



COGITO ERGO SUM: EXPLORATION OF RATIONALISM AND CERTAINTY IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE

Abstract: This research conducts an in-depth exploration of Rene Descartes's famous statement "Cogito ergo sum", with a focus on aspects of rationalism and certainty in the construction of knowledge. The research question underlying this study is to what extent cogito ergo sum is the basis for understanding the relationship between rationalism and certainty, and how this concept shapes the paradigm of human knowledge this research to uncover the hidden philosophical meaning in the statement cogito ergo sum, identify its conceptual implications, and explore its impact on human understanding of knowledge. The research method used is a literature review with philosophical analysis, and text analysis to explore the philosophical meaning of Cogito ergo sum as well as related studies in philosophy and knowledge as well as presenting new insights into the relationship between rationalism and certainty in the view of Rene Descartes. The results of this research reveal the complexity of Rene Descartes' thinking regarding rationalism and certainty, highlighting that cogito ergo sum is an important foundation in our understanding of knowledge. and has a significant impact on shaping the paradigm of human knowledge, placing reason as the main instrument in achieving absolute truth.

Keywords: Rene Descartes, Cogito Ergo Sum, Rationalism, Certainty, Knowledge.

Author:

Oci Anggraini¹
Neli Julita²
Syarifatun Nafish³

Affiliation:

¹UIN Fatmawati
Sukarno Bengkulu,
Indonesia

**Corresponding
author:**

ucianggraini059@
gmail.com

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Abstrak: Penelitian ini melakukan eksplorasi mendalam terhadap pernyataan terkenal "Cogito ergo sum" Rene Descartes, dengan fokus pada aspek rasionalisme dan kepastian dalam konstruksi pengetahuan. Pertanyaan penelitian yang mendasari penelitian ini adalah sejauh mana cogito ergo sum menjadi landasan untuk memahami hubungan antara rasionalisme dan kepastian, serta bagaimana konsep ini membentuk paradigma pengetahuan manusia. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah mengungkap makna filosofis yang tersembunyi dalam pernyataan cogito ergo sum, mengidentifikasi implikasi konseptualnya, dan mengeksplorasi dampaknya terhadap pemahaman manusia tentang pengetahuan. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah tinjauan pustaka dengan menganalisis filsafis, dan analisis teks untuk menggali makna filosofis dari Cogito ergo sum serta kajian-kajian terkait dalam filsafat dan pengetahuan serta menyajikan wawasan baru terhadap hubungan antara rasionalisme dan kepastian dalam pandangan Rene Descartes. Hasil penelitian ini mengungkapkan kompleksitas pemikiran Rene Descartes mengenai rasionalisme dan kepastian, menyoroti cogito ergo sum menjadi fondasi penting dalam pemahaman kita tentang pengetahuan. serta memberikan dampak yang signifikan dalam membentuk paradigma pengetahuan manusia, menempatkan akal sebagai instrumen utama dalam mencapai kebenaran mutlak.

Kata kunci: Rene Descartes, Cogito Ergo Sum, Rasionalisme, Kepastian, Pengetahuan.



INTRODUCTION

When humans talk about the role of reason and knowledge. In the world of philosophy, the search for truth and certainty has been an unremitting effort from ancient times to the modern era. The concepts proposed by philosophers often reflect the challenges and changes of the times in which they live.

In a body of knowledge when talking about modern Western philosophy, Rene Descartes is the first to be mentioned. Descartes is recognized as a major figure in the Western world who is considered the Father Of Modern Philosophy. Descartes' thought gave rise to a new wave by emphasizing the use of reason to achieve absolute knowledge while opposing Christian teachings which prioritize revelation as absolute truth. The journey of philosophy continues to develop along with the emergence of various problems regarding human life from Greek to modern and contemporary times. (Sergio & Demelo, 2023)

Since the Renaissance, philosophy has been the basis for the development of human knowledge. One of the main pillars in the history of philosophical thought is the classic statement by Rene Descartes, "*Cogito, ergo sum*" (think, therefore I am) has become a central pillar in self-understanding and knowledge. Where Rene Descartes, an enlightened figure in the 17th century, viewed reason as the main instrument in building definite knowledge. His statements explored the essence of human existence and challenged the thought paradigms of his time. This statement became a catalyst for the emergence of rationalism, a school of thought that emphasizes the role of reason in achieving true and certain knowledge. However, along with the progress of the times, especially in the current era, technological and digital advances are increasingly developing, but the role of reason in knowledge is starting to be misused, for example regarding the use of technology such as AI, with this making a person not use his mind in a matter knowledge.



