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Descartes

Descartes starts searching for new foundations for knowledge, and to achieve it he makes a method of doubt. He says that “anything that can be called into question, will be discarded” (John Cottingham pp. 21). Rene wants to dismantle all of the available knowledge in search of something certain and undeniable that can serve as a rock-solid basis. In addition, Descartes desires to dismantle his "home" of knowledge because he believed that what he knew was something that could be assumed without being supported by any evidence. He wants to discard those ideas and replace them with new ones based on facts that have been established via scientific research. Descartes claims that we must first cast doubt on everything we believe to be true in order to ascertain whether there is anything we can know for sure. He is unsure of why he thinks certain things because he feels he has been proven wrong so frequently. In order to cast doubt, Descartes first refers to the faults of the senses in his Meditations. He contends that since the senses can occasionally be deceptive, we should not put our faith in them. In his new philosophy, he depicts the senses as producing perceptions that inaccurately describe their objects and, as a result, give rise to false beliefs about the true characteristics of the material world. Furthermore, he says he will treat a belief as untrue if there is even a tiny bit of doubt about it.

Dreams are another thing we can doubt. Senses seem to function even in our dreams, therefore, there is a reason to doubt. Notwithstanding any apparent subjective distinctions between waking life and dreaming, he argues that these differences are insufficient to establish with certainty that I am not dreaming right now. He contends that the experience of a dream may, in theory, be indistinguishable from waking life. According to Descartes, he frequently has nightmares about things that appear real to him while he is sleeping. As well, he says, "...I am here in my dressing-gown, sitting by the fire- when in fact I am lying undressed in bed!" (John Cottingham pp. 22). According to Rene, only "arithmetic and geometry are free from any taint of untruth or uncertainty" among all other human endeavors. He remembers that occasionally, while he is dreaming, he deludes himself into thinking he is awake. Descartes believes he will never be able to know if he is dreaming after considering this. These sciences, according to Descartes, "occupy themselves with an object so pure and simple that they make no assumptions that experience would render questionable; they consist in drawing conclusions by means of logical arguments.

Despite Descartes reasons of doubting, his epistemology is indicative of a general approach to knowledge called Rationalism. He also claims that knowledge should be based in certainty, systems, concepts, logic, math, analysis, etc.; not so much in experience or the senses, which in themselves are not rock solid. Descartes was adamant that humans are born with the capacity for reason, and that this capacity can only be used methodically to apply reason in order to have direct access to actual knowledge, which cannot be acquired through the study of books. In his fifth meditation, he talks on how we learn about ideas without any sensory input, he claims that we come to know things by the strength of our own native intelligence. Descartes used dreams as a source of inspiration for his skepticism of sensory-based beliefs about the outside

world and his own bodily existence. He says that frequent sensory deceptions like the perception of something being too big or little are just one way that sensory experience can mislead us.

The main objective of Descartes' meditations was to lay a solid basis for the sciences to develop "strong and durable knowledge." For as long as one's belief system was based on lies, he thought this was impossible. Descartes gets to the conclusion that there is some undeniable truth from which to support the rest of knowledge despite the fact that he initially begins to dispute the validity of all that exists. Because the reality is, even if I'm lying or mistaken, I'm still sure that I'm thinking, and if I'm thinking, then I must be real.

When I was reading about Descartes, I had to read it a second time to completely understand what the purpose of his meditations were. Although Descartes is not that hard to read compared to other philosophers, for someone like me who does not read as often I had to mangle and read it more than once. While I was reading, I completely started to doubt my own knowledge, because everything that he says, to me, it was all true. For example, the way that he talked about senses and how he argues that anything that can be observed through clear and distinct perceptions is part of the essence of what is observed. Also, he talks about how the senses seem to function even in dreams and how that is another reason why we should doubt. We are unable to distinguish between situations in which our senses are accurately reporting reality and those in which they are not. Thus, the best course of action is to question if any knowledge can be based on our sensory experiences. He also claims how sense can not be reliable on knowledge, therefore, when employed as premises in arguments, assertions based on feeling are questionable since the truth of those propositions is by nature uncertain.

I can agree with Descartes when he argues about that all humans were born with knowledge through the higher power of God. Since this theory was about knowledge being

innate, I compared it to Locke's theory, which it was that knowledge should be acquired by experience. Although Locke and Descartes have differences in their theory, they Both Descartes and Locke attempt to find answers to the same questions in metaphysics and epistemology, like for example, they both were trying to figure out what knowledge was really about.