

# Year 9 Values and Society: Topic 1 Philosophy of Knowledge

## What is philosophy of knowledge?

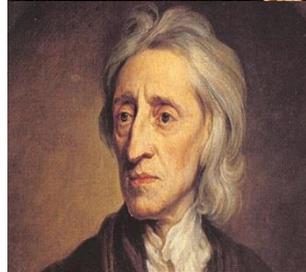
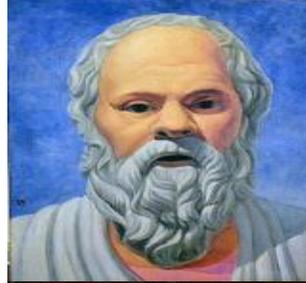
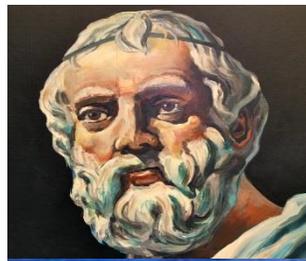
In philosophy, the study of knowledge is called 'epistemology'.

Epistemology comes from two Greek words:

- episteme which means 'knowledge'
- logos which means 'reason'.

Epistemology literally means to reason about knowledge and an epistemologist studies what makes up knowledge, what kinds of things we can know, what are the limits to what we can know, and even if it's possible to actually know anything at all!

Epistemology also deals with knowledge claims such as the existence of God (religious knowledge), claims about how we should live our lives and why (moral knowledge) and knowledge claims about the world.



## Key vocabulary

- **Doubt** – A feeling of uncertainty
- **Certainty** – A firm belief that something is true or fact
- **Scepticism** – The theory that certain knowledge is impossible / to doubt the truth of something
- **Rationalism** – The practice of basing opinions and actions on reason and knowledge rather than religion or emotions
- **Empiricism** – The theory that all knowledge is based on experience developed from the senses (see, hear etc)

## Philosophers:

- **Plato** – Ancient Greek. C. 428BCE. His writings explored justice, beauty and equality as well as political systems and cosmology.
- **Socrates** – Ancient Greek. C. 469BCE. His famous phrase is "All I know is that I know nothing." He believed that wrong-doing and behaviour that was not virtuous resulted from ignorance and that those who did wrong did not know any better
- **Descartes** – French, C17th. The 'father of modern philosophy' because of the widespread influence of his ideas. Used 'methodological doubt' to discover the one thing of which he could be absolutely certain.
- **Locke** – English, C17th. Locke believed that at birth the mind is in a blank state ('tabula rasa') and that knowledge is determined by experience.
- **Hume** – Scottish, C18th. Proclaimed that "reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions." He agreed with John Locke that the foundation of knowledge was experience.