Humans are now starting to prioritize technology so that reason is starting to be put aside. Researchers have questions about how rationalism and certainty provide construction in knowledge.

This research aims to answer this question by exploring key aspects of rationalism and certainty in the construction of philosophical knowledge. The novelty of this research lies in its comprehensive approach to the analysis of rationalism, not only as a form of thought but also as a foundation for the certainty of knowledge.

Method used in this research is a literature review with philosophical analysis, and text analysis to explore the philosophical meaning of cogito ergo sum as well as related studies in philosophy and knowledge. By involving careful analytical steps, then look for the hidden philosophical meaning and conceptual implications of the statement Cogito ergo sum. Then review relevant literature studies to support and deepen understanding. The literature review includes an in-depth understanding of the history of rationalism, the development of the concept of "Cogito, ergo sum," and its impact on philosophical thought. The theoretical basis of this research summarizes the framework of rationalism and the concept of certainty in a philosophical context.

In this research, the author hopes to provide in-depth insight into the problem points that will be analyzed, recognizing the extent to which rationalism can provide certainty, whether there are limitations in the construction of philosophical knowledge, and how contemporary perspectives respond to this challenge. It is hoped that the results of this research can provide valuable participation in developments regarding the exploration of rationalism and certainty in the construction of philosophical knowledge.



RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Biography of Rene Descartes

Rene Descartes, the fourth child of Joachim Descartes, a member of parliament in the city of Britari, Renatus Province in France, experienced a tragic event in 1597. At that time, when he was one year old, his mother died, leaving a deep impact on his life and creating his character. worry that lingers inside him. Rene Descartes' grandfather, Pierre Descartes, was a doctor, while his grandmother, La Haye Descartes, came from a medical background in the Province of Touraine. The young Descartes, whose baptism was Rene, showed philosophical talents from an early age, and his father proudly referred to him as "The Little Philosopher." His education began at the Jesuit School in La Fleche from 1604 to 1612. There, he acquired basic knowledge of scientific works in Latin and Greek, French, music, performing arts, Aristotelian logic, physics, Nichomacus' ethics, astronomy, mathematics, and metaphysical teachings from the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas. (Arsi & File, 2007)

Descartes was educated at the Jesuit University at La Fleche from 1604 to 1612 AD, where he acquired the foundations of modern mathematics that were far superior to those he could find in most colleges of the time. In 1612, he moved to Paris, but life in the city bored him. As a result, he decided to exile himself to a remote area in Fauborg St. Germain to study Geometry. Even so, his friends found him, so to further hide his identity, he decided to enlist in the Dutch army in 1617. (Fikri, 2018)

In 1621, Descartes ended his involvement in the battle. After traveling to Italy, he settled in Paris in 1625. For the next three years, he returned to join the army, but not long after that, he decided to leave again and finally chose to live in the Netherlands. There, he remained for 20 years, from 1629 to 1649, enjoying an atmosphere of freedom of



thought that allowed him to develop his scientific and philosophical works freely. Although Descartes never married, he had a daughter who died at the age of five. This incident is considered one of the deepest sorrows in his life. At one time, Descartes moved to Sweden after being invited by Queen Christine who wanted to receive teachings from him. Despite giving lessons every morning at five, this caused Descartes to fall ill, and finally, on February 11, 1650, he died at the age of 54. His body was then moved to France in 1667, and his skull is kept in the Museum Historie Naturelle, Paris. (Fikri, 2018)

Descartes created several highly influential works. One of his famous works is "*Discours de la Methode*" (1637), which can be interpreted as an explanation of method. In this work, he details his intellectual evolution and expresses his dissatisfaction with the areas of philosophy and science on which he focused. Descartes argued that in the scientific realm, there is no absolute certainty. Everything can be questioned, and is often questioned, except science which is certain in Descartes' view. (Fikri, 2018)

