THE ARCHITECTURE OF KNOWLEDGE: ON THE PROBLEM OF EPISTEMIC REGRESS AND DESCARTES' VIEWS ON FOUNDATIONALISM*

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Abstract

Beliefs are often accepted on the basis of certain reasons. For a belief to attain the status of knowledge, it must be justified by these reasons. This entails inquiring into the reasons behind the reasons. Under such circumstances, facing the risk of infinite regress is inevitable. What form should the causal structure take to attribute the status of knowledge to beliefs be? Is it possible that the regress of reasons ends at a certain point when it comes to the justification of a belief? The foundationalist perspective asserts that the regress can be stopped. Foundationalism asserts that there are basic beliefs that hold a privileged status. Basic beliefs provide a solution to the problem of infinite regress.

In this study, the problem of epistemic regress will be examined. In addition, the main propositions of the foundationalism will be analysed and Descartes' central role in the attempt to solve this problem will be revealed.

Keywords: Knowledge, Descartes, Epistemic Regress Problem, Reason, Foundationalism

BİLGİNİN MİMARİSİ: EPİSTEMİK GERİLEME SORUNU VE DESCARTES'IN TEMELCİLİĞE DAİR GÖRÜŞLERİ ÜZERİNE

Öz

İnançlar çoğu zaman bazı nedenlere dayanarak kabul edilir. Bir inancın bilgi statüsünü edinmesi, sözü edilen nedenlerin temellendirilmesiyle mümkün olur. Bu nedenlerin nedenini sorgulamak anlamına gelir. Böyle bir durumda kişinin sonsuz bir gerileme tehlikesi ile karşı karşıya kalması kaçınılmazdır. İnançlara bilgi statüsü kazandıracak nedensel dizge ne tür bir yapıda olmalıdır? Bir inancın gerekçelendirilmesi söz konusu olduğu zaman nedenlerin gerilemesi bir noktada sonlanabilir mi? Temelciliğin bu soruya

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cevabı evettir. Temelcilik, birtakım ayrıcalıklara sahip temel inançlar olduğunu öne sürer. Sonsuz bir gerileme tehlikesi bu inançlarda son bulur.

Bu çalışmada epistemik gerileme sorunu açımlanacak, Descartes'ın bu probleme dair bir çözüm denemesinin nasıl merkezinde olduğu, temelciliğin ana tezlerine de odaklanılarak ortaya konulacaktır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Bilgi, Descartes, Epistemik Gerileme Sorunu, Neden, Temelcilik

The Epistemic Regress Problem and Foundationalism

The field of epistemology is concerned with defining knowledge, investigating its sources, limits, and nature. In addition to these epistemic statuses, the architectural structure of knowledge is also part of the discipline of epistemology. The regress problem is also linked to the structure of knowledge. To understand this problem related to the structure of knowledge, we need to clarify its connection to reasons.

In the case of propositions that we claim to know, we rely on these propositions for certain reasons. To illustrate this further, let us consider a proposition in which we assert our knowledge of a particular subject in relation to the interlocutor. In this case, our interlocutor might ask us, "How do you know?" Our interlocutor may demand a justification from us, which is essentially a request for rationality. Therefore, if we want to claim that we know something in the presence of an interlocutor, we need to convince the interlocutor by expressing ourselves through reasons, and we need to present our justifications.[2] In such cases, a problem emerges concerning the structure of reasons, and thus the architecture of knowledge. The primary aim of this paper is to clarify this problem.

To illustrate this problem more clearly, suppose that you present a proposition that you believe you know to an interlocutor. Your interlocutor's response is likely to be to ask for the reasons that support your belief (Fumerton, 2006: 2). In fact, every time you offer reasons, he/she will ask you to provide evidence for those reasons as

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[2] The term persuasion in the sentence should not be understood as attempting to convince the interlocutor in any manner. Instead, it should be understood as fulfilling the interlocutor's demand for rational justification. This satisfaction is only possible by giving good reasons. For instance, when we make a claim such as "It will rain tomorrow", the natural response will be to ask for justification of this claim. In this case, between the reasons, "The weather forecast says it will be like this" and "I hope it will be like this", the first one will be the more convincing one. It can then be said that the first is a better reason and more convincing than the second. Justification, in this sense, depends on the availability of such well-supported reasons.

