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## Reading Question Week 2

Descartes, "New Foundations for Knowledge", pp. 21-25

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

1. Deception of the senses: Descartes argued that the senses can be deceived and that it is possible for what appears to be real to actually be an illusion. He used the example of a straight stick appearing bent when partially submerged in water to illustrate this point.

2. Influence of the environment - Descartes also noted that our beliefs and opinions are heavily influenced by the environment we are in and the people we interact with. He believed that this can lead to the acceptance of false beliefs and ideas.

3. Possibility of an evil demon - Descartes famously posed the hypothetical scenario of an evil demon who is deliberately deceiving us about the nature of reality. This idea serves to highlight the uncertainty of our beliefs and knowledge and the need to subject them to rigorous examination.

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

Descartes claims that the general sciences and mathematics are the only certain sources of knowledge. According to Descartes, the general sciences and mathematics are distinguished by their clarity and distinctness, which allows us to arrive at certain knowledge. Descartes believed that the process of systematic doubt leads to the discovery that mathematics and the sciences are the only sources of knowledge that are completely indubitable.

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

Descartes argues that the strong and unshakeable truth of knowledge is clear and distinct reasoning. He makes his argument by first doubting everything he had previously trusted in, and then searching for a single definite truth. He finally arrives at the conclusion that he exists as a thinking thing, and that this knowledge can only be gained through intuition and reasoning, not through the senses. He argues that his own existence as a thinking thing provides a firm foundation for knowledge and that all other truths can be deduced from this starting point through clear and distinct reasoning. Descartes argues that the very act of doubting one's own existence proves that one must exist in order to doubt. He asserts that this indubitable truth provides a strong foundation for further knowledge and inquiry, as it allows us to build a system of knowledge based on clear and distinct reasoning, rather than on uncertain and potentially deceptive sense-based information.

Locke, "The Senses as the Basis for Knowledge", pp. 25-31

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

Universality - Locke argued that if there were innate ideas, they would be present in all human beings and be universally recognized. However, there are many differences in beliefs and opinions across cultures and individuals, which suggest that there can be no innate ideas.

Lack of evidence - Locke claimed that there is no empirical evidence that supports the existence of innate ideas. He believed that all knowledge and ideas are acquired through experience and perception.

Empiricism - Locke was a proponent of empiricism, the idea that all knowledge comes from sensory experience. He saw innate ideas as incompatible with this philosophy because they suggest that some knowledge is present at birth and does not come from experience.

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

In John Locke's philosophy, the concepts of "children" and "idiots" play a significant role in his argument for the concept of "tabula rasa," or the "blank slate." According to Locke, all individuals are born with a blank mind, lacking any innate knowledge or ideas. Children and idiots, as those who have not yet developed their reasoning abilities, serve as examples of this blank slate. They provide evidence for the idea that knowledge and ideas are acquired through experience and perception rather than being present at birth. This concept is central to Locke's understanding of the nature of the mind and the basis of knowledge.

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

The concept of the "tabula rasa" (Latin for "blank slate") is a central idea in the philosophy of John Locke and refers to the idea that the mind is initially blank or empty at birth and is gradually filled with knowledge and experiences through sensory information and exposure to the world. According to Locke, the mind does not possess any innate ideas but acquires all of its knowledge and beliefs through experience and observation.

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

Sensation and reflection are two key processes through which Locke believes that knowledge is acquired. The sensation provides us with the raw data of experience, while reflection helps us to process and understand this data and form more complex ideas. According to Locke, both processes are necessary for the acquisition of knowledge.