

Plato and aristotle argumentative essay sample

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Plato's Theory of Forms

In Plato's Book V of The Republic, he defines the idea of a Form as an "idea of a universal, a property that more than one thing can have (Lacewing)." In this case, Forms exist independently and separately from the particulars which are changeable and can be destroyed. Forms are permanent, unchangeable and indestructible. Also, every Form is good, and that the Form of the Good is actually the Form of Forms.

Form of the Good

Plato likens the Form of the Good to the sun. It is in the highest level where the Form of the good is the highest form of knowledge. As Plato poses "Is there any point in having all other forms of knowledge without that of the good, and so lacking knowledge about what is good and valuable? (505a-b)" (Lacewing). In Plato's book, Socrates was asked on what the Form of the Good. He answers with the simile of the sun (506e, Lacewing).

We will not be able to attain knowledge about anything without the Form of the Good; just as we cannot see without the sunlight. Plato mentions that the Form of the Good is the source of knowledge; just as the sun is source of light. It is what gives people objects of knowledge or ideas and the capacity to understand them. Also, Plato points out that the sun itself is not the light and the sight; just as the Form of the Good is not actually intelligence or truth in itself but it is actually "beyond it, and superior to it in dignity and power (509b)" (Lacewing).

Just for example, the Form of roundness is the perfect example of being round. Round objects like a globe, a golf ball or jackstones only share or participate in the perfectness of the Form of roundness. Another example is the Form of “tableness” like the idea of being a table. There is a table and several tables in many places but those tables only participate in the quality of the idea of the Form of “tableness” – the core of being a table.

Aristotle’s Theory of Demonstration

Knowledge comes through demonstration

The premise of a demonstrative knowledge should be “true, primary, immediate, better known than, anterior to, and the cause of the conclusion” (Aristotle, 1901). Without these conditions, it will not produce scientific knowledge. These conditions are necessary for demonstrative knowledge. Demonstration has absolute features which are “true, primary and immediate”. It also has relative features which are “better known than, anterior to, and the cause of the conclusion.” We only have knowledge of a certain object only when we have understood its cause. If we have not grasped its “why” or its cause then it is not true knowledge.

Aristotle relates the four things which can answer the causality question: the material cause which is what it is made of; the formal cause which relates to its structure and shape; the efficient cause which is the primary source of its change; and the final cause which is the purpose of that object.

Sense perception and knowledge

Aristotle notes on how using our senses would help us acquire knowledge but he also notes that sense perception does not constitute knowledge in itself (Chapter II). Our senses only show us specific objects and to attain genuine knowledge, we must be able to also grasp the understanding of the demonstration of that certain object to attain genuine knowledge. In other words, we have to understand the causality of that object.

One needs to know the universal characteristics of a certain object because relying only on our senses would only show us a part of the truth. Aristotle also remarks on how our senses can fool us (Chapter V). For example, if you are on medication, you might be in a delirious state which would make you hallucinate or see things that aren't there. When you are sick, good food can be tasteless. In this case, we must not always trust our senses but knowledge should come from our understanding our the universal characteristics of a certain object.

References

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Lacewing, M. Plato's Theory of Forms. New York, NY: Routledge.

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