

Descartes on rationalism assignment

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**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

After much consideration, I have chosen to write this final paper on the topic of rationalism. I will be using Rene Descartes: Meditation on First Philosophy as my only resource. I plan to address each question asked one at a time in order to answer them completely. To understand what Descartes' point of view, I plan on beginning with an open mind. I plan to reread the section and reevaluate the notes taken in class to help formulate my opinion, and then I plan to approach each question and answer it. I will be analyzing Rene Descartes' view on knowledge.

He says that you must rely on the facts from your mind rather than the knowledge obtained through your senses to acquire your knowledge.

Descartes uses “ unshakable” knowledge to form his philosophy. In the Second Meditation, Descartes rids himself of all tangible properties to find if we can trust our own knowledge and to find who ‘ I’ is. This philosophy is classified as epistemology, which is the theory of knowledge, and under this classification there are two subcategories that are important to understand.

Rationalism is the theory that reason is itself a source of knowledge that is better than sense perception. On the other hand is empiricism, which is the theory that all knowledge originates in experience. In empiricism you obtain your knowledge through experiencing events while you gain your knowledge through reasoning or eliminating all other possibilities in rationalism. In order for us to be able to trust the knowledge that we obtain there must be three conditions met: truth, belief, and justification.

By believing the theories presented by rationalism, your reasoning will lead you to believe and trust the knowledge you have obtained. Again, through

rationalism, you eliminate uncertain facts with reasoning and you can justify what you know. I think that to obtain truth, you must use the theories supported by empiricism because people usually believe things to be truer when other people or themselves have experience them. In his Second Meditation, Descartes uses the example of wax to describe how we know certain things. If the wax was heated, it is still the same wax.

To look at this experiment as an empiricist account would leave you confused. When you first look at the wax it “has not yet quite lost the taste of the honey; it retains the scent of the flowers from which it was gathered; its colour, shape, and size are plain to see; it is hard, cold and can be handled without difficulty”. (Page 167) However, once the wax has been heated it no longer smells, it is hot and difficult to handle. With this comparison, I have explained why the ‘wax experiment’ is not a superior empiricist way to explain how we know what we know.

Our senses can be deceived and lead us to know incorrect things. Also, objects can alter their appearance and textures and no longer resemble the object we are trying to acquire knowledge of. To properly understand the wax, you must strip away all of the sense perceptible details and concentrate on only the physical qualities. However, once you are left with the rationalistic account and have stripped all these things away, in the case of the wax, you are left with flexible, changeable, and extendable.

All of the traits cannot be comprehended in the imagination and, therefore, the wax is perceived in the mind alone. Using pure reasoning to reach your knowledge, you have a better chance of not being deceived. There are a few

problems with the concepts of Descartes, some of which I have already touched on, but I will sum them all up in this final paragraph. Trying to acquire knowledge through your senses is not preferred because you are not using the facts.

You allow your imagination to take over and allow yourself to be misled. On the other hand, when you use rationalism you can allow for mental deception. In the case of the wax experiment, “ the perception I have of it is a case not of vision or touch or imagination...but of purely mental scrutiny; and this can be imperfect and confused”. (Page 167) Since our minds can deceive us, going through the wax experiment this way does not guarantee that we will affectively explain who we know certain things.