well. This is because to be justified, one's belief must be based on an appropriate reason or foundation (Leite, 2005: 397-399). In this case, you can begin to give reasons for your belief. First, you can try to support your belief with a proposition. However, this supporting proposition will only be accepted if there is evidence or justification or support for it (Cling, 2009: 335). Audi refers to this structure, in which beliefs support each other and each one is connected to the previous one, and which claims to create knowledge in some way, an "epistemic chain" (Gültekin, 2014: 48). Each proposition in the chain must be supported. However, it is impossible to satisfy such a requirement. If support is required for every proposition in the chain, there will be an infinite regress, and thus the chain cannot be completed in any way. In such a case, no belief can be evidentially supported (Cling, 2009: 335). It is impossible to stop the regress of causes in such a situation. The conclusion that follows from these explanations is as follows: Subject S believes a proposition like "p" only when there are reasons such as "p1", "p2", "p3" that support the proposition "p". Thus, if these propositions do not provide evidence for "p", subject S cannot believe this proposition. This is a very reasonable idea (Cling, 2009: 334). However, in order to have knowledge, our supports also must also be supported. For reasons such as "p1", "p2", "p3" to confer the status of knowledge on a belief, these reasons must also be supported, and attempting to seek support for each of the supports in the epistemic chain in order to believe allows for the risk of an infinite regress. Seeking the justification for these reasons means asking why the reason for the reason, and it is not clear at what point this confers the status of knowledge upon a belief. The questioning of the reason for the reason, the attempt to find a basis for every support, is an obstacle to building a reasonable structure. The risk of regress is on the horizon, waiting to descend like a shadow. In the situation we have roughly outlined, the problem lies in determining at which point the regress of reasons, which provide justification for a belief and confer it the status of knowledge, can be stopped.

One may persistently attempt to answer the question "How do we know?" Reasons can be put forward. But each time a reason is presented, it is possible to encounter a new demand for a new reason. The series of reasons may continue indefinitely. This means leading to the risk of an infinite regress. How to meet this demand in the face of this structural problem, which we see traces of in Aristotle and is also known as Agrippa's trilemma, is known as the problem of epistemic regress. Attempting to satisfy this demand is extremely challenging, and the only available options are to choose between three seemingly unreasonable alternatives. What kind of a causal

structure should beliefs possess to give them the status of knowledge? This demand can be met in three ways. The structure is either finite, infinite, or circular. In general terms, the problem of infinite regress is how to satisfy this demand. Otherwise, the answer to the question "How do we know?" would have to be "We don't know", which would be unacceptable.

The first respond to this question is that the reasoning system can extend infinitely. This approach is also known as infinitism[3] in epistemology. Infinitism is rest on the assumption that an infinite number of reasons can be within a reasoning system, regardless of the interlocutor's persistence, and that it is not necessary for the reasoning to terminate at any point. A second response to the threat of an infinite regress is to argue that there are initiating beliefs underlying the causal sequence that are independent of any other belief. These beliefs are intended to prevent the possibility of regress. There are certain primary beliefs, and the reasons in the reasoning system is ultimately grounded in them. Because of these foundations, there will be no further regress. Because these foundations respond to the need to justify the cause of the cause. The inquiry terminates when it reaches these beliefs. In epistemology, this option is known as foundationalism.[4] The third response to the problem of regress, which constitutes another branch of the epistemological trilemma, is known as coherentism. According to coherentists, there is no basic set of beliefs. It is not the case that one belief is superior to another or that some beliefs are privileged. The set of reasons does not form a structure in which there is a one-way support relationship based on a few privileged beliefs. Instead, it is a structure of mutual support determined by "all" of the beliefs held by the subject. Brand

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[3] An example of a proponent of the infinitism view is Scott F. Aikin. Although Aikin acknowledges that infinitism is difficult to defend, he underscores that this view aims to provide it with a legitimate place in the debate. In this option, there are no ultimate questions in the causal scheme, and in fact the view claims that it is possible to satisfy the demands of the persistent interlocutor indefinitely. To assert that providing is not possible is, in fact, a mere illusion (Aikin, 2011: 1-8). Prominent supporters of infinitism include Peter Klein (1999) and Jeremy Fantl (2003).

