

**Philosophy and Critical Thinking**  
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**Week-03**  
**Lecture 10: Rene Descartes**

Welcome in lecture 10. Today we are going to discuss the Rene Descartes from western philosophy. Today we will be discussing Rene Descartes and method of his philosophy and the notion of self. In last class, we have discussed Aristotle and his philosophy. Aristotle belongs to the ancient path, if you can recall the class, we have discussed the history of western philosophy. So, this Plato and Aristotle belongs to the ancient philosophy. And now Rene Descartes is from modern philosophy. We are not going to discuss the medieval philosophy. There are two reasons. First is since this course is the philosophy and critical thinking, So, we are going to talk more about the argument and then other philosophers going to reject the argument of the previous philosophers. Now in medieval philosophy, most of them, they believe that human is not capable of knowing everything. This topic already we have discussed where we have argued that how the philosophers argued that the reason has got the second position and the faith is in an upper hand. They believe that human capacity, they were doubting the human capacity and believed that it is not possible for human to know everything through reasoning. Now in modern philosophy, Rene Descartes, again he argued that human is capable of knowing everything through reasoning. So, you apply your intellect and then you will be able to know things. So, again, here in modern philosophy, these philosophers started discussing the argument and then their claim. They believe that this is a possibility to know, to know about this reality. Now in Plato and Aristotle, what we have discussed the idea and an experience. In this class, you have to go little more than that. So, take one more step. Now you have to, before starting the Rene Descartes, you need to understand about the world and then object. For example, there is an object outside the mind. Now is this object is real or this object is not real? Now I am going to explain you in the sense of like in the same with an argument of Plato and Aristotle. Plato said that we have an idea and then this world and a particular object, for example, table, the watch, mobile, it just in a poor copy of this idea. Aristotle argued that idea is just an abstraction of this knowledge. So, you are experiencing and then you are getting idea. So, you are experiencing any object and then what will be? Again, we are getting the idea of this object. So, I experience table, I experience cow, horse and then I have an idea of the table, this cow, then horse, cow-ness, horse-ness. This is what Plato said. Now, Aristotle says that this cow-ness and horse-ness is a product of experience. Plato arguing that this idea is not product of experience. So, this is what they are an argument.

Now let us understand in this in more detail or in a different way. Can we say that this object is there because I have idea? For example, a dream. In dream what we are doing?

There is a person and I am projecting myself and my friend and then a ball and then both of us playing a same game, playing with the same ball. Now after dream, you realize that oh it was a dream, it was not real. Now let us understand this in real world what we see. Let us start thinking that this object which is an outside of your mind is in a real or it just a projection of your mind. For example, in dark night suppose there is a rope is appearing as a snake or there is a dim light. It is called illusion. So, snake is an illusory object because there is no light, So, this rope is appearing as snake. The question is supposed you do not have any idea about snake. Even there is no light, this rope will never appear as snake. So, this is how the Indian system, Indian philosophy argue. Now what they are saying that you have an idea of an object and that is why there is an object. Now there is no one philosophy, one section saying that there is an object in the world because you have idea of that object. It is not because there is an object outside. So, they are saying that there is a world and this particular object because I have an idea this object and I am the person who is projecting everything. So, this world is not real. Take example of dream. Now what we are doing in dream, first there are many things, but everything is not real. We are just projecting, we have idea or maybe we are projecting those things in a different way differently. So, we have experience suppose an idea of table, idea of horse, idea of cow. Now in dream I saw there is a horse or many horses and so, on, or I am playing with them. So, the idea is you have an idea and then you are projecting. So, this world where we are like I am dreaming, the dream world, everything is just my projection. In reality, nothing is real. So, this is what we call idealism. In Indian system we will be discussing in well in detail. Even the western philosophy the same happens. We also, have a same idea and another set is saying that another group of philosopher arguing that no this even this idea is what we are saying is just a product of your experience. So, you have to little bit start thinking in this way. Start thinking that is it possible to doubt, is it possible to say think that whether this object is real or object is not real. I will give an example. Suppose I said Oh look this is a Gyan Prakash. So, you have like listening this lecture and maybe I will be interacting with you. So, you have an idea of a person called Gyan Prakash. So, you know this person. So, one day what happened that we met I mean you saw a me right there a person and you realize oh this is Gyan. So, let us go and say hi to Gyan. So, what you will do? Maybe you will say hi sir this is X this is Y and So, on. Maybe you approach me from back and I did not hear your any word. So, what you will do next maybe you will tap to see that whether this person is real or not real. And then what happened? You touched and then you saw that okay yeah then I replied oh hi. Then we started discussing philosophy. So, everything is real for you. I mean this is how we know things right. If there is a doubt suppose then object appeared and I have a doubt still I have a doubt whether maybe this is a false appearance. So, what I will do? I will go and check. I use my other sense organ; I will touch and even I am finding it is not there for me it is real. This is how we check if you are going to ask whether this is real or not real. But even you have taken all these examples all these arguments in your dreamy world. In dream world even you are going to do that everything is real. So,

