

THE RATIONALIST QUEST FOR KNOWLEDGE AND THE EMPIRICIST RESPONSE

Remigius Achinike Obah Ph.D.

Department of Philosophy, University of Port Harcourt,
Port Harcourt, Rivers State.

E-mail: remigius.obah@uniport.edu.ng

ABSTRACT

This study critically examines the rationalist quest for knowledge and the empiricist response. When we try to describe how we know something, we discover that we do not really have a clear idea of what it means to know. Hence, philosophers' attempt to examine the problem of knowledge and to discover the means by which it is acquired, the extent, possibility, and the standards or criteria by which we can reliably judge the truth or falsity of our knowledge brought epistemic impasse that spurred the rationalist on their quest for knowledge; which in-turn occasioned the empiricist response. This is the central problem this work sets out to investigate. The findings in this study reveal that the rationalist basic emphasis is on the concept of 'innatism' while the empiricists in response argue that innate ideas cannot adequately account for the origin of certain knowledge. For the empiricists, knowledge is obtained by forming ideas in accordance with observed facts and maintain that we know only what we have found out from our senses. Adopting the method of critical and hermeneutical analysis, this paper is particularly concerned with the questions involved in the problem of knowledge: what does it really mean when we say we know, this or that object? Are the objects really what we take them to be? Are they in existence independent of us? Or, are they products of our minds, as espoused by the rationalist and the empiricist. This study objects to the claim that there is 'only one way' in the acquisition of knowledge and recommends that we continue to integrate insights from the rationalist and the empiricist perspectives, and even beyond.

Keywords: Rationalism, Quest, Knowledge, Empiricist.

INTRODUCTION

In his metaphysics, Aristotle has rightly asserted that the desire to know is natural to man. However, the problem associated with this natural desire of man to know presupposes question like: What is knowledge? Hence, the nature, sources and extent of human knowledge have been a very difficult and controversial one. Consequently, philosophers and scholars through the ages have not only reflected on human experience, but have also advanced many answers to the problem of knowledge. The word knowledge is the noun form of the infinitive 'to know'. The basic proposition of knowledge is that everybody presumes to know. But what knowledge is in itself remains elusive. However, it suffices here to attempt a definition by saying that knowledge is awareness or consciousness of something. It means that knowledge is the act by which the subject becomes the object in an intentional way or manner. In other words, in the

very act of knowledge there is a unity between the subject and the object. This above explanation agrees with Paul Glenn's view of what knowledge is. He describes knowledge as the ability to apprehend something without altering it in the process – to hold or understand an object mentally while leaving its nature unchanged. Hence, in his criteriology, Glenn (1957) uses this description of knowledge: "To grasp a thing and have it unaffected by the grasp; to possess a thing and leave it unaltered by the act of possession; to get a thing into one's head and leave it where it is - this is to know the thing" (p. 15).

The problem of human knowledge is not just an issue in the contemporary scene of philosophy, but one of the perennial problems of philosophy. Various philosophers in history say different things about the notion of knowledge. The noun 'knowledge' is sometimes ambiguous. It is a conscious and a mental process that is conditioned by external evidence.

Knowledge as a basic psychic experience of man has defied all efforts of defining it. The very act or effort to define knowledge is knowledge itself. In knowledge, so many things come to play, that is why it is difficult to define it. In fact, knowledge is easily described than defined. Some philosophers, scholars and thinkers are of the view that in every act of communication knowledge is part of what is communicated. But the Sophists and relativists who have doubted the idea of knowledge have said otherwise especially Sophists like Georgias and Protagoras. They doubt and deny any act of knowledge. For them, nothing exists. This they said in the attempt to contribute to the problem of knowledge. This work, thus, does not attempt to say what knowledge is, but to expose and critically analyze the nature and problem of knowledge; the historical antecedence to the problem of knowledge; the rationalist quest for knowledge and the empiricist response. Finally, this study will end with a critical evaluation and conclusion.

THE NATURE AND PROBLEM OF KNOWLEDGE

When we try to describe how we know something, we discover that we do not really have a clear idea of what it means to know. For Bertrand Russell, the problem and theory of knowledge is a product of doubt. He believes that: "when we have asked ourselves seriously whether we really know anything at all, we are naturally led into an examination of knowing, in the hope of being able to distinguish trustworthy beliefs from such as are untrustworthy" (<http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/en/russell1htm>).