[4] J. Pollock and J. Cruz (1999) emphasize that examples of foundationalist theories can be found in Rudolph Carnap, C. I. Lewis, Nelson Goodman, Roderick Chisholm, Pollock and Paul Moser. Steup (1996) sees Descartes, Bertrand Russell, Moritz Schlick, and A. J. Ayer as defenders of foundationalism. According to him, in addition to these names, C. I. Lewis put forward a foundationalist argument in his works. Among contemporary philosophers, Audi, Chisholm, Foley and Moser defended foundationalism with their works in the 1900s.

Blanshard, Otto Neurath, Keith Lehrer, Laurence Bonjour and Wilfred Sellars are some of the prominent thinkers on coherentism in epistemology.

Considering the scope of this paper, we can now return to the option of foundationalism. When justifying a belief, can the regress of reasons be stopped at some point? In the face of the problem, the theory that asserts that structure is finite appears as foundationalism. A question that can be asked in this context is: "Should all our beliefs be supported by other beliefs? Are some beliefs believed without a supporting relationship? What is the proper support relation between beliefs? (Poston, 2014)" The foundationalist theory aims to overcome the problem of infinite regress, especially in relation to the question of whether all the above beliefs need to be supported or not, with a structure in which some beliefs are not dependent on other beliefs, and some beliefs are considered basic, without needing any support. Some beliefs are basic and they do not need the support of other beliefs. The question then is what it means for a belief to be basic. The foundationalist conception of basic beliefs can be characterized as follows: In the justification of beliefs, or for a belief to acquire the status of knowledge, at the top of the set of reasons is a belief that provides support for all reasons but does not itself need any support. These beliefs, which do not need any support while supporting other beliefs, are basic beliefs. These beliefs are considered as the initiating point for other forms of beliefs, in other words, they are the support points that provide the basis for justification (Pollock & Cruz, 1999: 29; Swinburne, 2001: 134).

In the explanation of foundationalism, various analogies are made regarding the structure of reasons. These analogies are significant for understanding foundationalism and the supporting relationship of basic beliefs. For example, the fact that this structure is like a chain, that it is similar to the structure of a house, or that this structure is in the form of a pyramid are different examples of efforts to reveal the structure problem. In the case of the chain, the chain has a starting point, which, like the basic belief, points to the initiating step. It is itself the foundation without the need for any support. The "house analogy" is similar to the chain example. Just as every house has a foundation, so some foundations that constitute knowledge must also be recognized. Obviously, it is not reasonable to think of a house without a foundation. Ernest Sosa characterizes this structure as a "pyramid". Basic beliefs are found at the bottom of the pyramid as the foundation without needing any support (Sosa, 1980: 5; Pritchard, 2014: 32; Öztürk, 2014: 45,49). In relation to the structure of knowledge, it is useful to focus on the "pyramid analogy" in order to make the structure clearer. One of the best-known metaphors of the causal

system is the pyramid model, which claims that the structure is not symmetrical. According to this model, the causal system has a non-symmetrical structure, and this structure can be likened to a pyramid. In pyramids, the base provides support for the mass at the top, but the base does not need a foundation, as in the building of a house. In a sense, this base acts as a foundation. In the case of the knowledge structure, just like the base of the pyramids, the causal structure has "core beliefs" at its base, and these core beliefs do not need any support. These foundations do not seek support and provide support for the beliefs on top of the structure. Obviously, these foundations are the privileged class of the causal structure. Because a group of beliefs that can provide support without needing support itself is in a privileged position, at least in the sense that it does not need support (Sosa, 1980: 5). Thus, how should the role of these privileged beliefs be understood?

As mentioned above that when we tell an interlocutor that we know something in a situation in the context of a proposition, the first question we are likely to face is why we believe what we believe. In response to this question, it is clear that we will attempt to provide reasons for what we claim to have knowledge of, to justify our belief. In such a case, we try to make a justification by putting forward reasons. But how will this attempt at justification work? Foundationalists tend to make this attempt based on a set of basic beliefs. The set of reasons ultimately culminates in a set of basic beliefs, and in this way, knowledge is grounded by providing justification from basic beliefs to other beliefs, in other words, through a one-way support relationship. Here, the core beliefs in the pyramid provide support to the beliefs at the top by fulfilling the task of providing justification.

