

# Certainty of Descartes '*Cogito*

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Title of the Seminar Paper :  
**Certainty of Descartes '*Cogito***

## Rene Descartes

- Lived **1596-1650**
- Often described as the "father of modern philosophy "
- Well known as a mathematician



**René Descartes**  
(1596 - 1650)

"The Father of  
Modern Philosophy"

# Descartes' Project

As a young man he was first and foremost a mathematician and, based on his own mathematical experience, Descartes developed a practical method of investigation and general problem solving. Towards the Middle of his life he tried to unveil the philosophy of his project.

# Certainty of Descartes' *Cogito*

- First, because of his single-minded search for method in all branches of human enquiry
- Second, because he introduced into philosophy, largely on account of that search, many of the concepts and arguments which have since served as its foundation.

# KEY QUESTIONS

- What is the *cogito*, a proposition or an argument or a bit of both? How does Descartes derive it?
- How certain or indubitable is the *cogito* itself? Is the *cogito* valid?
- What is so special about the *cogito*?
- Why is Descartes generally regarded as 'the father of modern philosophy', and what was his influence in shaping the modern world view?
- How did Descartes protect Western Philosophy from Scholasticism and Medieval Christian thought?

# The Medieval Thought :

## Descartes and Scholasticism

- Scholasticism was the determinative attitude of the whole Middle Ages. It was the methodological explanation of Christian doctrine.
- The term was derived from "School" and meant ""School Philosophy" \_\_\_\_ philosophy as it was treated in the school.

# THE MODERN TURN

- After the breakdown of Scholasticism, Western Philosophy assumed the modern Outlook.
- Descartes attacked the principle of authority and advocated that if the truth was to be realised, it was not the faith, but the spirit of free inquiry that had to ultimately prevail. He consecrated "reason" as the life blood of philosophy.
- Descartes changed our conception of the world and Western Philosophy get a new Outlook.

# Descartes' Meditations

- The meditations is written like a guidebook meant to help any Pilgrim blessed with common sense to arrive at the most fundamental philosophical truths. So this also makes it a good introduction to his philosophical system.
- Descartes believed that if he could eliminate errors in his thinking and discover sound principles for acquiring true beliefs then this would provide a bedrock on which the edifice of scientific understanding of the world and our place within it could be built.

# Descartes' Analogy

- If you are worried about rotten apples in a barrel you will be well advised to tip out all the apples and examine each one before you replace it in the barrel. Only if you are certain that the apple you are considering is sound should you put it back in the barrel, since a single rotten apple could contaminate all the others.
- This analogy explains his method of radical doubt, often known as the Method of Cartesian Doubt.

# CARTESIAN DOUBT

- **Doubt as a Tool**
- Descartes is not a sceptic. For him, doubt is only a means. It is not an end in itself. It is a means both philosophical and psychological way. Descartes advocates doubting as an art. This art free us from the influence of the senses.

# THE COGITO

The certainty which Descartes discovers, the turning point in his philosophy, has come to be known as the *Cogito*, from the Latin *Cogito ergo sum* ( English phrase : 'I think, therefore I am'), although it doesn't occur in the *Meditations* in quite this form. In the *Meditations* he says '*I am, I exist*, is necessarily true, every time I express it or conceive of it in my mind '.

This insight is often referred to among philosophers as "the cogito "

' I think, therefore I am '-----[*Discourse on Method*]

'I think, I am '-----[ *Meditations on First Philosophy* ]

### **KEY QUESTION**

Is the *Cogito* an intuition or an inference ?

# Conclusion

- The most important contribution of Rene Descartes in the history of philosophy is his *cogito*. In the same way, however, the *cogito* has also been the most critical problem of his philosophy.
- In conclusion, we have examined the role that Descartes's claim to certainty of his thought and existence plays in his philosophy and the philosophical issues that are raised by his claim.

# Thank you

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