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### Epistemology Paper

A philosopher who sought assurance was René Descartes. He was a philosopher during the Enlightenment, which was concerned with the issues of what it meant to be human. Descartes discovered this by questioning everything. Descartes, a rationalist, was one of the key thinkers who helped Ancient Philosophy shift to Modern Philosophy. Descartes appears to doubt everything in his Meditations on First Philosophy, yet in his Second Meditation, he observes that something cannot be questioned. Descartes held to the simple ideas of cogito ergo sum, rationalism, and doubt. Descartes employs these concepts to articulate his views on knowledge in-depth..

Descartes had the idea that everything can be doubted. In many ways things can be doubted and in his writings Descartes explains a few. Some that he talks about are childhood opinions, senses, the thought of dreams versus reality, and crazy people do not understand they are crazy. Descartes describes through childhood opinion “it will be enough if I find at least some reason for doubt. And to do this I will not need to run through them all individually, which would be an endless task”(22). He continues on to use the thought of a building to describe that some thoughts will disappear if he goes to the base of them. Through this idea, Descartes did write that math, geometry, and abstract sciences are more certain and knowable than some sciences that are based on senses and experience.

Through his view of doubt he believes that even math can possibly be doubted. He gives an example that it could possibly be God or an evil demon tricking you into believing  $2+2=4$ . This brings a deeper thought that what if what we think is right is actually wrong or what we think is wrong is right. In this part of his writing he talks about how there is or is not a powerful force that created everything the way that it is. Descartes says that we should just allow those people to deny God and continue to think what we think. Descartes writes that he has no response to the fact that these people and the arguments they make. Descartes continues to doubt until he decides to set aside his work for the day. Descartes realizes that one thing that cannot be doubted is the existence of himself. He realizes that he at least is a “thinking thing”. This ties with the idea of cogito ergo sum which means “I think therefore I am”(22). The thought of this idea is bringing together the mind and the body. In thinking of cogito ergo sum, it is simple to begin with what you already know. Descartes believes that the substance of thinking is different from the substance of material.

The idea of rationalism is about an internal focus and it is in the search of certainty, systems, distinct ideas, and clear. Being a rationalist, Descartes seems to have the thoughts of a priori knowledge. A priori knowledge are the thoughts that it is certain, self-evident truths, innate truths, and truths from definitions. The thought of Innate truths makes Descartes seem to disagree with Plato’s writings. Plato wrote about how Socrates believed that knowledge must be innate and learning is just a recollection which seems to be the only similar thoughts. Plato seems to disagree with the basis of the knowledge that inspires him. As Descartes believes that everything should be doubted, Plato believes that prior to people on Earth knowledge was implemented. Plato writes that truth is recognized through asking questions, analyzing, logic,

definition, and contemplation. This seems to go completely against Descartes' thoughts of everything possibly not true.

Although Descartes was a rationalist, some other philosophers were known as Empiricists. Rationalists have an internal focus and believe knowledge comes through reflection. Empiricists have an outward focus and believe knowledge comes through experience. Descartes is clearly a Rationalist for the simple fact that he is searching for certainty. The way that Descartes seems to have such a unique perspective of knowledge is something that most people would only somewhat relate to.

To further interpret Descartes Second Meditation, he seems to finally realize that one thing cannot be doubted. He realizes he must exist and also he decides he will continue to go on and on until he sees no certainty. He continues to say that, "Is there not a God, or whatever I may call him, who puts into me the thoughts I am now having?"(25). He begins to question why he would think this and states how he said he had no senses. His Second Meditation is literally the next day after all his thoughts in the First. After getting his rest he woke up realizing that some things he thought before were not exactly sensible in his theory.

Epistemology is the study of belief, knowledge, truth, justification, and how we know what we know? In my opinion I believe that Descartes does have in depth solutions to his theory. But I don't think that it is completely realistic. To doubt everything would be a bizarre thing to do in today's day and age. In life, sometimes things are doubted and that is bound to happen but I would not think about doubting something that occurred in my childhood. The belief that people are completely unsure of what they believe and do not believe seems very unrealistic. I do like the examples that Descartes describes especially with dreams versus reality. Sometimes dreams

can seem as if it actually did happen in real life, this part makes sense. But realistically I will know what was really a dream or what is reality.

Throughout “New Foundations for Knowledge” by René Descartes, he looked to find certainty by the process of doubting. His three ideas; doubt, rationalism, and cogito ergo sum, are how he found his certainty thoroughly. He thought that these would end in clear and distinct ideas. Although to some people today some of the things Descartes had to say are crazy, he led to the development of Philosophy and majorly Epistemology. He was also tied with math and sciences. Descartes saw that he needed to rebuild everything again right from the beginning of all of his living memories.