It is now necessary to make a distinction between core beliefs and supported beliefs. In foundationalist theory, the beliefs to which basic beliefs provide a support relationship, i.e. supported beliefs, are treated as "non-foundational beliefs". Foundationalists distinguish between basic beliefs and non-basic beliefs and think that the set of reasons is jointly structured through these beliefs. Basic beliefs provide grounds for non-basic beliefs, while they themselves do not need any grounds. These beliefs are at the very top of the set of reasons and provide a support for all other beliefs.

It is to note that basic beliefs have an epistemic privilege. This privileged status refers to having a property that ordinary beliefs lack. Non-inferential beliefs in the foundations are somehow self-justified and therefore have the status of being basic beliefs (Pollock and Cruz, 1999: 33). Being self-justified is one of the features that

make basic beliefs privileged. Basic beliefs that are somehow self-justified justify all other beliefs inferentially (Öztürk, 2014: 49).

Foundationalists consider certain beliefs as privileged in the causal system. Such beliefs are called basic beliefs. So which group of beliefs are basic? Ordinary perceptual beliefs do not have the specific privileges we have mentioned above. For example, it has been experienced that ordinary perceptual beliefs can be false many times. This is obvious when considering physical situations. For example, when a white shirt is seen in a red light, one can form the belief that the shirt is red. For this reason, strong foundationalists do not accept the source of perceptual beliefs in support of basic beliefs (Pollock and Cruz 1999: 30). Foundationalists still do not exclude perception, but they revise their system to exclude beliefs about physical objects. In perception, there are sensory experiences. Sensory experiences are the source for the subject to have beliefs about the physical environment. In this framework, the following question is asked: I may be wrong about the environment, but could I be wrong about the character of my sensory experiences (Pollock and Cruz, 1999: 31)?

 We can think of this in terms of these two statements: "something is ...." is different from "something appears to me as ...". The latter refers to the character of our sense experiences, and it does not seem obvious that we can be wrong about such statements. In other words, stating that something is a certain way is different from stating that it appears a certain way to me. While it is possible to be mistaken about the nature of something, it is emphasized that under normal circumstances, it is difficult to be mistaken about how something appears to me. Therefore, such beliefs can be regarded as basic beliefs and, furthermore, beliefs about objects are indirectly supported by inferences from our sensory experiences (Pollock and Cruz, 1999: 31).

The foundationalist theory, which was derived in order to prevent regress in contemporary epistemology, differs in terms of the characteristics of basic beliefs and is basically divided into two as "Classical Foundationalism" and "Moderate Foundationalism". Classical (strong) foundationalism, as in the case of Descartes, accepts beliefs that are self-evident, unquestionable and infallible as examples of basic beliefs. Such necessary truths are also considered basic beliefs. Basic beliefs are attributed properties such as infallibility, unquestionability, self-evident, and non-revisability. In other words, the status of a belief as a basic belief depends on its possession of these properties. An example of a belief that cannot be revised is mathematical truths. It is impossible for mathematical truths to be false because they

are necessary truths (Pollock & Cruz, 1999: 34). Beliefs with the aforementioned characteristics can only be basic beliefs. A causal system formed by accepting beliefs that have the opposite properties as basic is doomed to collapse: For instance, if the causal system has a ground for doubt, or if the beliefs that are initially accepted as basic are fallible, the causal system will collapse. In such a case, it is challenging difficult to say that the structure of knowledge is robust. Traditional -strong- foundationalism differs from moderate foundationalism in this respect. Because for moderate foundationalists, basic beliefs are fallible and can be corrected and revised (Öztürk, 2014: 50; Gültekin, 2014: 50).

Having clarified what foundationalism is, the distinction between basic and non-basic beliefs, and the characteristics of strong and moderate foundationalism, it is possible to demonstrate how these ideas are reflected in Descartes' epistemology. It is significant to illustrate the traces of this in Descartes' epistemology in order to show how he could be positioned in a strong foundationalist position. At the same time, Descartes' position serves as a basis for foundationalism. Considering that foundationalism is built on this basis, Descartes' thoughts on this issue are very important.

