

David Hume (1711-1776)

When one ball strikes another and apparently causes it to move, observers cannot see any force that literally connects the two movements. As all observation of causes are confined to the past, it cannot be known that causes that have operated in the past will do so in the future.

Plato (427-347)

As is frequently the case with philosophical theories, Plato's is centered on a metaphor. In his dialogue Meno, Plato points out that there is no practical difference between knowledge and correct opinion. If your opinion is correct, it will serve as a useful guide to action as well as knowledge. The difference between them is that opinions are transitory while knowledge is secure.

True opinions are a fine thing and do all sorts of good so long as they stay in their place, but they will not stay long. They run away from a man's mind; so they are not worth much until you tether them by working out a reason. . . . Once they are tied down, they become knowledge, and are stable. That is why knowledge is something more valuable than right opinion. What distinguishes the one from the other is the tether.

René Descartes

In the process of evaluating his faculties, Descartes considered various ways in which they might go wrong. The senses are well known for revealing misleading appearances. Moreover, there may be no senses at all, since it is impossible to distinguish with certainty (based on how they appear) dreaming from waking. Thus a central challenge of epistemology is to prove that an external world exists.