Descartes gave great importance to reason, so he often ignored knowledge that came from the senses because he thought it could mislead humans. In this perspective, Descartes is often identified as a proponent of the reality of two coexisting realities: a truly thinking consciousness and matter that includes physical continuity, with consciousness only knowable through definitive scientific methods. Thus, according to his view, humans show a dualism between the soul and mind and the body and its physical dimensions. (Nawawi, 2017)



B. Construction *Cogito Ergo Sum* Shaping Paradigm Knowledge Man

Expression *cogito ergo sum* in Western philosophy was introduced by Rene Descartes, in this expression it is an important foundation in forming the paradigm of human knowledge because reason is a differentiator from other creatures.

In the expression *cogito ergo sum*, it shows direct intuition that cannot be doubted, because with *cogito ergo sum* a person can know himself clearly and separately, because by having doubts a person proves it with a thought process until it becomes true.

In every opportunity to discover new things and experience events and symptoms related to life with society, humans always want to know about them quickly. Wondering about what happened, these questions are a form of human curiosity about everything that is experienced, both directly and indirectly. This opens a new and innovative window of knowledge, showing that human curiosity is an extraordinary gift. (Vera & Hambali, 2021)

Similar experiences often become the basis for humans in acquiring knowledge. The desire for curiosity is used as a basic principle in human's deepest instinct, namely the instinct to seek truth or knowledge that is unlimited and cannot be satisfied. Aristotle, one of the philosophical figures, stated that the origin of knowledge comes from feelings of awe and wonder, suggesting that a sense of wonder is the root of the "desire for wisdom" or philosophia. Therefore, human curiosity toward the truth is considered natural and a symbol of pure intelligence from birth. (Vera & Hambali, 2021)

In the philosophical domain, acceptance of knowledge cannot occur without careful consideration. Therefore, every view that has become a general view must be testable and based on logically acceptable arguments. For philosophy, it is not sufficient to assume that humans

automatically know now. In contrast, philosophy requires an investigation into the nature and scope of basic knowledge. This involves fundamental matters about the nature of knowledge, at least until humans understand the essence and responsibility associated with the knowledge they possess. (Vera & Hambali, 2021)

After the Renaissance phase of thought reached its peak, which marked the maturity of thought, there was agreement regarding the natural sources of knowledge for humans, namely reason (ratio) and experience (empirical). Because they tend to form schools based on one of these two sources, two opposing schools emerge. (Achmadi, 2016)

Rationalism, introduced by Rene Descartes (1596-1650), is considered a major figure in the development of modern philosophy. Descartes, an expert in natural science, law, and medicine, stated that science must be singular, incomparable, and composed of one individual. According to him, science must be an independent building, following general methods. The definition of truth according to Descartes is that which is clear and can be clearly distinguished. He proposed that science follow the steps of exact science because exact science can be used as a model for dynamic knowledge. (Achmadi, 2016)

Rene Descartes, a pioneer of rationalism, argued that a reliable source of knowledge is 'reason'. Only knowledge obtained through reason meets the requirements necessary for all scientific knowledge. By using reason, truth can be found through deductive methods, as illustrated in the exact sciences. Descartes was looking for a new thinking approach, and for that, he believed that a definite starting point was needed that could be found through doubt, which was expressed in his statement: *cogito ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am). In other words, Descartes



emphasized that certainty can be found by starting from doubt. (Achmadi, 2016)

Descartes discovered that the one thing that could not be questioned was his existence when he doubted everything and was in the process of thinking. If he is thinking, then there can be no question that he must exist. The reason is that what does not exist cannot possibly think and doubt something. Therefore, with conviction, Descartes stated "*Je Pense, je suis*" (I think, therefore I am), which is famous in Latin translation: *cogito ergo sum*. According to Descartes, humans must start the journey of thought from a rational basis to reach certain truths, where reason must play a role as much as possible. (Khaerani, 2014)

