

Candidate 4 evidence

Philosophy National 5 Resource Sheet			
Candidate Name		Scottish Candidate Number	
Introduction:			
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where does knowledge come from? Different sources of knowledge: <i>innate ideas, rationalism, and empiricism</i> Scepticism threatens these Descartes' opinion – explores in 'Meditations', wants something <i>firm and lasting</i> 		
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Innate ideas definition Leibniz's block of veined marble (metaphor) Criticisms – doesn't provide <i>all</i> knowledge (only abstracts: beauty, justice...) 		
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Empiricism definition (a priori/a posteriori) Strength – gives explanation to why we all have different values John Locke's Tabula Rasa – rejects innate ideas, <i>no man's knowledge goes beyond his experience</i>, adults don't know innates Criticisms – solipsism (subjective), senses, descartes' dream & sense arguments 		
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rationalism definition Strengths – promotes clear thinking, can't deny without contradiction Descartes agrees – wax example & aims Criticisms – simplistic understanding (morality?), subject to doubt (scepticism) 		
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scepticism definition Criticisms – negative outlook, can't engage in meaningful discourse, infinite regress, dead end, burden of evidence Descartes – at first he trusts a priori, but then questions it (evil demon), until finally establishing cogito 		
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Descartes opinion & Cogito conclusion – necessary truth, arose from logical thinking, proving rationalism to be superior 		
Conclusion			
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rationalism has the strongest foundation – backed up by descartes We derive our knowledge from all three combined as they cover all aspects and complement each other. Making it diverse, complex 		

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What is the Ultimate source of Knowledge?

Where does our knowledge come from? This question has intrigued philosophers ever since we have had thoughts, what is our ultimate source of knowledge? There are three main theories: innate ideas, rationalism, and empiricism. However the idea of scepticism does also pose a threat. The great philosopher Descartes explored this question in 'Meditations', aiming to establish something firm and lasting in the sciences, which eventually he does achieve with his cogito conclusion.

The first source of knowledge is innate ideas, this is the belief that we are born knowing certain concepts, for example beauty, justice, or morality. The philosopher Leibniz used the metaphor of a block of veined marble to demonstrate his understanding of this theory. He said that the veins in the marble represent innate ideas, which Leibniz believed came from God; he said that the act of chiselling away at the marble represents experience. The innate ideas need to be 'triggered' by experience, so as, in this case, the experience tries to chip away at the marble, the veins encourage it to take on certain shapes or forms. One criticism of innate ideas could be the fact that it fails to provide an explanation for all knowledge, simply just the more abstract concepts such as beauty, or justice, ect... This is a problem as it means this cannot stand as the ultimate theory of knowledge.

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Another source of knowledge is Empiricism, this is the theory that states all of our knowledge comes from sense experience. There are two types of knowledge that can be mentioned: a priori knowledge is that independent of experience, while a posteriori knowledge is dependant on experience. So empiricist knowledge claims are a posteriori knowledge. One strength of this theory is that as it is very personal, as we all see the world only from our perspective, it provides an explanation to why we all have such different values. The philosopher John Locke was in support of empiricism and rejected innate ideas. He said that instead, we are born knowing nothing. At birth, our minds are a blank slate (a tabula rasa). He believed that no man's knowledge goes beyond his experience. His reasoning was that certain adults don't seem to know the ideas said to be innate, so they mustn't exist. However, no theory is without problems. One criticism of empiricism is the trap of solipsism. As this theory is based entirely on the individual's experience, it makes knowledge claims become subjective. How can any knowledge from sense experience be trusted if it is completely made up by me? This is a problem as it reduces the reliability of knowledge claims based off of empiricism. Another criticism is one of Descartes. He said that as our senses often mislead us, for example when viewing a stick appear bent in water, or when viewing objects at a distance, how can we be sure that they aren't misleading or tricking us at any given moment. The senses

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argument then proves that we cannot trust knowledge from our senses. Then in his Dream argument, Descartes questioned whether or not we can distinguish wakefulness from sleep, and that he has sometimes dreamed that he is awake, by the fire, when in fact he is in bed asleep. This throws all knowledge from experience into doubt and empiricism can be rejected.

(The final source of knowledge is that of rationalism. This theory states that knowledge comes from logic and reason alone. For example, a piece of rationalist knowledge could be $2+2=4$. This is always true no matter what and is an example of a priori knowledge. One strength of this theory is that it promotes clear thinking due to its foundation on logic, and also you cannot deny it without contradiction. Descartes supports this theory which can be made clear through his example of wax. As wax melts, it changes form. Our senses urge us that it is now a different piece of wax, however, by using rationalist thinking, we can conclude it is indeed the same piece of wax as at the start. Also, we can see how Descartes was in favour of this theory through some of his aims, for example he aimed to prove the supremacy of rationalism and to overcome scepticism. However, one criticism of this theory is that it can have a very simplistic understanding when it comes to certain ideas. For example, rationalism cannot fully explain concepts such as morality. Another criticism is that rationalist claims can still be subject to doubt by scepticism.

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Scepticism is the understanding that knowledge is impossible and unattainable. Sceptics believe that nothing can be known beyond doubt. The main problems and criticisms of this belief is that it provides a very negative outlook on life and can mean sceptics are unable to engage with any meaningful discourse. Another problem is the infinite regress argument, this means that our justification will never be satisfactory as we must find evidence to back up the evidence (and so on...) which leads to an eventual sceptical dead end, while also having needed a high burden of evidence.

While exploring the sources and foundations of knowledge, Descartes became overwhelmed by scepticism. At first he is fully trusting of a priori truths, however after questioning the existence of God and whether there was in fact an evil demon deceiving him, he then realised even a priori knowledge could be subject to doubt, however finally he establishes his cogito conclusion.

Descartes supports the rationalist theory and this is made clear by the conclusion to his studies. The conclusion 'I am, I exist', and 'I think, therefore I am' (cogito ergo sum) arose from logical thinking and rationalist reason, it is a necessary truth which means it would be self-contradictory if it were to be false, this all proves Descartes' opinion of the superiority of rationalism.

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To conclude, rationalism seems to have the strongest foundation of knowledge and even the great philosopher Descartes backs this up, meaning that the ultimate source of knowledge must be rationalism. However, I believe that we derive our knowledge from a delicate combination of all three theories combined, as they cover all aspects and complement one another perfectly, this is the reason that our knowledge is so beautifully complex and diverse.