Introduction to Philosophy – Week 6 Assignment

Knowledge – Descartes vs Hume Visual Presentation

Descartes eventually gives up his hyperbolic doubt (his game of feigned and extreme skepticism) and admits that there are real external objects in the world and that other people even exist. But, even though he admits that primary qualities (such as height, weight, length, mass, and anything else that can be measured mathematically) actually exist in the object, he never concedes that secondary qualities (such as color, smell, taste, shape, and anything else that can change or can be misinterpreted by the senses) exist in an object. Instead, he argues that secondary qualities exist in the person viewing the object, and not in the object itself. Color is a great example, because two people can be perceiving the same object but each seeing it as a different color, meaning that the “color” is in the perceiver’s mind and not in the object itself; if color were in the object, both people would agree.

Hume agrees with Descartes that primary qualities are in the object, but he also thinks that secondary qualities are in the object as well (and not just in our minds). If there is any disagreement about a secondary quality, Hume would say that it is because one of the perceivers is wrong. But, when it comes to gaining information that we can usually trust to be true, the bottom line is that Hume trusts the five senses of the body and Descartes does not, since he trusts only the mind’s ability to reason to undoubtable certainty, and that certainty is about primary qualities.

Of course, the differences between Descartes and Hume (and, thus, between the Rationalists and the Empiricists) are more complicated than presented here and need additional explanation to demonstrate just how far apart these two philosophers actually are in their thinking. **THAT is your assignment---demonstrating the differences between Descartes and Hume with regard to what each of them believe can be known with certainty and what can be assumed to be reasonably “believed,” but with far less certainty.**

·         This is going to be hard at first for some students, but if you can do it, it will make it a lot easier to see the differences between Descartes (who is a Rationalist) and Hume (who is an Empiricist). What you are going to do for this assignment is to visually demonstrate the differences between Descartes and Hume regarding what can be known for certain, and what can be (and should be) doubted.

·         The driving force behind this assignment is that you cannot write an essay, and, however you present the information, you are limited to one 8 ½ x 11 inch page (one page in Microsoft Word). You can make a chart, construct a diagram, create graphics, provide a combination of all the previous methods, and so forth, **but you cannot write a paper**. The idea is that you are constructing something for yourself that makes the information easier and more accessible for you when comparing and contrasting the two very different epistemological approaches.

·         You will not be graded on your art skills (if you draw pictures) or on your ability to use technology to draw lines and so forth. Your actual “picture” can be very rough, and that is OK. The point of the assignment is to help you find alternative methods for representing difficult information in a way that makes it easier for you to master it. Not everyone can memorize a page of technical terms, but “seeing” how things work together can make it a lot easier. So, learning this skill can be very beneficial when you have to deal with highly technical information in future classes.

Please do not use anything other than your textbook as a source for this assignment. And, definitely include all the major ideas from both philosophers dealing with how we learn, what we can know, and any method we can use to reach certainty about our knowledge.

[View your assignment rubric.](https://content.grantham.edu/academics/GU_PL201/W6Assignment_Rubric.htm)

