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Philosphy
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Reading Question Week 3

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.

The arguments presented by Descartes are not likely to lead one to doubt what one already knows.

a. The senses are easily fooled, according to him. For the purpose of illustrating his point, he uses an example of an optical illusion.

b. According to Descartes, even God or other beings can manipulate our thoughts. He calls this argument the Evil Demon argument. There is a possibility, therefore, that one might think he has been taught something true, but it may not be the case.

c. In addition, he points out that even self-evident truths or truths derived from mathematics cannot be true since they are more likely to be wrong.

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

It is a case of deep interdependence and interconnection between the sciences, according to Descartes, and each of them must be obtained through one method of study. Descartes is usually pictured as someone who advocated demonstrating science in a similar way Euclid demonstrated geometry, namely with self-evident truths rather than observation and experiment.

A mathematical demonstration is one of the most evident truths that the human mind is capable of attaining. Descartes referred to a mathematical demonstration as an example of an object that can be intuited or discerned plainly and clearly by the human mind.

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

As per Descartes, our beliefs must meet a standard for them to be regarded as genuine knowledge. According to him, we may not be able to meet the standard if we believe what we are told through our senses. Therefore, based on our senses, we cannot know anything. The conclusion came from Descartes himself, but he did not rest on it.As a result of his discovery of the Cogito, Descartes was impressed by its factual certainty, which can never be questioned when believed. In his view, a belief could only be known with certainty.

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

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

According to Locke, all knowledge is derived from experience, so there are no innate notions. He claims that no concept can be called an idea in the mind that it has never heard or been aware of, because not everyone accepts every principle. If there is broad agreement about a principle, it would not have been reached by innate thought, but by another agent. Concepts cannot be developed without understanding them, thus fundamental principles can only be covered after being taught or reviewed.

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

"Children" and "idiots" play an influential role in Locke's argument in that they both lack awareness of their full potential, which is reflected in the fact that both of them aren't aware of their full potential. The open minds of these children make them extremely susceptible to impressions, making them distant from the core of the group. Hence, a belief such as Locke's, which asserts that individuals have to be conscious of their own ideas and determine whether they are true inside of them. This is in order to carry their own ideas with them.

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

Locke states that this concept of tabula rasa is when our minds begin with an empty slate, it is impossible to discern truth from falsehood. In addition, we are only able to discern what is real and what isn't through our experiences. Certain concepts and principles will be influenced by our experiences.

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

Whenever we sense specific objects, such as clothing, food, or home, we have the ability to transfer multiple impressions of those items to the mind. These impressions can then be used to form perceptions about those items or objects. Sensation is the ability of such objects to transfer multiple impressions of the items to the brain that can be used to generate perceptions about those things. By studying the correlation between several perceptions, our minds can gather knowledge, according to Locke. Our knowledge of the entire world can't be reliably perceived because we form most of our concepts in our heads. During this discussion, Locke asserts that we cannot create systematic knowledge using this method. In order to be able to derive a conclusion from the patterns that occur in our reality, we will need to discern them sequentially in order to arrive at a definitive conclusion.