

Philosophy Journal

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In Plato's *Republic*, Plato and Glaucon are having a conflict defining human morals. Glaucon tells the story of Gyges, an ordinary shepherd who stumbles upon a magical, golden ring which allows him to disappear amongst his peers if and when he chooses, letting him freely choose to commit *just* or *unjust* acts. Choosing the unjust path, Gyges decides it is in his best interest to seduce the queen, murder the king and take the throne. The legend of Gyges proves the statement made by Glaucon that "we are all unjust" by nature. When given the power and opportunity, we will always choose to be unjust if we are allowed to get away with it, and avoid facing the negative consequences. Glaucon states that if we were able to live like Gyges, then it would be like being a God among men, taking all that we desire of wealth and power, proving the natural state of self-interest for power that consumes us all. In my honest opinion, if we would be able to live without the guilt of being a self-indulgent deity among our peers who suffer at the hand of the cruel unjust world, then I believe anyone would do exactly the same as Gyges did. In society, we praise those that promote justice because we have been trained to believe that this is the right conduct, and with that type of mentality we are psychologically developed to have these kinds of *morals*. They allow us to perceive what appears to be just and unjust. Plato's rationalist views coincide with Hobbes's theory in *Leviathan*. Hobbes claims are that all men seek self-interest and need security from others who try to commit unjust acts. The desire for security ends up in a "war of all against all." The "selfish" theory is the driving force behind our striving for happiness.

In John Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* we learn that in order to attain knowledge we have to adopt the empirical standpoint which involves direct observation both of the material and mental worlds. He believes all our knowledge is derived from the senses and not so much from reason or a purely rationalist point of view. Locke takes what he receives from his senses in high regard and trusts them unconditionally. All objects that we can sense and that have a physical state have what he calls "qualities," which then bring certain "ideas" to our minds and allow us to relate to them. Two types of ideas come from an object with certain qualities. "Primary Qualities" are physical attributes that make up the object and without these qualities the object wouldn't exist at all. Hence, they are the real qualities of objects. These "Primary Qualities" are solidity, extension, figure, number, and motion which are just the atomic structure of the object and cannot be changed. The "Secondary Qualities" are characteristics of an

object which, if they were eliminated from the object, the “Primary Qualities” would still remain. The “Secondary Qualities” consist of color, sound, texture, and smell. To prove that “Secondary Qualities” exist only in ideas in the mind and do not affect the objects’ existence, he asks the reader a simple question: “If you turn off all the lights, a state where no colors are seen, doesn’t the object still exist?” He wants you to understand that it’s there because it always has its “Primary Qualities” and there isn’t anything that you could do to change that.

In René Descartes’ *Meditations*, he theorizes that we should not rely on our senses as a primary source for acquiring knowledge because we don’t always receive the correct information and are left deceived by our very own senses. Descartes wants to be certain that all facts that he has acquired until now are indeed what they are said to be and not just a matter of misinterpretation from his senses, leaving them mere opinions. We are taught to believe that seeing is believing and even knowing. “So, for the purpose of rejecting all of my opinions, it will be enough if I find in each of them at least some reason for doubt” is how Descartes goes about his thinking. To truly prove your knowledge you must take certain elements into consideration that may cause you to change the way you think about things. You can easily see that if you were a madman and your brain did not work as it should, then the simplest task like looking at a color and trying to associate that color with its name could be flawed. We can often be tricked by the senses by making assumptions based on similar situations and similar items. For example, if we were to see a nice man who gives to charity and acts like a good Samaritan accused of a violent crime, we would be baffled. The only fact that is known is that there is more to knowledge than just what we can sense.

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