Knowledge is essentially the consciousness of an object, i.e. of anything, fact, or principle belonging to the physical, mental, or metaphysical order, that may in any manner be reached by cognitive faculties. An event, a material substance, a man, a geometrical theorem, a mental process, the immortality of the soul, the existence and nature of God, may be so many objects of knowledge and thus, constitute the problem of knowledge. Hence, knowledge implies the antithesis of a knowing subject and a known object. It always possesses an objective character

and any process that may be conceived as merely subjective is not a cognitive process (Dubray, 1910). The question of truth is one of the most important questions of our life which no one can do without in this concrete existence. The problem and question of knowledge - whether we can know, how we can know, and what we can know must precede any other question that can be asked in philosophy.

The name designated for a specific branch of philosophy devoted to studying the nature, sources and limits of knowledge is Epistemology. While the term epistemology is relatively recent in origin, the problem of knowledge is as old as man and philosophy itself. The term epistemology is a combination of two Greek words '*episteme*' meaning knowledge and '*logos*' meaning science, reason, basis, justification or theory. As such, the etymological meaning of the term epistemology is the science of knowledge; or, the justification of knowledge; or, simply, the theory of knowledge. Epistemology has been defined as, "the branch of philosophy which deals with the nature and scope of human knowledge" (Omogbe, 1990, p. 134). It tries to sort out the standards to which genuine knowledge should conform. Philosophers have attempted to examine the problem of knowledge and to thereby discover the means by which our knowledge is acquired, the extent of our knowledge, the possibility of our knowledge, and the standards or criteria by which we can reliably judge the truth or falsity of our knowledge. All this therefore combine to become what constitute the problem of knowledge.

What can I know? What does it mean to know anything? How do we know that we know? The problem of knowledge is one of the most arduous tasks of philosophy. This is because an uncommon effort of reflection is necessary to explore our knowledge. Moreover, our interior world is immediate for us but imperceptible to our senses, present and at the same time fleeting, full of certainty for some and yet most uncertain for others (Sanguinetti, 1987, p. ix). The theory of knowledge does not always acquire a clear field of autonomy in the sphere of philosophical disciplines. It also treats questions that are also studied in psychology, logic and other disciplines. Contemporary interest in the nature and problem of knowledge has in fact transcended theory of knowledge as a branch of philosophy to such fields of study as information theory, artificial intelligence, and cognitive sciences (Uduigwomen & Ozumba, 2000, p. 12). If we recourse to the history of human opinion, we will discover that there is no theory or belief that has been so absurd that there has not been someone who believed it, and argued for it. On the other hand, however, Bertrand Russell asks if there is any knowledge in the world which is so certain that no reasonable man could doubt it. He maintains that this question which at first might not seem difficult, is really one of the most difficult that can be asked. For him, it behoves philosophy to answer such ultimate questions, not carelessly and dogmatically, but critically, after exploring all that makes such question puzzling (Russell, 1957, p. 25). The history of science is replete with theories that have been thoroughly believed by the wisest men and were then thoroughly discredited. Repeatedly people have attempted to impose their beliefs on others and punish those who rejected them. There have been many 'martyrs' whose 'crimes' were that they challenged the 'infallible wisdom' of the rulers of their society. We know the story of 'philosophical martyrs'; typical example was Socrates. We are

also aware of the execution of Galileo Galilei who represents a ‘science martyr’. Philosophers are concerned with the basis of all knowledge claims, and to agree upon standards for judging these claims. If, so much of what had been taken as certain could prove to be false or doubtful, then how can we ever be certain of anything? What is the nature of human knowledge? What is the human mind capable of knowing?

