

# Theaetetus essay

Philosophy



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Introduction Theaetetus was a dialogue that comprised Plato's definition of knowledge, which was simply stated as "true justified belief", that somehow demonstrated the impossibility of affirming god's existence<sup>1</sup>. Theaetetus began as a narration of the conversation between Socrates, Theaetetus and Theodorus, as written in Eucleides' journal. The definition of knowledge presented by the dialogue was actually debunked by Socrates as well.

Nonetheless, among the three arguments discussed, "knowledge as a true justified belief" seems to be interpreted to be the most favored or agreeable. Using this concept, an assumption can be made to demonstrate that it will be impossible to affirm god's existence. While the purpose of this paper is to argue that god's existence is something that cannot be proven, it is important to note that Plato himself believes that there is an entity that exists that act similarly to the common notion of god<sup>2</sup>.

Actually, Plato seems to imply that there are actually two forms of god. The first one is represented by the Form of Good while the other one is represented by a craftsman<sup>3</sup>. Nevertheless, it remains a laborious task to try to affirm the existence of god. Primarily Plato believes that aside from the physical world, there exists a "platonian Heaven 4" which is also known as the "world of forms". This dimension, as stated by Plato is essential for particulars to exist. The particulars form together the complex and the complex composed the things that can be experience in the world. However, it can also be the case that God does not actually exist.

Indeed, God is nowhere to be perceived but the earth itself and the complexities involved in human life somehow points out to the fact that

there is indeed a God, a creator or a designer. Nevertheless, the burden of abolishing the common perception requires a logical proof. Nonetheless, Saint Thomas Aquinas elaborates on the existence of god based on contingency<sup>5</sup>. Aquinas argued that God is a perfect being. In this case, God does not exist contingently. If so, then God exist necessarily. Saint Augustine reflected on Plato's idea and agreed that the expressions like Justice, Beauty and Goodness are universal and everlasting.

Augustine further argued that it can be the case that the Forms that Plato believed to exist are actually the ideas of a thinking god (3). Nonetheless, Plato might still argue that the existence of forms does not imply that it came from a thinking God. Therefore, a thinking god does not necessarily exist. Another position that is worthy of consideration is the idea put forward by Rene Descartes regarding God as the main component of knowledge. Humans are finite beings. Descartes assumes that by being finite, a person grasp a portion of the concept of infinity.

Being finite limits the person's understanding Furthermore, Descartes suggested that since the idea of God exist, therefore the “ content of the idea must also be real”. In the dialogue, the discussion regarding ‘ what is knowledge’ started as a question made by Socrates. Theaetetus replied that knowledge is a realm of study that involves several instance of knowledge such as math, science, etc <sup>6</sup>. However, Socrates rejected this belief because according to him, giving examples would only mean that the person already know the definition of knowledge.

Socrates clarified that what he is looking for is not the object of knowledge rather knowledge itself 7. Thus, Theaetetus proceed by offering three other definitions. The first concerns “ knowledge is perception” 8. Socrates debunked this notion as troubling due to its vagueness. Moreover, the fact that people differ in experiences and preferences put an end on the issue. Different people have different capacity and perspective. To define knowledge as perception highlights the facts that this definition denotes knowledge as something relativistic. The second definition is “ knowledge is true belief” .

However, Socrates argued that it will be highly complicated to define what is meant by “ true” and “ belief” . True belief can differ from one person to another. It is something that is not found in experience alone but by reflecting on prior actions. “ Knowledge is true belief” implies rationalizing about what the senses have perceived. The third definition is “ Knowledge is True Judgment with an Account” 9. Basically, this denotes that an account of something makes true judgment known. For instance having knowledge of a star is a true belief about that star combined with the explanation or description of the star’s composition.

Nevertheless, if the star is not a composition but rather a “ simple” or “ primary”, it is something that cannot be known. DiscussionGoing back to Descartes idea of God as the source of knowledge, he assumed that the idea of god can only exist if indeed god actually exists. This is the case since ideas are always affected and is usually affected by a particular source. This is also the case with the idea of ocean is affected by the existence of an ocean, itself.

Descartes argued that the foundation of knowledge is oneself. Also, since Descartes was engaged in constant doubt, he particularly believes that the use of senses to perceive is generally false. Plato also agreed that sense-perception is unreliable as a source of knowledge due to its relativity. While Descartes believed that God's existence is rooted on the fact that the ideas are caused by a source. Plato argued that through knowledge, the existence of god is unverifiable. Saint Augustine also argued that god's existence is verifiable.

The basis is the fact that people exist. To deny this fact is of course absurd. Augustine argued that there are other things that exist even without humans<sup>10</sup>. For instance mathematical ideas still exists and will always be true even without man. Plato would argue that  $1 + 1 = 2$  is a complex or a combination of primaries which is why it can exist even without man.

Augustine also failed to show whether the existence of god is verifiable or not. Knowledge for Augustine emanate from god. Aquinas argues that knowledge is about comprehension of sense perception.

Aquinas also argues that humans posses an innate capacity to reason which shall be use to develop knowledge. Unlike Plato who believed that there is a realm of forms where knowledge is waiting to be discovered, Aquinas argues that to be knowledgeable reasoning is important. In terms of God's existence, Aquinas acknowledge the notion of 'potentiality to actuality' which implies that there must be a first mover and that must be God<sup>11</sup>. Everything is moving, even the atoms in rocks are moving. Indeed the universe is in constant flux. Plato sees this "flux" as something that deters

standards or stability and therefore rejects its notion. Knowledge of god's existence is something that cannot be known. This proposition is grounded on the fact that primary elements are woven together to form an account which can be described or explained.

On the other hand, those that remain as a primary element can only be named. Conclusion God's creations are not seen as an extension of god's self. Knowledge of god is not possible since god is not composed of several primaries.

This means that god is a primary himself. As discussed above, primaries are only known through their names. God had almost always been described as all-knowing, all-powerful and always present. The existence of god had always been a necessity since god give people hope and relieve their pains. However, since god is a primary, it does not have any explanation or description. With this in mind, since it is impossible to know anything about god except for his name it is obvious that god's existence is impossible. End Notes[1]Plato.

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[2]Timothy Chappell. Plato on Knowledge in the Theaetetus. (May 7, 2005)<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/plato-theaetetus/> (accessed on May 12, 2009)[3]Ronald H. Nash. Life's Ultimate Questions: An Introduction to Philosophy. Zondervan, 1999.

[4]Chappell, 2005.[5]ThinkQuest Competition. Aquinas's Thoughts On Religion. (1998).

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<http://library.thinkquest.org/18775/aquinas/religaq.htm> (accessed on May 12, 2009)[6] Plato, 2006[7] Ibid.[8] Ibid.[9] Ibid.[10] Donati , Nicole. St.

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