

Early modern philosophy



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Early Modern Philosophy Cogito Ergo Sum Descartes states that, "I should withhold my assent no less carefully from opinions that are not completely certain and indubitable than I would from those that are patently false" (Descartes 18). This is indicating that he realizes past ideas he had may be founded on nothing and as a result "patently false." Descartes' then goes on to question the validity of sense impressions through a rigorous line of questioning. He considers that it might be possible that when he believes he is actually alive, he is actually dreaming. He also considers that a malicious and omnipotent god is manipulating him. Ultimately, he concludes that even with these occurrences, he can be certain he exists, because in the process of doubting his existence he is thinking and thinking necessitates existence - I think, therefore I am.

It's necessary that Descartes' 'Cogito Ergo Sum' argument be understood from the first person perspective because the argument throughout Descartes' philosophy is precisely that senses cannot determine the validity of existence (Frost 1962). Descartes' Cogito Ergo Sum, therefore, only proves that the individual who is thinking exists. As discussed, the essence of the argument is that one's thoughts directly determine the validity of one's existence, so that an outside individual cannot determine another exists simply by listening to another. It is entirely from the first person perspective that the cogito is founded.

Descartes vs. Early Philosophers

Descartes differed from earlier philosophers on a number of levels. During the Middle Ages philosophy became highly related to theology and god and the supernatural were the predominant concerns of thinkers. In this regard, Descartes' introduced a higher awareness of skepticism, although he offered

viable and logically derived solutions for these questions.

Considering Descartes' difference from the pre-Socratic philosophers, one is drawn to the nature by which knowledge is believed to be founded and attained. The pre-Socratic philosophers, while promoting the natural sciences and other such intellectually rigorous propositions, founded their philosophic and scientific assumptions on the primacy of the senses. Descartes' was skeptical of the senses and sought a more rigorous understanding of knowledge through his rationalist philosophy (Waterfield 2009).

Father of Modern Philosophy

Descartes is known as the father of modern philosophy as his main philosophical ideas, most notably the cogito ergo sum, were foundational elements in the development of modern philosophical thought and progress. Some of Descartes' major contributions were to break from the Aristotelian philosophy that had dominated mainstream philosophic thought. He set about integrating philosophy into new sciences, and altered the relationship between philosophy and theology. His cogito ergo sum first break down knowledge to its bare essentials through an aggressive method of questioning and doubt. Descartes establishes knowledge based on the foundational belief that all knowledge is founded on what he claimed is the indisputable fact that if one thinks and doubts their existence then they truly exist. Descartes then sets about establishing the foundation of knowledge, including scientific understanding, on this basis. Because of these reasons Descartes has been a highly influential philosopher, and is present in many of the major 17th and 18th century philosophical works, including those by Leibniz, Kant, Locke, Hume and Spinoza (Scruton 2001)

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References

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