According to Descartes, the highest truth can be found in human reason. When reason becomes the main basis for truth, this shows that human existence depends on his efforts to optimize his intellectual abilities. With a high level of reason, reason is considered the main source of knowledge. When reason can become a form of knowledge, that is when truth can be accessed. Consequently, because Descartes glorifies reason as a tool for exploring truth, he distrusts information that comes from sources outside reason and reason. For Descartes, the search for truth must be carried out using clear and selective criteria. (Riyadi & Sukma, 2019)

Starting from the desire to find an efficient method for achieving absolute certainty in knowledge and to ensure that the existence of something is real and not just imagination, Descartes formed the foundation of what he called the Method of Doubt. He started this approach by trying to doubt everything.

Descartes based his approach on the recognition that humans are often deceived by observation, as expressed in Plato's Arguments. Plato noted that sticks submerged in pools appear bent, and straight paths

appear to meet at their ends, as well as other similar phenomena. With extreme caution, Descartes continued to question every aspect as a first step in his quest. (Khaeroni, 2014)

In his attempt to find a definite point, Descartes began by doubting everything, including metaphysical views about the material and non-material world. He did not even exclude the possibility that these views might just be a trick of a very cunning devil. Even so, Descartes sought a solid foundation by stating that at least "I doubt" is an indisputable reality, the more we doubt, the more real the existence of this nature is proven.

The doubts acknowledged by Descartes are perceived as methods, not as true skeptical doubts. In his view, the use of doubt aims to achieve certainty, and according to him, only reason can guide someone towards the truth. Regarding what and who guarantees truth, Descartes argued that this idea comes from God, and God is the guarantee of truth. Ideas were considered a gift from God, and because God could not give false guidance, reason became a tool for seeking and measuring knowledge. Therefore, this flow is called Rationalism. (Vera & Hambali, 2021)

Descartes, a philosopher who followed rationalism and is recognized as the figure who provided the foundation for modern philosophy, believed that absolute knowledge could be found when someone realized that he was thinking about his existence. Through his life's journey, Descartes discovered belief in certainty, especially through experiences in dreams. The essence of his experience in dreams is that there are things that feel real but do not correspond to reality. Therefore, Descartes tried to doubt everything and develop a new philosophy to achieve certainty in knowledge. His famous statement, "*Cogito ergo sum*" (I think, therefore I am), became the main principle in his philosophical



pursuits. In proving this, Descartes set three conditions for his belief. First, certainty must be something that cannot be proven through reason. Second, this certainty does not depend on other people's beliefs. Third, certainty is related to the existence of a thing. (Sergio & Demelo, 2023)

Descartes then evaluated beliefs related to sense perception and emphasized that the senses cannot be used as a source of certainty because what is seen through the senses may be an illusion. As time went by, Descartes finally found certainty through reason, stating that only reason was able to guide someone to absolute truth. For Descartes, the action of clear and disaggregated reason, which he called "*Ideas Claires el Distinctes*" (clear and disaggregated thought), was the only way to achieve truth. In addition, Descartes also recognized three innate ideas: the idea of thought, the idea of God as a perfect being, and the idea of vastness. (Sergio&Demelo, 2023)

In his search for definite knowledge, Descartes stated that even though he doubted everything, including the mathematics he believed in, there was one belief that he could not doubt, namely that every time he doubted, he must continue to doubt. In doubting all other beliefs, he cannot doubt that he is doubting, so that his existence becomes certain. This is where Descartes found the absolute certainty of knowledge, namely in his self-awareness and the certain first principle, which he then formulated in Latin as "Cogito Ergo Sum" (if I think, therefore I am). (Sergio & Demelo, 2023)

C. Certainty Through Rationalism

To obtain certainty in knowledge, Rene Descartes' thinking is very necessary, namely to find an exact truth, because the function of reason is very useful for uncovering things that are doubtful to find clarity and produce certainty.



