

Descartes and opposing other philosophical views philosophy essay



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Descartes had his fair share of opposing philosophers, but one of his main critiques was in the person of John Locke. I do not totally agree with his proposition that only the mind can produce certain knowledge and that our senses are always under the attack of the devil that deceives us. And by that note I will use Locke to oppose the main proposition of Descartes concerning doubt or the first meditation. Descartes first meditation focused on doubt and how knowledge is innate in us. In Descartes' first meditation; there was this thought that since our senses can be considered as doubtful or deceiving, therefore the knowledge that came to us thorough the senses are doubtful and the knowledge that we now have is from the mind[i]. Descartes pointed out that we are in a dreaming state, that we are but in a state where in the senses that we have deceives us. Locke therefore proposed that we our sense are not deceiving us, we are not in a dream state; because for him knowledge can only be achieved through the senses and not by some innate ideas that is from our mind. This concept of ideas that comes from our minds posts some problems that were identified by Locke; one is that if one possesses this innate knowledge locked up in his mind, he or she therefore must have the consciousness that this knowledge exists, but by the mere fact that a child does not know that his parents are his or her parents proves that knowledge cannot be innate or can be only found in the mind.

Locke then suggested that there are two kinds of experiences; one is what he called as external experience. External experience or is what he described as the experience which we can attain knowledge through the use of our five senses; the color, the smell, the motion and etc. of an object can be attributed to this kind of experience[ii]. In other words, sense experience

is about the analysis of the physical characteristics of an object that is in front of you. The other kind of experience is what he calls as the internal experience or called as reflection[iii]; this experience makes us understand or interpret the several characteristics that the external experience have produced; meaning the shape or taste of a an object is interpreted by this second experience. Locke here proposed that there is this cycle from which a certain object or a thought must go before it can be considered as a piece of information, which I truly believe would be the most correct process of understanding a certain object. Unlike what Descartes has been promulgating, Locke has made a logical process of how we could attain knowledge. Descartes has proposed that since our senses deceive us therefore anything that passes through our senses is considered to be doubtful or untrue.

Now let us go to Descartes' God argument. Descartes started by saying that the knowledge of God is again innate in us[iv]. Again we see the problem here in the statement of Descartes. Experience will teach us the moral principles and the background needed to understand and have the knowledge about God. Then how would God be innate in us if experience would be the basis for us to understand and have a notion about God. Our mind during our infancy and early years is what John Locke considered as a clean slate, a tabula rasa, wherein knowledge is added to it by the use of our sense experience and not by mere innate ideas. Moreover if we had this innate idea of God, then why is it that we all have different interpretations of him? Why is it that some people even come to the extent of not believing him or even not considering him as living? God for Descartes seemed to be

the promulgator of all that is true. And for him sense experience is impossible because we can be deceived. So who is doing the deceiving? Descartes then pointed out that there was this being that is responsible for deceiving us by the use of our senses. He called this deceiver as the devil the cause of all the falsity that our senses produce. The thought that the senses can be deceived by the devil gives us the notion that all outside objects and might as well our senses can be controlled by the devil. And by saying this Descartes proves that our sense cannot be trusted but rather, our mind is the most trustworthy attribute. God for me is not an innate object or idea. As same as what Locke has said, our ideas of God varies and therefore we cannot say that there is this universal knowledge about God that is innate in all of us.

Now that was done we shall now go to his second meditation where in we can find his most famous phrase “ Cogito ergo sum” which translates to “ I think, therefore I am”[v]. Using Locke’s empiricist look I shall now ponder on this issue of the cogito. Since John Locke adheres to the idea that the senses are the source of knowledge and nothing else, it could be said that there would no need for a concept of the cogito. By the mere fact that we have a body and we can experience it is enough reason to say that we exist. Sense experience, as said earlier, is the basis for knowledge also it can prove that we exist. We can feel other bodies and other objects therefore it is a proof that we exist and we are not being deceived by any supernatural being. Our sense experience is enough proof that we are alive, we exist beyond reasonable doubt. Doubting the existence of our body is like saying that we do not feel or see or hear anything. We can see, we can feel, we can

experience pain and pleasure by the use of our bodies; therefore doubting it would require us to think that we do not feel anything, we do not feel the pain if our hand is put above fire. For me therefore I completely disagree with his second meditation.

Next we go shall go to his interpretation of the body and the mind and how the mind is more known to us than the body[vi]. Locke argued that the body cannot be unhinged from the concept of the mind; for it is the body which sucks in outside stimuli to force the mind to think; the body therefore is our receptors for knowledge and since it is our first level of experience it can be considered as more known to us than the mind. Locke continued by saying that as we are not always in a pondering state therefore we are not that acquainted with our mind. Our body is a big strainer where in all of the outside stimuli can be felt. Our body is the receptacle of all things which we can feel or experience. Therefore our body is becomes our first contact with the outside world and by the fact that we can consider it as a first, then we could say that we know more about our body than our mind. For example we see a chubby woman running towards a fast food restaurant, isn't our first thought would be her size, her being chubby and not what she thinks? We first think about her physical appearance thus we could know first her appearance, but we cannot deduce what she is thinking; what her mind contains as we see her walking to a restaurant.

Now we go to her third meditation which is about the existence of God[vii]. For me his justification of the existence of God is not that strong and I do not agree with it. If for example I have an idea of a dragon, then that dragon

must be existing in reality; but it does not. So therefore I shall use the <https://assignbuster.com/descartes-and-opposing-other-philosophical-views-philosophy-essay/>

doctrines of St. Thomas on this. God's existence can be proven by his effects, which are all the things that we can see here. The greatest example would be the world. It would be quite impossible for this sphere of land and water just appeared unwilled. Therefore there must be this all powerful being that created the world and its majesty. The effects of God therefore would be a stronger justification rather than saying that if we have an idea of a God or the God therefore we can say that he exists.

Now we can go to the next meditation which involves the existence of material objects[viii]. Descartes in this part of his meditations that we can have knowledge, a correct knowledge, of material objects. Though he did say that this knowledge then must not pass through our senses but by again it should directly be processed in our mind. By the use of Locke, I can say that this proposition cannot be trusted or correct. How would external objects be processed through our minds directly without the use of our senses? This proposition seems to be, for me, an impossible thing to be done. Every material object has several physical characteristics that can only be felt by our senses and if we do not use these senses or if we do not experience these objects then it would be impossible for us to understand them or for our mind to interpret them.

Lastly we shall now go to his last meditation which is the argument of mind and body[ix]. I agree with this part, that the body and the mind are two completely different entities; for the mind function differently from the body. The mind acts upon the by the use of outside stimuli that is received by our senses of the body. Therefore their duties are different from each other; the mind would be to control the bodily functions and interpret what the outside

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stimuli is expressing and the body is the one acted upon by the mind, but is the first to receive stimuli from the outside source.

From my point of view, several meditations that were done by Descartes were simply not logical. His main contention of the mind being the first to receive experience or knowledge is very problematic. It suggests that the senses cannot be trusted, that all that the senses have perceived and the knowledge that has come from them are doubtful even if it is not. As I have said I do not agree with all of the ideas that were given to us by Descartes and I hoped I explained it properly by the use of the examples and by the use of the doctrine of John Locke.