Descartes and Foundationalism

Descartes is considered as a key figure in the development of foundationalism. Within epistemology, Descartes is interpreted as a strict rationalist. His ideas about the architectural structure of knowledge, as a result of this rationalist attitude, led him to take a strong foundationalist position. Descartes' reflections about the structure of knowledge are explored in detail in his *Meditations*. In the *first meditation*, he argues that knowledge must be based on solid foundations (Descartes, 2017: 15).

Initially, when it comes to knowledge, he examines the source of sensations. He emphasizes that the role of sensation is significant among the things he has had knowledge of so far and refers to situations in which he has knowledge as a result of the source of sensation. However, sensations can deceive individuals in various cases. Similarly, Descartes was deceived on at least one occasion in a situation where he made use of these senses. This is why he first scrutinized the reliability of the senses. Because people think that one obtains knowledge about the external world directly from sensations. However, even though we think we have knowledge through sensation, sensations are misleading. The system of knowledge derived from sensation is unreliable. One should not fully trust what is obtained from sensations

or the information provided by sensation. If there is even one case of deception, the reliability the sensory faculty should be approached with skepticism. Descartes asserts: All that I have hitherto regarded as most true and reliable I have learned from or through the senses; occasionally I have experienced that these senses are deceptive, so it is a matter of prudence never to trust completely in things that have deceived us once (Descartes, 2017: 16).

Therefore, the fact that the knowledge acquired through an unreliable faculty, in other words, the knowledge originating from the senses, is inherently doubtful prevents the structure of knowledge from being established on a solid ground. Since a system built on unreliable foundations is doubtful and lacks certainty, the subject must be built from the ground up. Descartes emphasizes that he starts all over again in order to establish a solid structure for knowledge. First, he draws a boundary to knowledge. According to him, nothing that is clearly false, doubtful, or suspicious should not be included in the string of knowledge (Descartes, 2017: 15-16). In this case, doubt is a method in the process of acquiring knowledge. In other words, doubt is the method to distinguish between knowledge and non-knowledge. With his method, Descartes also determined the path to be followed for knowledge. He decides to exclude any beliefs he doubts from this structure. He starts looking for the ground where he cannot doubt and where he can build the architecture of knowledge. The entire belief system must be questioned from beginning to end. The structure of knowledge must be reconsidered. If what is built on unreliable foundations can be doubted, then a "starting point", a way out must be found. At the same time, if that point of departure is both free from doubt and certain, then knowledge will be firmly established.

After arguing that what is obtained through sensation does not have the status of knowledge, Descartes continues his process of doubt by examining the states of asleep and awake. According to him, being seated at a table by a fire, having a body and hands, being clothed, and many other such things are accepted as undeniably, unquestionably known. To think otherwise, or to say that these are not knowledge, is madness. However, a person can experience in their sleep everything that a madman can imagine in his waking life, and even more. Therefore, a clear distinction must be made between asleep and awake. The individual must be awake and consciously aware of this state of awake. However, there is no clear criterion that would make such an awareness - the awareness between asleep and awake - possible (Descartes, 2017: 16). Since there is no such criterion, nothing explicitly recognized as true through experience can be granted the status of knowledge. As clearly stated

above, Descartes regards even our judgments about our current experiences as doubtful. For example, even a proposition such as "I am holding this pen", which the subject thinks he knows easily through experience, he cannot say that he knows because he cannot distinguish between the asleep and awake. Such an experience cannot gain the status of knowledge as it cannot be excluded from doubt.

Although everything appears to be open to doubt, there is one domain that seems beyond it. Descartes presents this field as mathematics. According to him, two plus three will always equal five, whether asleep or awake. It does not seem possible to doubt that such truths are false and far from certain (Descartes, 2017: 17). But what if there is a deceiving God? Deception is incompatible with the nature of God. He then asks us to imagine an evil demon instead. What if an evil demon is deceiving mankind? If an evil demon wants one to be deceived, then the subject will be wrong every time he adds two and three, every time he counts the sides of a square (Descartes, 2017: 17-18). All propositions that can be considered foundational to knowledge are under serious threat, given these three different arguments of Descartes.

