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Reading Questions: Descartes & Locke

Descartes

1. List and explain three of the reasons Descartes gives for doubting what he thought he knew.

He said that anything that can be questioned and doubted should be and probably be removed too.

He also said that sciences borrowed their principles from philosophy and nothing certain can be built on such unstable foundations.

His purpose was to reject all his opinions and beliefs to hopefully find some doubt and come to a more certain conclusion.

2. While still in the realm of doubt, what does Descartes say about the general sciences and mathematics and their place in our knowledge?

He claimed that physics, astronomy, and medicine depend on the study of composite things which makes it doubtful. Then claimed that arithmetic or geometry is certain because it deals with the simplest things regardless if it's concerning the existence in nature or not. He follows that with the simple fact that such simple truths are just that and can't be doubted.

3. What does Descartes ultimately argue is a strong and unshakeable basis for knowledge? How does he make his case?

What is the unshakeable basis for knowledge is I am, I exist. He makes his case by stating that because he believes it and it's presented by him then it's true. His idea is that if he continues to find doubt in something then he'll put it aside. He'll continue this process until there is no doubt and it's unshakeable or until he finds no certainty in this life.

Locke

1. Explain some of the reasons Locke believes there are no innate ideas.

Locke believes that there are no innate ideas because the mind gains knowledge from experience through sensation and/or subsequent reflection. Even if everyone has universal assent, they'd have to have that memory unlocked with sensation.

2. What is the significance of "children" and "idiots" in Locke's argument?

The significance is that children and idiots don't have a high understanding or a thought of them. So they can't have innate knowledge because knowledge of something that's 'imprinted' on their soul or mind that they can't understand or perceive is not accurate.

3. Explain the concept of the "tabula rasa".

It means a blank sheet or white paper representing human minds before they have knowledge and reason from experience.

4. Describe in your own words what Locke means by "sensation" and "reflection" in describing the acquisition of knowledge.

I believe that sensation is describing our five senses that are activated when we remember a memory. We can still smell the smells from that experience, hear things from when it happened,

feel the same feelings from before, and so on. We can basically relive a past experience like it was happening again in the present. I think reflection is based on the aftermath of an experience. How we grieved or celebrated and how it affected their lives afterwards.