Descartes' concept of primary (self-evident) truth essay sample

Sociology, Ethics

Rene Descartes is one of most well-known French philosophers of the seventeenth century. As most of his contemporaries, Rene Descartes dedicated lots of his time and efforts to studying the way people cognize the world and consideration of different theories related to cognition processes. Descartes is considered to be an author of catch phrase Cogito, ergo sum, which is translated from Latin as " I am thinking, therefore I exist". Despite the fact that the meaning of this phrase can be considered to be quite clear, I would like to make an attempt to challenge Descartes' most famous statement and, therefore, doubt about his cognitive theory.

First of all, let me consider most common considerations, regarding Cogito, ergo sum. People often tend to think that Cogito, ergo sum is a kind of conclusion (it can be also considered an incomplete syllogism, which lacks the second premise or enthymeme). This thesis is confirmed by the fact that the phrase contains one premise (cogito), connective (ergo) and conclusion (sum). According to Smilley (n. d.), we should not consider this statement to be a conclusion. By this statement, Descartes referred to primary truth, which cannot be doubted about. It is worth mentioning that Descartes thought that arranging a new system of views and notions requires doubting the system, which existed before. On the other hand, it is natural that some basis is needed to start the new system. According to Descartes, primary truth, which became the subject of his most famous statement, should serve as a basis for the new system of views and notions, which should substitute existing systems. Primary truth, which can be also called an intuition, is the one, which is cognized instantly and clearly. In other words, this statement is the one, whose opposite is unimaginable. Descartes exemplifies his

consideration by referring to the basic axioms of Euclidean geometry. For instance, we cannot imagine a situation, which will give us a chance to draw more than one straight line from one point to another.

Despite clear argumentation and examples, used by the author, I cannot help mentioning the fact that sometimes it is impossible to distinguish primary truth from notions or views, which are later proved to have been the elements of existing system. For instance, in early Middle Ages people could not imagine lots of things, opposite to their knowledge. They could not have imagined the world to be round; cosmic vehicles, which let people travel to other planets; mobiles phones, which help people stay in touch wherever they are. So, such facts as disc-like form of the globe, impossibility of space travelling and non-existence of technical tools for communication can be considered primary truth for those, who lived thousand years ago, as they could not imagine their opposite. On the other hand, history showed that facts, whose opposite was unimaginable in the past, can be doubted and even disproved in the future.

References

Smilley, Mark " Rene Descartes: Discourse on the method of rightly conducting the reason, and seeking truth in the sciences. Part four to six (Excerpts)" Perspectives in philosophy, n. d. Web 16 February 2013