Ratio is considered to be the origin of truth. Only through reason can one reach the truth. What is considered true is only the clear action of the mind which he calls *Ideas Claires el Distinctes* (a clear and well-divided mind). These clear-minded concepts were considered a gift from God given before one was born (innate ideas) and were therefore considered infallible. Because only reason was recognized as the source of truth, this school was known as Rationalism. The knowledge that comes from the senses is often considered misleading. Rationalism is a philosophical view that states reason is the most important instrument in obtaining knowledge. According to the rationalist school, knowledge is obtained through the thinking process. (Hakim & Saebani, 2008)

Rationalists refer to individuals who hold rationalism. Rationalism itself is a theory or view that believes that thought and reason are the only basis for solving problems or finding truth that does not depend on the senses. This view emphasizes the role of reason rather than emotions or other inner aspects. (Teng, 2016)

The emergence of rationalism can be explained by the desire to free oneself from traditional thought patterns, namely scholasticism. Scholasticism is a school-related school, and this term characterizes the historical period of medieval philosophy. Even though it was initially accepted, scholasticism turned out to be unable to cope with the developments in science it was facing. The thinking instilled by Aristotle at that time was still influenced by fantasies. Descartes, who wanted a new thinking approach, felt the need to look for a definite starting point, which could be found in doubt. The concept of "*Cogito ergo sum*" (I think, therefore I am) emphasizes that certainty can be found through a thought process that starts from doubt itself. (Teng, 2016)



After doubting everything, including his existence, Descartes concluded that there was something irrefutable in his existence (his doubting self). His self-doubting existence proves directly that he thinks, replacing it with the phrase "*Cogito ergo sum*" (I think, therefore I am). This confession is considered the first philosophical truth or philosophicum. Descartes emphasized that although doubt can permeate everything, this doubt cannot destroy the basis of existence itself, namely the existence of the individual who doubts. Descartes established the role of reason, intuition, and deductive reasoning as key elements in achieving certainty. He proposed several methodological principles that became the basis for the thinking process:

1. Only accept something as true if you believe in yourself that it is true.
2. Breaking down problems into small components to facilitate the resolution process.
3. Think systematically by starting from simple things, and then moving on little by little until you reach a higher level of complexity.
4. Comprehensive details and a thorough inspection are needed so that nothing is overlooked. (Fikri, 2018)

D. Relevance Rationalism And Certainty in Knowledge

Science can be defined as a conscious effort to investigate, discover, and improve human understanding of various aspects of reality in human life. Restrictions on certain aspects are necessary to formulate clear concepts, provide certainty, and limit the scope of scientific views to provide definite results by the involvement in the investigation. (Mujib, 2019)

So, this phenomenon is known as a sign of awareness, an indicator that then produces understanding (philosophy) for humans. Knowledge, which includes everything that humans know, appears as a result of



symptoms that arise within humans, encouraging them to use their minds to find out things that are not yet known. Humans search, try, and ultimately analyze the knowledge they obtain to fulfill their needs and desires. If this knowledge can satisfy humans, it is called true knowledge. Conversely, inaccurate knowledge is referred to as a fallacy. These mistakes are often riskier than ignorance because they can result in wrong actions and cause disaster for humans. (Mujib, 2019)

Rationalism believes that reason plays a major role in the acquisition of knowledge. According to this view, rationalism states that the truth of the law of cause and effect cannot be tested through experience, because the infinity of natural events makes it difficult to observe. Although rationalism recognizes the value of the senses in gaining knowledge, it does not deny that the senses can stimulate reason. Furthermore, rationalism emphasizes that reason can produce knowledge without depending on information obtained through the senses. Thus, reason is considered capable of producing knowledge about abstract concepts. (Teng, 2016)

Rationalism, apart from being a school of thought, basically reflects a period of modernity that marked a paradigm shift from cosmocentrism to anthropocentrism. Rationalism is one of the thought frameworks of modernity, together with empiricism, but both place subjectivity as a reference or standard of truth which is called the subject. Rationalism and empiricism view humans as subjects of knowledge, with the main difference being in the methods they use. (Sandiah, 2012)

Descartes argued that previously philosophy tended to combine reasoning that might be true with certain reasoning. For him, the main goal of philosophy is the search for certainty, which can only be achieved if it is based on irrefutable evidence. Therefore, in philosophical debates,



only certain reasoning should be an indispensable element. (Yogiswari, 2020)