It is precisely at this point that Descartes makes his first determination that cannot be doubted. If something, whatever its name, deceives, as long as it is thought, the existence of the subject is undeniable a foundation that cannot be doubted. No matter how much the deceiver deceives, as long as the subject thinks it is something, the deceiver will not be able to prevent that it is not something (Descartes, 2017: 21). Descartes has now pushed the process of doubt to its extreme. A point beyond doubt has been reached. This point is the foundation from which all other knowledge will stem. Descartes made the first basic determination for knowledge through the "thinking subject". "There is a subject who thinks that there is something." This proposition, independent of what the senses provide, of experiences deemed obviously true, and of the truths of mathematics, represents a foundation that is beyond doubt in Descartes' system. Cottingham highlights this crucial point in the following words: Having carried this method of skepticism to its extreme, Descartes now realizes that there is at least a truth - a solid and immovable point - which even the most advanced skepticism cannot touch (Cottingham, 2003: 47).

By focusing one's attention on direct consciousness, in other words, through a process of meditation, skeptical objections are initially put aside. According to Descartes, it must also be accepted that this foundation, free from possible skeptical objections and beyond doubt, is necessarily true. Descartes states that one must

accept that the proposition "I exist" as always true, after thinking and analysing everything in depth. That is, every time one thinks or expresses this thought, one must recognize it as necessarily true, realize that it is an immutable truth and ultimately accept it (Descartes, 2017: 21). Descartes' Cogito, which he sees as the starting point, is fundamental, fundamental because it is not inferential. Cogito alone suffices to place Descartes within the foundationalist theory. However, further exploration is necessary to clarify the foundationalist theory.

In Descartes' theory of knowledge, the knowledge that is established as the starting point, the knowledge at the ground of the system, is a certain, indubitable knowledge. Moreover, this knowledge is also clear without relying on other knowledge: Descartes argues that I am therefore ... a thinking thing, ... and that this idea and knowledge of myself that I have acquired in such a distinct way does not depend on things whose existence is still unknown to me, as he claims (Descartes, 2017: 23). This, as a thinking being, forms the basis of all clear and distinct knowledge (Çüçen, 2001: 89). The knowledge system is built on this foundation; in other words, knowledge is constructed on this foundation.

In addition to the *Cogito,* Descartes considers his knowledge of the contents of the mind as an indubitable foundation. In Descartes' framework, these contents, referred to as *innate* ideas, serve as examples of basic belief. These ideas are innate, inherent in human beings. The understanding of these ideas, which are not acquired through the senses or experience, is intuitive. Intuition is non-inferential, and since these ideas are not inferential, they do not require any external grounding. For the thinking subject, these ideas are immediately grasped. Several questions must then be raised. For instance, what are *innate* ideas? How are innate ideas justified? How are these ideas the source of other propositions? These questions must be answered in order to reveal basic beliefs.

The first indication of ideas that appear innate, without any empirical experience, can be found in the first meditation. This category includes "mathematical truths". While sciences such as physics, astronomy and medicine are considered doubtful and therefore distant from certainty, arithmetic, and geometry, which deal with very simple and general concepts, are considered to contain certain and indubitable, regardless of whether they occur in nature (Descartes, 2017: 20). The sum of two and two is four, or that any quadrilateral is quadrilateral, are things that can be grasped clearly and distinctly. It seems unreasonable to think that they lack certainty or to doubt them. Descartes continues these reflections in the subsequent sections.

When considering something so simple as arithmetic and geometry, he questions whether he can grasp them clearly and distinctly enough to be at least true, and he explains that he doubts this, thinking that God may have given him the possibility of being mistaken even in things he considers clear and beyond doubt. But even when he thinks this, he says that he is certain of the truth of what he thinks he has clearly grasped. In his own words: "… let anyone who can do so deceive me, he will never bring it about that I am nothing, as long as I continue to think I am something; nor can he make it true at some future time that I have never existed, since it is now true that I exist; or bring it about that two and three added together are more or less than five, or anything of this kind in which I see a manifest contradiction. And since I have no cause to think that there is a deceiving God, and I do not yet even know for sure whether there is a God at all, any reason for doubt based simply on this supposition is a very slight and, so to speak, metaphysical (Descartes, 2017: 29-30)."