the question is how do you know that this objects this world is real. This is the question you need to ask and we will be discussing in this class how the Rene Descartes argued how Rene Descartes talked about the self and so on. Now before starting the Rene Descartes, I also, would like to highlight one problem which is very important not only in western philosophy even in the Indian philosophy. So, my intention is to put these ideas in your mind. So, when you start discussing those things you will have an idea right. I understand that since this is a very basic course So, I will be trying this to explain this concept in very basic level right and again I will be discussing when I will be discussing the different philosophers. So, things will be clear for you. Suppose I said or like in first class I look hi I am Gyan Prakash and So, on. So, the question arises then when I am saying I am Gyan Prakash then what does it mean? Am I referring to my body or something else? The question is who am I? So, this is the main question I mean in Indian and as well the western philosophy. So, we are going to talk about the what is self. So, I am saying this is Gyan then what is Gyan? It is body and more than a body or different from the body or something else. How are you going to define that? That is a very important question. So, you need to understand that what is this body and if I am not body then who am I and how it is different from this body? So, this is a very simple question that okay I am saying all the time oh I am Gyan Prakash, right then I have the question is that fine if I am saying I am Gyan then what does it mean. So, even like even I am not I am like saying to anyone even I am thinking that who am I? Because I have said in the very first class that the philosophy is more about a subjective world. So, when I am saying I then I also, need to understand that who am I? So, for example if you take the Socratic idea or Platonic idea what they are saying? The Soul which is immortal is going through the many lives. So, I am not this body I am soul. So, this is how I am not saying that this is the only way to defend this or argue for the self. There are many ways to explain self the notion of self. However, you need to understand that in western philosophy as well the Indian philosophy this is a very important question. Question is who am I? So, these are things it was important to discuss before starting this, Rene Descartes.

Now let us start with Rene Descartes. Descartes timing is 1596 to 1650. Now for him the first part of true philosophy is metaphysics which contains the principle of knowledge such as attributes of God, soul and all the clear idea and simple idea that he possesses. So, in this metaphysics this branch what we do or we talk about the idea of God, the idea of soul right and Rene Descartes believed that this is the first part of true philosophy. Let me tell you that Rene Descartes was a very creative mathematician right and he was also, interested in philosophy and he gave a very significant importance to philosophy and I will see the next slide how the Rene Descartes has used his mathematical knowledge to the and applied in philosophical area. The second is physics in which after finding the true principle of this material thing we examine in general how the whole universe has been framed. So, he argued that first is what philosophy. For him a philosophy was on a kind of there is in a tree So, roots are the metaphysics and trunks is physics and then all the branches are other

