PHILOSOPHY, UNIT III: EPISTEMOLOGY NOTES
 **“Epistemology” 🡪 Greek for “the study of understanding.”
-Broadly, it is the theory of KNOWLEDGE, which asks if and how we can achieve certainty
-Key Question: *How can I be certain my PERCEPTIONS and BELIEFS reflect Reality?***\* “Perceptions” 🡪 Our sensory experience of the world: sights, smells, tastes, etc.
*--I perceive a carved redwood chair, which feels smooth and smells fragrant.*
--MAYBE YOU CAN’T TELL IT’S IMITATION PLASTIC! OR YOU FORGOT YOU TOOK DMT AND YOU’RE HALLUCINATING!!

\* “Beliefs” 🡪 The concepts we develop and trust in to explain and structure that experience
*--This chair came from Ron Swanson’s own woodshop! It cost a lot, but it’s well-made.*--BUT WHAT IF IT’S A FAKE? DID YOU *SEE* HIM MAKE IT? WHAT IF RON SWANSONDOESN’T REALLY *EXIST??* ***In short, how can we make certain our perceptions and beliefs are trustworthy guides to our Reality?*** *\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_***There are four broad “schools of thought” on this topic that you need to know, starting with three ancient ones:**

1. Rationalism: LOGIC NEVER LIES
We can never be certain of our perceptions. Instead, we should trust logically-reasoned beliefs (necessary validity).

**PLATO – There is a higher World of True Being (Ideas/Forms) that, while invisible, can be rationally proven to exist.**(For singular, temporal things to exist, they must gain their Being from an eternal, universal “Form” that “grounds” them; for example, all imperfect, worldly triangles participate in the Form, just as all cats participate in Cat-Ness).
 **ST. THOMAS AQUINAS – Prime Mover argument claims to “prove” God’s logically-necessary existence.**(Everything in nature has a cause that comes before it – you came from your parents, who came from their parents, and so on… But there must be a FIRST cause that has NO prior cause that “caused” the Universe to Be: that is GOD.)

\* Notice that both men are DUALISTS (believing in a higher “ideal” reality) that cannot be shown, only argued for.

2. Empiricism: SEEING IS BELIEVING
We can never “factor everything into” analysis. So we should always trust empirically-verifiable (observable) evidence.

**ARISTOTLE – Plato is wrong; there is NO higher World. Truth resides in the world around us, waiting to be studied.**(Observation of phenomena 🡪 Comparison 🡪 Categorization: An early version of the Scientific Method!)  **JOHN LOCKE – The Mind starts as a “blank slate” (*tabula rasa*). It is “filled in” through Experience 🡪 Knowledge.**(We create Ideas or concepts by “*reflecting”* on our sensory “impressions” and making connections between them.)

3. Skepticism: YOU KNOW NOTHING
We can never be sure of our perceptions or beliefs (or both), to such an extent that “knowledge” is *always questionable.*

**SOCRATES:** Claims he “Knows Nothing” – This makes him wise, because he knows Absolute Truth is beyond our reach  **DIOGENES:** “A Socrates Gone Mad” - Engages in vulgarity, insults and theatrics to show that society’s customs are lies **SEXTUS EMPIRICUS:** Roman ultra-skeptic – a troll before the internet, who would debate two opposing sides at once

These ancient Skeptics are less important than these two from the Renaissance/Enlightenment era’s birth of science:

**I. RENE DESCARTES –** Turns Rationalism into Skepticism by doubting ALL sensory evidence:
 
 restores belief with the ***Cogito- “*I am thinking, therefore I Exist,”** meaningThe Self is the first, and possibly only certainty available to Reason alone:
 
[*But, Descartes also claimed he could logically justify the existence of God/World based on his proven existence: false!]*
**II. DAVID HUME –** Turns Empiricism into Skepticism by doubting Reason’s power to understand the world around us. **“Knowledge”** is really “**Custom” or Habit – we get used to things happening certain ways** and trust they’ll stay the same (e.g. the sun will rise tomorrow, like always), but there are always unknowns to prove us wrong (e.g. black swans). SO,
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[*Hume’s “problem of induction” – can we really base knowledge of the future on past experience? – remains alive today.]* 