

Laura Calvin

Professor Louis Sanchez

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Paper 1:Epistemology

A French thinker named René Descartes lived from March 31, 1596 to February 11, 1650 during the "early modern era". He had a significant impact on the field of epistemology and philosophy as a whole. He was born in a town near Tours, and went to college in Anjou where he was educated by the Jesuits. Despite this, the majority of his life was spent in the Netherlands. Descartes sought absolute certainty through questioning everything, including his own existence, the world, and even God. His ideas continue to be studied and debated by philosophers to this day, 300 years later. Descartes was a knowledgeable individual, possessing vast knowledge in several fields such as mathematics, astronomy, and philosophy. He was considered a "universal genius" for his diverse areas of expertise. He authored works on physics, mathematics, and medicine at a young age, but his favorite subject remained philosophy.

His notable works in philosophy include "Discourse on Method" written in French in 1637 and "Meditations" written in Latin. "Meditations" delves into the examination of the basis of knowledge and covers topics such as the existence of God and the nature of the human mind. Descartes passed away on February 11, 1650 in Stockholm, having published several other

works in various fields prior to his death. I have investigated the origin of knowledge and worked on its underlying assumptions.

René Descartes is recognized as the originator of rationalism, alongside other philosophers of the same ilk discussed in earlier readings. He gained fame for his skepticism, being regarded as one of the premier skeptics among philosophers. I have posited that our perceptions are not actual experiences but rather replications of prior perceptions. From this, he surmised that an evil entity could manipulate our minds. He established a method of gaining knowledge through skepticism, raising questions such as "What is real?" and doubting everything until he reached a conclusion. This led to his publication of "Discourse on Method", in which he espoused the idea that nothing can be deemed certain. He was taught this philosophy in his youth and carried it into his explorations in other fields of science.

Descartes' systematic method of doubt, which holds that everything can and should be questioned, even discarded if necessary, was derived from his experiences. He redefined the concept of knowledge, starting from a position of doubt and ultimately discovering that he could not doubt his own existence as a person. This led to his famous insight, "I think, therefore I exist", which was widely known in French, Latin, and English. He reasoned that if he was doubting, he must be thinking, and thus, he could be certain of his existence regardless of whether he was asleep or awake. One of his theses was that the ability to dream presupposes existence, further reinforcing his belief in the unassailability of his and our existence.

In the following section, I aim to briefly contrast the philosophy of René Descartes with other philosophical beliefs. René Descartes lived in the "early modern period," a time frame that differs from the classical era in which philosophers such as Aristotle and Plato lived. These latter philosophers held similar views on the stability of what constitutes knowledge, until Descartes changed this notion by being impacted by the unreliability of several accepted theories.

Aristotle believed that real knowledge arises from life experiences, while Plato believed it is derived from innate, eternal, and universally true concepts. The use of doubt in Descartes' philosophy of knowledge is reasonable, as skepticism can lead to a more informed understanding. However, it's important to remember that not everything deserves suspicion and some things can be trusted.

In conclusion, my personal belief is that knowledge stems from a combination of experiences and doubt. While life experiences can provide a foundation for knowledge, some knowledge may also be innate.