The question involved in the problem of knowledge: what does it really mean when we say we know, this or that object? Are the objects really what we take them to be? Are they in existence independent of us? Or, are they products of our minds? To arrive at a correct response and answer to the problem of knowledge, it is important to understand the concept of what it means to know. To know can mean a variety of things, because of this variety of meanings or nuances, plus other implications or complications, knowledge is difficult to define, if not impossible. The following examples: I know Port Harcourt; I know the Governor; I know the lesson; I know how to dance; I know I am weak; Etc., In all these sentences the word ‘know’ does not mean the same thing: it indicates rather a variety of things or nuances such as; being familiar with, being acquainted with, having grasped and remembering, mastering an art, having experience of, being conscious of, etc. To know, even in its more basic sense may mean to perceive, to recognize, to identify, to recall, etc. These nuances make it difficult for knowledge to be defined. Knowledge itself is a primary act of experience, and that is why the idea of knowledge is a basic psychic experience that can better be described rather than defined. Defining itself is an act of knowing. So, it not necessary to do so. For I know what knowing is in the same way that I know what loving or fearing is, as an immediate psychic experience (Donceel, 1967, p. 26). Knowledge cannot properly be defined for every term in the definition is some sort of knowledge.

Certain conditions must be fulfilled before that which we claim to know becomes knowledge. The objective of the analysis of knowledge is to state the conditions that are individually necessary and jointly sufficient for propositional knowledge: knowledge that such-and-such is the case. Propositional knowledge must be distinguished from two other kinds of knowledge that fall outside the scope of the analysis: knowing a place or a person, and knowing how to do something. The concept to be analyzed - the analysandum - is commonly expressed using the schema “S knows that p”, where “S” refers to the knowing subject, and “p” to the proposition that is known. A proposed analysis consists of a statement of the following form: S knows that p if and only if The blank is to be replaced by the analysans: a list of conditions that are individually necessary and jointly sufficient. To test whether a proposed analysis is correct, we must ask (a) whether every possible case in which the conditions listed in the analysans are met is a case in which S knows that p, and (b) whether every possible case in which S knows that p is a case in which each of these conditions is met. When we ask (a), we wish to find out whether the proposed analysans is sufficient for S’s knowing that p; when we ask (b), we wish to determine whether each of the conditions listed in the analysans is necessary (<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/knowledge-analysis/>).

HISTORICAL ANTECEDENT TO THE PROBLEM OF KNOWLEDGE

The history of the problem of knowledge began from the pre-Socratic philosophers. What knowledge is, was not a problem to them, because they know what knowing is. For them, nature and its attendant perplexity was the focus of philosophy. They were primarily concerned with the stuff or material out of which the universe is made. That is, to postulate what the world is made of, hence the question, *ex qua materiale constituti mundi*? F. V. Steenburghen (1949) captures it thus:

The first thinkers of Greece, the so-called physiologists did not concern themselves with knowledge as such, nor with the knowing subject. Their attention was rather drifted to objects, that is, to nature whose secret they tried to discover (Steenburghen, p. 52).

However, to affirm that they were totally unconcerned with the whole quest for the nature and meaning of knowledge (the problem of knowledge) would be unfair, because during this period two schools of thought prevailed. Heraclitus representing the first school emphasizes the use of the senses in knowledge acquisition, while Parmenides, stressed the role of reason. But neither of them doubted the possibility of knowledge of reality.

History have it that a renewed interest in knowledge was inaugurated by and with the emergence of the Sophists in the 5th century B.C. The Sophists seeing the many contradictory theories of their predecessors became discontented and contested the assumption of the possibility and certainty of knowledge. Thus, certain questions emerge viz; do we have knowledge of nature as it really is? This gave birth to relativism and skepticism in philosophy. Protagoras, a Sophist, in his relativism argues, “that man is the measure of all things” (Omeregbe, 1998, p. 60). - *homo est mensura*. This implies that, it is man who decides for himself what exists and what does not exist. The skepticism of the sophists is seen in its extreme form in Gorgias. Gorgias says, “that nothing exists. Even if anything exists, it cannot be communicated to others” (Omeregbe, 1998, p. 6). From the above, one can say that with the advent of the Sophists, there was a shift in the main focus of western philosophy from the cosmological speculations to man and the society.