When we look at the third meditation, Descartes establishes a rule for truth. This is about clarity and distinctness. In the third meditation, in addition to clarity and distinctness, there is an expansion of the system of knowledge. In other words, this meditation tries to make the structure of knowledge explicit. The *cogito is an innate* idea, and clarity and distinctness are its essential characteristic, not separate from it: "I am certain that I am a thinking thing. Do I not therefore also know what is required for my being certain about anything? In this initial item of knowledge there is simply a clear and distinct perception of what I am asserting; this alone would not be sufficient to make me certain of its truth of the matter if it could ever turn out that something which I perceived with such clarity and distinctness was false. Therefore, I now seem to be able to establish a general rule that whatever I perceive very clearly and distinctly is true (Descartes, 2017: 28-29)."

Descartes finds the way to be sure of something is to be clear and distinct. Something that is clearly and distinctly grasped is taken as "true". In this case, it can be said that the underlying beliefs, in other words, the basic beliefs, are those that can be clearly and distinctly grasped. Once these beliefs are identified, Descartes hints at the process of meditation: He states that in order to have the opportunity to examine, without disturbing the order of meditation, which consists in starting from the first ideas that one encounters in the mind and proceeding step by step to what one finds later, one should divide one's thoughts into certain types and examine which of these types contain truth or falsity in the true sense (Descartes, 2017: 30).

It is clear that the causal system is constructed starting from ideas that are clear and distinct true. In explaining his system, Descartes distinguishes between the elements within the structure. "Ideas", are concepts of objects in the mind. "volitions, emotions and judgments" are states that arise in response to desired and feared situations. Of these states, ideas, which are at the basis of knowledge, have certain characteristics. For example, they cannot be wrong, none is truer than another, they are infallible. Some of them are innate. But where does the truth of these ideas come from? Descartes thinks that the truth of these ideas comes from "natural light". This is also the ability to distinguish right from wrong (Descartes, 2017: 37-40). These ideas, which are grasped with the ability to distinguish truth from falsity, must now be determined. Descartes identifies substance -thinking and extension, shape, position and number, duration and movement as ideas (Descartes, 2017: 36). In addition to these ideas, he identifies one more idea, which is actually above all other ideas. It is the "God-idea". He reveals what he understands by the idea of God as follows: By the name of God, I mean an unlimited, eternal, independent, supremely intelligent, supremely powerful being and everything else by whose action I and all other existing things (if it is true that such things exist) are created and brought into being (Descartes, 2017: 36).

The source of these ideas is God. This, in fact, clearly points to the existence of God. Descartes' explanation makes this situation easier to understand: " It is true that I have the idea of substance in me by virtue of the fact that I am a substance; but this would not account for my having the idea of an infinite substance, when I am finite, unless this idea proceeded from some substance which really was infinite (Descartes, 2017: 36)."

Clearly, the subject has an idea of infinity. Although humans are not an infinite being and there are no infinite phenomena in their experiences as infinite, he has an idea of such a concept. Given that the subject is finite, how can they have this idea of infinity? It is God who has placed this idea in the subject's mind. In other words, God is the guarantor of this idea.

At the foundation of the structure of knowledge, the initial elements that provide support, namely, the fundamental principles that establish the foundation, are grasped through natural light. This observation offers insight into foundationalism. The subject's clear and distinct understanding of the basic beliefs is direct and unmediated. Nothing else is needed to justify these elements. Through an intuitive grasp, also referred to as natural light, the subject does not doubt them. Since these

indubitable truths directly apprehended by the mind, they do not rely on the support of other beliefs. Roughly up to this point we have answered the questions of what *innate* ideas are and how *innate* ideas are justified.

Another question that must be addressed is how inferential beliefs are derived from non-inferential basic beliefs. The process by which one moves from non-inferential basic beliefs to other beliefs is "deduction". The subject deduces non-foundational propositions from a set of clear and distinct foundations.

