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Introduction to Philosophy

Professor Sanchez

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

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

Descartes had three reasons for doubting 1) The Deception Argument, 2) The Evil Demon Argument

3) The Argument from God's Omnipotence

The Deception Argument - Descartes argues that throughout his life, he has been deceived by his senses and experiences. He claims that he has experienced illusions and dreams that were indistinguishable from reality. Therefore, he concludes that he cannot rely on his senses or experiences to provide accurate knowledge.

The Evil Demon Argument: Descartes suggests that there might be an evil demon who has the power to deceive him at any time. According to Descartes, this demon could make him believe that everything he experiences is real, even though it is not. This argument challenges the very foundation of his knowledge, suggesting that everything he thought he knew might be an illusion created by the demon.

The Argument from God's omnipotence: Descartes also suggests that even if he assumes that the evil demon does not exist, he still cannot trust his senses or experiences. He argues that since God is all-powerful, he can create a world that deceives him into believing things that are not true. This argument again challenges his reliance on senses and experiences and suggests that he must rely on something other than them for accurate knowledge.

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

Descartes believes certain truths can be known with certainty, particularly in math and sciences. For example, mathematical truths are self-evident and depend not on senses but on reason and intuition. An example of this is the truth that $2+2=4$ is certain and undeniable because it can be grasped purely through reason and does not depend on any sense of experience.

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

In summary, Descartes argues that the foundation of knowledge lies in the certainty of the self and the existence of God, as well as the clear and distinct ideas that can be derived from reason. Using the method of doubt, he sought to eliminate all uncertainty and arrive at a firm foundation for knowledge.

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

1. Explain why Locke believes there are no innate ideas.

According to Locke, all knowledge comes from experience and is acquired through the senses. His argument is that there is no evidence to support the existence of innate ideas. He claimed that if such ideas existed, they would be universally accepted and recognized by everyone regardless of their background and cultural context; however, this is not the case.

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

The Significance of "Children and Idiots" in Locke's argument is to highlight the importance of individual consent and rationality as the basis for legitimate political authority

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

The concept of the "tabula rasa," Latin for "blank slate," is a philosophical idea suggesting that individuals are born without innate knowledge or predispositions. Their experiences and environment shape their thoughts, beliefs, and behavior.

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

In John Locke's philosophy, "sensation" and "reflection" are two ways individuals acquire knowledge.

Sensation refers to perceiving external stimuli through the senses, such as seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, and smelling.

Conversely, reflection refers to the process of thinking about and analyzing the ideas we have formed through sensation.