Following this confusion, there arose an epochal transformation launched by Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. They rejected the relativism and skepticism of the Sophists. They upheld the possibility of certain; objective and universal knowledge. Socrates sought to elaborate and examine the claim of authentic human knowledge, and to establish its possibility. For Socrates then, the possession of knowledge by men was virtuous. ‘Knowledge is virtue’. Hence, he saw knowledge as the practical application of a well-disciplined moral standard. Knowledge and virtue are interwoven according to the teaching of Socrates. Socrates believes that everybody has knowledge inside him. For him, the surest way for knowledge to be attained is through a disciplined conversation, a method he called dialectics. This is also called intellectual midwifery based on the principle of innatism.

Plato with his theory of world of forms or ideas in agreement with Socrates his teacher holds that, objects of opinion and of sense perception are particular, individual things. But the objects of true knowledge are not particular, concrete, individual things that are to be found in this world. Hence, the objects of true knowledge for Plato are the essences of things, the ideal things or the perfect nature of things. For him, knowledge consists of acquaintance with the super-sensory world of ideas, which alone had reality. The senses for him cannot yield any genuine knowledge. Aristotle unlike Plato was more a realist. He disagrees with Plato. In his theory of knowledge, the physical world is real and knowledge of it is knowledge as such. Though, the sensible knowledge, for Aristotle, is knowledge, he equally presented levels of cognitional processes in his degree of abstractions.

The medieval era with its theocentrism, is the time of the confluence of philosophy and theology. In this era, God became the source of all intellectuality and the enabler of all intellectualization. The philosophers of this period were oriented towards God and their orientation influenced their method of philosophizing greatly. This was so because at this time philosophy was seen as only a handmaid to theology -*ancilla theologiae*. Thus, refuge was taken in divine revelation. Though, Augustine and Thomas Aquinas made efforts to contribute to the problem of knowledge. Augustine sees Plato's world of forms as the mind of God (Omeregbe, 1998, p. 71). For Augustine, the truth of human knowledge and its certitude could be seen only in the light of revelation. Thus, he says, "it is the divine light that enables the human mind to acquire knowledge by illuminating it" (Omeregbe, 1998, p. 72). Thomas Aquinas following Aristotle, "maintains that there are no innate ideas, knowledge comes from sense perception" (Omeregbe, 1998, p. 74). Aquinas holds that, "there is nothing in the intellect that was not first in the senses" (Stumpf, 1994, p. 195). The senses for him can only apprehend particular objects, not universal ideas. Universal ideas according to him are formed from object of sense perception through the process of abstraction.

In the renaissance period and subsequent emergence of modernism, philosophy became divorced from the theocentrism of the medieval thinkers to the anthropocentrism of the modern man; which saw a critical approach to knowledge. The emergence of science during this period led to the rebirth of skepticism, which rejects the possibility of knowledge and the search for a method that would determine objectivity once and for all. Consequently, the attempt to place philosophy side by side with the new art (science) saw the emergence of two distinct scientific methods; "one empirical and one deductive" (Jones, 1952, p. 67), viz the Baconian empirical-inductive method and the Galilean mathematical-deductive method. Bacon says, "knowledge must be based on experience" (Omeregbe, 1998, p. 78). Bacon laid emphasis on observation, experimentation and inductive generalization. Galileo holds that human knowledge could be attained with mathematical and logical application. With this divergent view, the attendant result became the denial of certainty in knowledge.

In the modern period, there was a great influence of scientific method on philosophy. This period eventually produced, nurtured to maturity and fruition two great and influential schools

of epistemological thought viz; rationalism and empiricism. Both schools have a common prejudice. No wonder C. Mascia (1961) observes that:

The common origin of rationalism and empiricism consists in the phenomenalist prejudice that man does not know things directly but grasps only the impression these objects make upon him (p. 290).

The effect of this bias is that, man does not know reality as it is but only the appearances which reality produces in us. Hence, both rationalism and empiricism set out to see how far we can penetrate reality, but in different approaches. The rationalists maintain that the only way to true knowledge is reason which possesses innate ideas of all reality. Thus, philosophy then, consists in the analyses of these innate ideas. This analysis, for the rationalists, is sufficient for the discovery of all truths. On the other hand, the empiricists, in opposition refute the rationalists' claim; insisting on sense experience as the source and bases of our knowledge of reality. For them, the mind is like a blank slate; on which experience writes the data of knowledge. The above polarized position between reason and sense experience brought philosophy again into an epistemological crisis. In rationalism, philosophy had gone the way of mathematics, while empiricism, had gone the pathways of the empirical sciences with severe implications for human knowledge.