There are criticism of Descartes' foundationalist epistemology. For instance, when he constructs his epistemological system, for example, he begins with the exclusion of sensations. Because, according to him, sensations have misled us many times so far, therefore, if knowledge is to be obtained, the subject must be freed from sensations. According to Cottingham, while sensory perceptions may indeed be susceptible to deception, there is an important issue that warrants further attention (Cottingham, 2003: 48-49). This is that sensations, even if they work extremely well, are not intrinsically reliable in obtaining knowledge. To support this claim, Cottingham references Descartes discussion of the wax example. ... what is it in this wax that is apprehended with such distinctness? Certainly, none of the properties that we attain through the senses (Cottingham, 2003: 49).

As illustrated by the example of wax, its taste, smell and colour -anything that can be perceived through the senses- do not reveal its essence. Its essence is what remains of the wax, its 'substance' or 'extension'. Thus, the essence of wax can only be grasped by the faculty of cognition, not by the faculties of "sense" or "imagination". Cottingham justifies this explanation as follows: Wax is a diffuse entity with length, breadth, and depth. It can take on an indefinite number of geometric shapes. We cannot perceive this by sense or imagination because we can conceive of wax can take on a shape that we cannot even imagine. It is possible to think that it can take on a shape that we have not yet experienced. Then this is something to be grasped with faculty of understanding (Cottingham, 2003:49).

Through the example of wax, Descartes emphasizes the importance of the faculty of understanding rather than sensation or imagination, as a means of acquiring knowledge. Although sensations seem to play an important role in the subject's interaction with the external world, for Descartes, the essence of the sensible is grasped beyond sensation, through the faculty of understanding. Knowledge of what is be grasped -clear and distinct perceptions- is attained through the faculty of understanding, which is granted to us by a benevolent God. These clear and distinct

perceptions are not those provided by the senses, but rather the perceptions we form when we think about mathematical propositions, which are purely cognitive (Cottingham, 2003: 50). What we grasp clearly and distinctly forms only the foundation of knowledge.

Cottingham argues that Cartesian philosopher must set aside everything previously accepted and build a system based on clear and distinct perceptions. The subject proceeds from the knowledge of its own existence to the knowledge of an undeceiving God. However, to prove the existence of God, one must begin with certain axioms. But how can we be certain that these axioms are true? Descartes believes that we grasp them clearly and distinctly. However, Cottingham presents this point as the beginning of what is known in the literature as the " Cartesian Circle". This circle can be explained as follows: Perceptions claimed to be clear and distinct may guarantee of axioms, but how can we trust these perceptions (Cottingham, 2003: 52)? What guarantees of these clear and distinct perceptions? Once God is proven, he may then be the guarantor of our clear and distinct perceptions. However, it is problematic to rely on a set of unreliable perceptions to prove God's existence.

In response to this circle, Cottingham argues that Descartes asserts there are certain propositions that are intrinsically reliable: "Two and two make four" and "I think, therefore I am" do not require God's guarantees to be reliable. These are the types of propositions that are understood simply and directly (Cottingham, 2003: 53). Building on the above statements, Descartes provides examples of basic beliefs. For example, the proposition "I think, therefore I am" serves an example of a basic belief that is reliable, clear and distinct. This also demonstrates that these propositions are independent of any external support.

Conclusion

The structure adopted for knowledge - particularly the criteria for elevating belief to knowledge - depends on the stance one takes in answering the question 'How do we know? The possible answers include that the structure may be finite, infinite or circular. At this point, foundationalist theory argues that the structure is finite. The problem of regress is resolved in basic beliefs that are privileged. Descartes' *cogito*, which he considers basic, is positioned as an "Archimedean point" at the base of the system of causes that seems to be grasped by direct intuition rather than by sense or experience, and whose essence is thought, free from doubt. This point, which is directly grasped and not based on any proposition, is considered foundational and

forms the basis of Descartes' epistemology, as it does not carry any inferential properties. This point itself, which constitutes the foundation of Cartesian epistemology, is sufficient to place Descartes within foundationalist theory.

As it is evident that Descartes identified basic beliefs as the foundation of knowledge. When tracing foundationalism in the history of philosophy, it is accurate to position Descartes here. The reason for focusing on Descartes' foundationalism is that a formulation of strong foundationalism can be traced in his system. There are several important clues in Descartes' system, particularly regarding the nature of basic beliefs. The fact that basic beliefs are exempt from justification and are infallible are key examples of these clues.

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