I will present the sum of my argument in favor of my thesis. The thesis is that the way in which someone answers the question of the definition of “truth” (or the word true), has logical implications for how that same thinker would have to conceive of his or her methodologies for finding particular truths. The argument which I presented was one which vindicated the thesis by showing that if a word has meaning only in reference to one thing alone then they lose their ability to serve as meaningful descriptive words of their respective objects. For instance, if I were to claim that Bryan has brown hair in a circumstance where neither I nor anyone else knows what the meaning of the word brown is, what claim am I making? Sense no person would have a definition of the word brown the word would come across to all people in the same way that a word from a foreign language which one has never learned will sound to the individual who has never heard or read such a word. It is also the same as if I were to make up a word and call it “cdfaserit.” Such a word would have no meaning in any given discourse unless it is assigned a meaning within a social network of discourse.

Or what if I attempted to describe the color of my own hair with a word for that color which is utterly unique, purely individual, and descriptive of no other color save the exact shade of color which is the color of my hair alone. And because such a word would have to be utterly unique it would have to be a new word. Because if it is not a new word then it cannot be predicated solely upon my hair alone. Because all words currently in use have meanings attached to them. And of these meanings of all of these words none refer solely to the color of my hair

alone. Therefore I would need to define the color of my hair with a new word. Let us name this new word, “hagistrws.” Now I internalize this word and tell myself that “hagistrws” refers to the color of my hair alone. Does this new word indicate any unique quality, or any quality at all to the color of my hair? Would it not be better to merely say that my hair is dark brown? Every time I say the word “hagistrws” the only meaning which can come into my mind is an image of my own hair. In order to bring the word into the world of social communication I begin telling everyone that word for my hair color, and my hair color alone, is “hagistrws.” If I am asked to give a description of the color of my hair and I reply, “hagistrws,” then I am saying nothing more than, “the color of my hair is the color of my hair.” And the reason this is the case is because “hagistrws,” can meaning nothing else save, “the color of my hair.” This is the case because the word was never designed to apply to more than one particular thing in its descriptive capabilities.

As we can see from this example a word needs to have meaning which applies to more than one thing if it is going to serve as something describing that thing beyond merely being a name for the entity. So if we are thinking of the word “true” we must conclude that it cannot be used unless it has meaning beyond merely it being a name for one particular thing. If true is only a property we assign to one proposition, and one proposition alone then we are not saying anything meaningful about that proposition. Let us take the proposition “the earth is the third planet from the sun.” If I say that it is true that the earth is the third planet from the sun. And in this context I use the word true as a word which only has a meaning in regards to this one proposition, and this proposition alone, what does this say about this proposition that is not equivalent to the proposition itself? Essentially I cannot think of any new information which is being added to the statement that the earth is the third planet from the sun. And the reason for this is because I cannot claim that the word “true” in this case is something which can possibly

have a definition. Because if it had a definition then it would be a word which has a meaning in many different circumstances. If the word “true” in this case only has meaning in reference to this one statement how can I define the meaning of this word in this situation? Because the word has no meaning in application to anything besides this statement it can be defined only as a word predicated of the statement, “the earth is the third planet from the sun.” The word serves only to reiterate the idea that the statement is the statement. Just as the word “hagistrws” says nothing about my hair except that “hagistrws” is the color of my hair.

Therefore in order to determine that a particular claim is true one must have a definition of the word true which refers to something which is not merely a word with a meaning attached to one particular claim or thing alone. It must be a word which says something meaningful about a wide range of claims in order for us to claim that any particular claim is true in any meaningful way. If we establish a definition of the word true then we can make meaningful claims that particular claims are true. And if we determine particular claims to be true then in some sense we are defining the meaning of the word by its use. If I begin to use the word “hagistrw” in reference to every object which is dark brown. Then the word, by its use in particular cases will be defined by these uses to the point that the word “hagistrw” will begin to mean “dark brown.”

In sum, we have seen from this work that in order to develop methodologies for the conformation of particular truths one must develop a definition of the word true. The universal meaning of the word true and the way in which particular truths are confirmed to be truths are deeply integrated with one another. Furthermore, not only is this a theoretical truth of reason but this can also be observed to be the case in the thought of the four great philosophers whose thought was considered in this project. The implications of this fact of reason is that good philosophers, in developing their epistemology, must strive for consistency between their



definition of the true and their methodologies for determining particular truths. For example if I hold that truth exists in the Platonic world of forms and not in the empirical world, then I must not hold that individual truths are found in empirical observation. Because if I do then I risk confusing my readers in such a way as to render my work obscure. This truth has the potential to inspire the further refinement of human thought in virtue of its ability to clarify an issue that is at the heart of epistemology, and ultimately the core of philosophy itself.

# Key words

Epistemology- The discipline of philosophy dealing with the problems of knowledge. More specifically, how knowledge can be gained, what is knowledge, ect.

Truth- A word describing the concept of the universal definition of truth or the true. Often described in this project with phrases such as, “the true,” “truth,” and “abstract truth.”

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