THE RATIONALIST QUEST FOR KNOWLEDGE

Just as we have penultimately said that the intellectual struggle between the adherents of the two scientific methods gave rise to two philosophical schools of thought. These schools are continental rationalism and British empiricism. Affirming this Omoregbe (1998) writes:

The influence of the renaissance science and mathematics on philosophy can be seen in the two great traditions that sprang up in the modern period, namely, rationalism and empiricism. The former adopted the mathematical method while the later adopted the empirical method (p. 79-80).

The two schools share the same ambition, which is the provision of objective foundation for knowledge. For them, things in the world constitute reality, thus, their concern is an emphasis on how best to apprehend reality. However, they are at cross roads as to which should be regarded as primary in the apprehension of reality.

According to the encyclopedia Britannica, the word 'rationalism' is derived from the Latin noun 'ratio' meaning 'reason'. Thus, as the name implies, rationalism is a philosophical position that regards reason as the chief source and test of knowledge (Edward, 1967, p. 528). As a doctrine, rationalism sees knowledge, merely as the unfolding of the minds innate power, so that all knowledge can be derived without recourse to experience. Its basic emphasis is on

the concept of ‘innatism’; the in-born traits in man and its assumption that man can grasp truth or knowledge of the physical world through logico-mathematical reasoning alone-the idea that by the strict analyses of the rational principles, man can attain knowledge of reality. In the words of Stumpf (1994):

They (rationalists) set out to formulate clear rational principle that could be organized into a system of truth from which accurate knowledge about the world could be deduced. Their emphasis was upon the rational capacity of the human mind which they now considered the source of truth (p. 235).

These philosophers maintain that the mind of every individual possesses innate ideas and is structured in such a way that simply by operating according to appropriate method it can discover the nature of the universe. The rationalists also claim that what they could think clearly with the mind, did in fact exist in the world outside their mind. Hence, for the rationalist reason is the source or avenue for the acquisition of indubitable knowledge; they thereby undermine the role of the senses.

Historically, the first western philosopher with a rationalist insight was Pythagoras in the 6th century B.C. He noticed that, for a right-angle triangle, a square built on its hypotenuse equals the sum of those on its sides and that the pitches of notes sounded on a lute bear a mechanical relation to the length of the strings. Pythagoras held that these harmonies reflected the ultimate nature of reality (Russell, 1979, p. 54). Rationalist insights can also be seen in Plato (427-347 B.C) in his postulation of the ideal world or the world of forms, which can only be known through dialectical reasoning. Aristotle (354-322 B.C) Plato’s student also in his degrees of abstraction exalts reason over sense-perception. His syllogistic logic is regarded as the instrument of rational explanation. In the modern period, rationalism as flourished in the continent of Europe was championed by French philosopher Rene Descartes (1596-1660), Benedict Spinoza (1632-1677) and Gottfried W. Leibniz (1644-1716). These continental rationalists believe in rational capacity of the mind, which they considered the source of truth.

THE EMPIRICIST RESPONSE

The empiricists in response to the rationalists’ quest for knowledge argue against innate ideas of the rationalists. This for them cannot adequately account for the origin of certain knowledge. For the empiricists, knowledge “is obtained by forming ideas in accordance with observed facts” (Titus, 1977, 171). They maintain that we know what we have found out from our senses. Clarifying the empiricists’ position especially that of John Locke, Hamlyn (1977) writes:

The empiricists, like John Locke, maintain that all our ideas or concepts in which knowledge is to be expressed come ultimately from experience because they derive directly

from sensation or from reflection on what is given in sensation, or from the mind's activity in compounding complex ideas from simple ideas derived from sensation (p. 34).

As a philosophical position, empiricism is etymologically derived from the Greek word "*empeiria*". The Latin translation is "*experientia*" which means trial. It is from it that the word experience later came. According to D. J. O'Connor (1967):

Empiricism has usually been taken to refer to philosophical theories which say that the materials of human knowledge are to be found only in experience and that as a consequence of this, we can never have any knowledge of what lies outside the bounds of human experience (p. 41).

