

What arguments
does descartes give
us for thinking essay



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Rene Descartes argues that sense perception is untrustworthy and not reliable enough to determine what is true and real. He gives us a number of arguments and examples to show how easy it is to deceive our senses. They are not a reliable authority to distinguish between right or wrong thus we need to use our mind to understand abstract things. Only our intellect can reassure the real truth. Therefore sense perception can be seen as a function of our mind. Descartes begins his argument in his first meditation when he starts to doubt everything he knows, sees or feels.

He looks for something clear and distinct to have a starting point which seems a logic way to do. When established the first precise thing which is that he exists because he thinks, Descartes moves on to find out more about his existence. In the second meditation he gets closer. So far he knows that he is a thing that thinks, a thinking thing which is a mind thus he concludes that “ I am, I exist”. Descartes acknowledges that thinking is understanding, doubting, refusing, imagining and senses. Senses are classified as what we see, hear or feel which is not different from thinking thus these actions belong to our mind.

Nevertheless they are easy to be deceived and this is another aspect for our existence as we must be at least something to be deceived. An example that Descartes brings up to show that our senses are untrustworthy is about a piece of wax. If we observe it, it has a distinctive size, colour, feel, taste and temperature. As the wax is heated all sensory attributes change so relying just on our sense perception we would conclude that the wax in its original form is a different substance than it is in its later form.

In this case only our mind can explain to us that a piece of wax is flexible and mutable and that both substances are the same. So we can say that our senses are not good enough to understand a physical thing clearly and distinctly what confirms Descartes statement referring the unreliable senses. This example is an effective one to demonstrate the difficulty to rely upon our senses as they are deceivable and we can only use our mind to understand the world around us. We can use our senses to help us understand particular things but it is an inadequate source to determine truth.

All things we know by certainty are those we know by our judgement, understanding and thinking of them in our mind. Similarly when we look out of a window and we see a person walking down the street we say it is a human being and not a robot or something else whereas we just see some clothing. Our intellect helps us to form a judgement that what we see is a person. Descartes does not mean to deny our sensory input, in fact senses provide us the material for our mind to understand such situations.

He also does not say that senses have no value but that understanding is a function of our mind rather than our senses. Looking at both examples we can clearly state that senses are instruments of our mind to receive the information we need for our brain to process them. They are very valuable and useful as they detect everything happening around us. If we make use of both our senses and our intellect we are very likely to avoid mistakes what therefore would result in truth. However we make errors because people tend to jump to conclusions and make judgements too quickly on bad evidence.

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We assent or dissent before we have clear evidence. We can avoid it by holding back and agree to those propositions which we perceive as distinctly true. Furthermore we should concentrate on things which we perfectly understand and separate them from cases which are more confused for us thus we are likely to reach the truth. This procedure is difficult as we need to decide which information either is complex or clear. Descartes has three main arguments to prove that senses are untrustworthy. First everything we receive from the outside world is possibly to be a mistake.

Things are often not as they seem at first for instance if we look up to the sun we would say that it is quite small and close to us whereas in fact it is very far away and much bigger than the earth we live on. So it is prudent to doubt everything we receive from the outside world through our senses as said above in the first meditation. Second since our dreams during being asleep can not be distinguish from waking experience, he argues that everything we now perceived from the physical outside world in fact is nothing more than a dream or just our fanciful imagination.

Given that it is possible to doubt that every physical thing really exist even that there is an external world at all. As this doubt is very extreme because even if there is no material world out there one plus two remains three and blue looks blue to us even in our dreams he created a third method of doubting. Thus finally Descartes argues that there could be an omnipotent god which deceives our believes in the moment we produce them. Not that he changes them but in that particular moment he changes the world so as to turn our believes false.

The point of this all is to out-do the sceptics and to create the broadest possible method for doubt. Even if it may look a bit strange Descartes created these three arguments in order to be able to doubt everything we think of. It is difficult to agree or disagree with Descartes argument because we use our sense perception everyday and it is hard to believe that they are untrustworthy. Furthermore we have these authorities from our birth on and they are the first attributes we require to understand something. Our mind or intellect needs to develop through out the time in order to make use out of it.

If we did not possess our senses, our brain could not get any raw material thus he would be unable to judge and to tell us what truth or false is therefore our mind would be useless. Furthermore sense perception is the most valuable I can imagine for every human being to live and they are easy to describe and understand whereas nobody can clearly explain what a mind is. Considering all these on the one hand I can say that I disagree with Descartes argument as I am sure that it is worthy to trust my senses as they have infinite value and they perceive very clear and distinct information (noise, smell, feel).

Even if they are deceivable but not as easy as Descartes states in may be one case out of hundred they still fulfil their duty in most circumstances. Therefore I am pretty sure that I can rely on my senses without any doubts as I did in the past. However on the other hand Descartes examples and arguments are very effective to demonstrate the opposite. I do not deny that it is possible to trick our sense perception as it is very possible to deceive our

mind or intellect and this leads us to mistakes. Sometimes we need to use our intellect to fully understand some features.

The example with the wax or the sun is one of those instances where our sense perception gets tricked and our intellect helps us understand the real truth. Here the mind plays an additional role as in most cases to realize the correctness. But at the example when we look out of the window and see some clothing we still can detect faces and therefore conclude that it is a person. Even if a human being is fully coated we recognize movement and behaviour and thus we can say with certainty that it is a person.

Descartes argument about a deceiving god or better an evil being who's mission it is to deceive our believes or even changes the world in that moment in order to make our thinking look false is very heavily, impossible and just unreal. To conclude overall I disagree with Descartes arguments even though there are some effective and clever reasons which appear to be logic. He linked our senses directly to the mind and said that they are functions of our mind where I again disagree. I think that they are separated from our intellect and if they belong together than the mind is another sense.

When we use our intellect we do not necessarily need our senses and the same the other way round. Our sense perception is a gift of god thus he would not try to deceive them. Furthermore he wants us to use them in order to receive information around us from the external world. Their aim is it to give us clear and distinct ideas of everything we perceive and to reveal wrong judgement, information and understanding out from our mind.

Without our senses we certainly could not live but without our mind we could survive.