By utilizing the ability of reason, the hope is to create a more perfect world, which is guided and controlled by human wisdom. This belief is especially striking in the field of philosophy, where there appears to be a desire to devise a comprehensive, high-level system of reasoning decisions a priori. This thinking approach, which greatly worships the ability to reason in the context of philosophy, is known as rationalism. (Musakkir, 2021)

Rationalism is a philosophical school of thought that states that reason is the main means of acquiring knowledge and that the highest truth lies in the ability of human reason or reason. In an alternative context, rationalism can be interpreted as a perspective on the theory of knowledge that emphasizes the role of reason or reason in the process of forming knowledge. (Choiriyah, 2018)

Since the time of Descartes, many philosophers have considered this theory of knowledge important. This view was influenced by Descartes' idea of "I think therefore I am," which positioned the mind as something more certain than matter, as well as the belief that one person's thoughts are more trustworthy than other people's thoughts. In the legacy of Descartes' philosophy, many tend towards subjectivism and see matter as something that can only be known through inference from what the mind already knows. (Choiriyah, 2018)

Descartes' thoughts and concepts highlight the importance of reason or reason in seeking truth. The use of deductive methods to obtain new knowledge is emphasized as an effort to optimize the role of reason. This approach is considered as precision science, to meet the need for that knowledge. In this perspective, the emphasis on optimizing reason focuses more on finding new theories that can be applied generally and

are relevant in various contexts, rather than being limited to just one incident. Although society can approach knowledge through sensory experience, this is not considered definitive truth. (Riyadi & Sukma, 2019)

So Descartes found absolute certainty, proof of his existence, and certain principles. The formulation is expressed in Latin as *cogito, ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am). Every time I reflect on this, *cogito ergo sum*, *cogito* confirms that I am present as a thinking entity and that only applies if I am aware that I am thinking. On the other hand, if I stop thinking, even though there are other things that I imagine, I have no basis for claiming that I am present. *Cogito* simply proves that I am a thinking entity, an existing substance, and that it is my nature to have thoughts, ideas, and beliefs. This is direct knowledge that is recognized as philosophical truth with fundamental principles. (Yogiswari, 2020)

Finally, Descartes formed the entire framework of his philosophy based on absolute truth, namely that when I am aware that I am thinking, I can be sure that I exist. In Descartes' theory of knowledge, one truth that is unshakable, secure, and beyond doubt is the truth about my existence as a conscious subject. (Yogiswari, 2020)

CONCLUSION

Rene Descartes is known as the Father of Modern Philosophy. The method of doubt became the basis of Descartes' thinking, and he stated "*Cogito, ergo sum*" (I think, therefore I am) as the basis for the certainty of his existence. *The cogito ergo sum* construct and the paradigm of human knowledge. Humans have curiosity which is a natural urge to know and understand the surrounding environment. Experiences and events trigger humans to seek knowledge, with wonder as the root of curiosity. Rationalism, pioneered by Descartes, emphasizes the role of reason as the main source of knowledge



and truth. The *cogito ergo sum* process shows that certainty of knowledge can be achieved through the use of rationality and the method of doubt.

Rationalism, held by Descartes, places reason as the main instrument in obtaining knowledge. Through the method of doubt, Descartes achieved certainty of knowledge by questioning everything and deducing its existence through *cogito ergo sum*. Certain knowledge, according to Descartes, comes from human reason, which produces truth through seductiveness and rationality.

Rationalism, as a philosophical school, emphasizes the importance of reason and deduction in achieving definite knowledge. The concept of "*Cogito ergo sum*" created the basis for the certainty of knowledge and became the watchword for rationalist philosophy. Criticism of sensory-based knowledge and the attempt to achieve absolute certainty characterize rationalist thought, as proposed by Descartes. Thus, Descartes' thoughts on rationalism and the concept of *cogito ergo sum* had a significant impact on forming the paradigm of human knowledge, placing reason as the main instrument in achieving absolute truth.

To develop further research, it is recommended to delve deeper into the Implementation of the Doubt Method in the Modern Era. Application of Descartes' method of doubt in a modern context, especially in the fields of science and technology. Examines how skepticism of this method can be used to examine the validity of new scientific and technological discoveries.

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