O'Connor's assertion conforms to that of Francis Bacon. Bacon maintains that the objects of knowledge are experiential. This of course portrays Bacon's empiricist orientation. In this regard, he asserts:

The evidence of the sense I for the most part retain, but the mental operation, which follows the art of sense I for the most reject, and instead of it I open and lay out a new and certain path for the mind to proceed in starting directly from the simple sensory perception (Bacon, 1900, p. 135).

In the above position, Bacon stresses man's power of perception or observation and lays emphasis on observation, experimentation and inductive generalization.

Historically, their (empiricists) antecedent could be traced to the ancient philosophers in the western tradition. The Sophists were the first empiricist who concentrated their philosophical enquiry on such relatively concrete entities as man and the society, thereby rejecting the rationalistic speculation of their predecessors. Later the Stoics and Epicureans came up with their empirical tendencies majoring on ethical issues. In the modern period the historical development of empiricism cannot be divorced from the socio-political, commercial and industrial context of England. England was on the sure path of industrialization and urbanization. Hence, unlike rationalism, empiricism seemed to march force for force with the dominant existential trend. On this, William Wallace (1977) comments:

And so, people were beginning to abandon the age long breadless philosophical art of seeking pure knowledge and were turning towards the possibilities offered by the now technological harvest. Empiricism therefore became a suitable philosophical counterpart of the new scientific knowledge that was then in vague (p. 297).

In the modern period empiricism was championed by the three famous British empiricists; John Locke (1632-1704), George Berkeley (1685-1753) and David Hume (1711-1776). They see the rationalists' claim of innate principle in the mind as absurd and unacceptable. Locke argues that the human mind at birth is like a blank slate - *tabula rasa*; on which experience writes knowledge. Another of the empiricists is Berkeley; he argues that to be is to be perceived; that whatever cannot be perceived does not exist. He therefore identifies being with the perceived. He is known for his famous assertion, '*esse est percipi*'. The last in the line of the empiricists is Hume. He is regarded as the most consistent empiricist, who dragged empiricism to its logical conclusion thereby falling into skepticism. In his response and rejection of rationalism, Hume denies the existence of substance, causality and metaphysical assertions (metaphysics). For him, all knowledge must be traced to experience and is confirmed by it; or else they are mere phantoms and fabrication of the mind. For him, all knowledge is impressions and ideas. He is known for his dictum, 'show me the impression'.

CRITICAL EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION

The definition of knowledge as justified true belief seems to be widely accepted among English speaking authors. It is however, good to know that there are thinkers of other tradition who would question this assertion. There are two stories about the origin of the word metaphysics. According to one, the books by Aristotle that were put behind (that is to indicate the position of this work among his other writing as coming after) his *Physic* were collectively called *Metaphysics*. According to the other, these books were called *Metaphysic*, because the themes discussed in them (that is the contents) go beyond or underlie those of his *Physics*. Both stories make sense. According to Stumpf, throughout this work, Aristotle is concerned with a type of knowledge that he thought could be most rightly called wisdom. This work begins with the statement that 'All men by nature desire to know'. The same Aristotle, who is seen as the progenitor of metaphysics tells us that the first principles and causes are the true foundation of wisdom, for they give us knowledge not of any particular object or activity, but rather knowledge of true reality. Thus, metaphysics is seen as dealing with knowledge at the highest level of abstraction. This knowledge is abstract because it is about what is universal instead of what is particular. Typical metaphysical questions deal with questions like: 'Is there a god? If so, can we prove its existence'? Is there external world? If so, can we prove that there is an external world?

There is then a big correlation between knowledge and reality. In order to inquire into what is knowable and what we can know we find out that we plunge our quest into deep metaphysicality of things. Among the epistemological questions we will be concerned with are: What is knowledge - is it justified true belief? Can we ever know anything? If there exists an external world, what can we know about it? Can we be justified in our beliefs about the future? If there is a distinction between analytic statements, which are true due to their meaning and synthetic statements, whose truth value depends on what is the case, can we have a *priori*

knowledge about analytic and/or synthetic statements, that is, knowledge before or without any empirical input via our sense? Or else, is all our knowledge a *posteriori*? We notice that we cannot ask any question correctly without asking if something did not exist. Or, we see that it is a contradiction to say I know without meaning to know something.

Beyond these debates surrounding knowledge, or rather because of them, there remains the need for ongoing philosophical inquiry. The nature of knowledge has been a perennial problem in philosophy, with various thinkers offering different perspectives. The definition of knowledge as justified true belief is widely accepted, but its limitations are evident. Aristotle's notion of knowledge as wisdom highlights the complexity of the concept. The debate between rationalism and empiricism underscores the challenges in understanding knowledge. Rationalists like Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz emphasize reason, while empiricists like Locke, Berkeley, and Hume stress sense experience. However, both approaches have limitations; rationalism can lead to abstract speculation, while empiricism can result in skepticism. The role of perception, cognition, and reality in knowledge acquisition remains contentious. Plato's theory of forms and Aristotle's degrees of abstraction demonstrate the historical depth of this issue. The relationship between knowledge and reality is equally crucial, with metaphysics exploring the highest level of abstraction. Ultimately, knowledge may be more describable than definable, as it encompasses various nuances and complexities. Philosophers continue to grapple with epistemological questions, seeking to understand the scope, limits, and justification of knowledge claims.

The debate between rationalism and empiricism highlights the tension between reason and experience as sources of knowledge. Rationalists emphasize the role of reason and innate ideas, while empiricists stress the importance of sense experience and observation. Ultimately, a balanced approach that acknowledges the interplay between reason and experience may provide a more comprehensive understanding of knowledge. The pursuit of knowledge is inherently linked to metaphysical questions about reality and the nature of existence. As Aristotle noted, metaphysics deals with knowledge at the highest level of abstraction, seeking to understand the fundamental principles and causes of reality. In the end, the problem of knowledge remains a profound and intriguing challenge. By exploring the complexities of knowledge and reality, we can gain a deeper understanding of what it means to know and how we can justify our beliefs. Through critical evaluation and reflection, we can continue to refine our understanding of knowledge and its significance in our lives.

REFERENCES

- Bacon, F. (1900). *The Advancement of Learning*. Ed., by G. W. Kitchin. J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd.
- Doncee, J. F. (1967). *Philosophical Anthropology*. Sheed and Ward.
- Dubray, C. A. (1910). *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Volume VIII. Robert Appleton Company.
- Edwards, P. Ed. (1967). *Encyclopedia Britannica* Vol., 15. Macmillan.
- Hamlyn, D. W. (1977). *The Theory of Knowledge*. Macmillan Press Ltd.
- Jones, W. T. (1952). *A History of Western Philosophy* Vol., III (Hobbes to Hume) 2nd Ed., Revised. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Inc.
- Mascia, C. (1961). *A History of Philosophy* 4th Ed. St. Anthony's Guild Press.
- O'Connor, D. J. (1967). *John Locke*. Dover Publishers.
- Omogegbe, J. I. (1990). *Knowing Philosophy*. Joja Educational Research and Publishers.
- Omogegbe, J. I. (1998). *Epistemology: A Systematic and Historical Study*. Joja Educational Research and Publishers.
- Russell, B. (1926). "*Theory of Knowledge*". The Encyclopaedia Britannica Available Online: <http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/en/russell1.htm>
- Russell, B. (1957). *The Problems of Philosophy*. Oxford University Press.
- Russell, B. (1979). *History of Western Philosophy*. Union Paperbacks.
- Sanguinetti, J. J. (1987). *Logic and Gnoseology*. Urban University Press.
- Stanford Publication; Available Online: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/knowledge-analysis/>.
- Stumpf, S. E. (1994). *Philosophy: History and Problems* 5th Ed. McGraw Hill
- Steenburghen, F. V. (1949). *Epistemology*. Joseph F. Wagner Inc.
- Titus, H. H. et al. (1977) *Living Issues in Philosophy*. Wadsworth Publishers.
- Uduigwomen, A. F. & Ozumba, G. O. (Ed.). (2000). *Philosophy and Logic*. Centaur Publishers.
- Wallace, W. (1977). *Elements of Philosophy*. Society of St. Paul.
- Glenn, P. (1957) *Criteriology*. Herder Book.