sciences. Now the main problem of Descartes was I mean problem that says that philosophical problem they aim to find a body of certain and self-evident truth such as everyone endowed with common sense and faculty of reasoning will accept. Now for Descartes was very convinced with the mathematics now saying that in mathematics or mathematical conclusion is a certain and self-evident. So, if there is a 2 plus 2 is 4 no one will everyone going to accept this without any discussion. In philosophy we do not have a philosophical conclusion is not like a mathematical conclusion. So, someone is saying there is X and then other person is coming and then dissecting this idea of X and this is our 10th class. So, you also, have some idea now by the time that how the philosophers are arguing X and then another are coming and saying no X is not main cause of this world this universe the Y is the main cause. Other philosopher is arguing and then it is going to know this is not one, it is countless so on. So, in philosophy we do not the conclusion like mathematical conclusion. So, philosophical conclusion is not that certain and that is why we have so many disputes and controversies for example the existence of God, the immortality of soul, the reality of external world and so on. So, some of the philosopher is arguing that there is an existence there is God some of them arguing against this idea. Some of the philosophers arguing for soul or is it immortality of soul some of them saying they know there is no soul. Again, the reality of external world also, is a part. I mean this is not only few topics where there are disputes there is an argument that there are many in philosophy. So, idea was in philosophy we do not have any certain conclusion. So, X person is coming like for example Plato argued that the idea as are real and particulars are just enough poor copies of this idea. Aristotle student of Plato argued that no this idea is a product of the experience. So, still there is no any fix or some conclusion which is beyond this controversy or certain proposition we have. Descartes was more interested in philosophical conclusion like mathematical conclusion. He wants to conclude in philosophy something like a mathematical conclusion. If you are going to do that then it is like we are going to finish all the controversies all the disputes. Now he was very much impressed with this method in mathematics and he believed that the method must be extended to philosophy. Now what we do in mathematics we start with the axioms which is self-evident, everybody accepts that and from there without making any mistake we are deducing some next proposition with applying the reasoning and then next proposition. This is very clear and as certain as the former. The idea is we are starting with the simple and then going to the complex without any mistake in reasoning. So, Descartes basically believed that the mathematics method or method in the mathematics we should use in this where in this philosophy, why? Because we also want philosophical conclusion like a mathematics conclusion or conclusion in mathematics. Descartes also, argued that we should be on our guard against being influenced by our prejudice and transmitted beliefs which have been impressed upon us in our childhood by our parents and teachers. If you can recall even the Socrates' idea of this knowledge system he also, has said the same thing like when he is arguing that we

need to re-examine. Descartes also, arguing that we have to be like sure right I mean not going to when you are inquiring anything method is a very-very important thing.

Now what Descartes did Descartes laid down four broad rules for his self-guidance. Self-guidance in the sense that he was aware of this mathematical method and then he wanted to apply the same method where in the philosophy. So, that we will have a very certain conclusion in mathematics, certain conclusion in philosophy. Now first one is never to accept anything as a true unless I clearly know it as such. So, when you have an idea that this is a very clear then only accept. So, he used to say that never accept X if there is any possibility of not X. So, if there is any possibility of not X it means there is also, you are not very certain about the X and that is why he used to say if there is any possibility of not X never accept this X. In the thought process that is what is in a very important part in the Descartes method. Now if there is a difficulty so he argued that divide up each of the faculties divide up each of the difficulties under examination into as many parts as possible. So, simplify your this thought process when you are thinking divide right in part in part and then think properly and then finally conclude. Commence with the simplest object and assign step by step to the more complex right. So, this is what even in the mathematics how he is applying the same method in the philosophy right. We start with the simple proposition and then go to the complex one. And the fourth one in every case make the innovation so complete that I might be assured that nothing is omitted. Descartes believes that the single certain truth can be systematically sought be deliberately doubt. So, he arguing that if you start doubting, then we can have a real certain truth right. So, when doubt is pushed to its farthest then limit then it will reveal something which is clearly indubitable which is clearly perceived. So, he is now working on this method and then he is arguing that if you are going to doubt anything right and you push this, I will be giving an example how the Descartes used this method of doubt and Descartes was the person who his doubt is thought a simple doubt is a radical doubt. He also, argued about the sense testimony can be doubted. So, whatever we are perceiving it is we start doubting those ideas those objects. Descartes believes that the sense perception does not reveal the need to do is we need to doubt everything right. If you want any certain truth. So, one day what happened is Descartes with this thought this idea that today I am going to write something in philosophy using this mathematical method so that we will have a very certain conclusion in philosophy like mathematical conclusion, and he sat with a piece of paper and pen and he started doubting as he discussed as he argued about the sense testimony can be doubted. So, he started doubting is an everything. Now see his how he has done that. He started doubting even this room, this pen, then pencil, paper, hands, body, and everything. So, he started doubting that whether this my body is real not real. Starting from this okay fine when I am this world is real not real right. Suppose for example now I am like saying something discussing about the René Descartes philosophy where I am discussing his method. Now is it real or it is not real? Because many times I have done the same thing in my dream. Now, how to realize how to check because we do not have any

distinguish mark so that we can say that is real it is not real. Even my body right so that my body is real or not real. I got this kind of body I mean kind of body means the color, shape, size and so on or let us say this body at all whether this is my body is my body or not. I will give you an example like for example what we are doing we are in dream first we are projecting ourselves right that this is me and then another person and we are fighting. I have an experience about this dream right. Sometime what I used to dream a lot right. So, sometimes what happened then one day I dream that there was a dream and for me it was a bad dream where what I did, I saw that someone shot me the bullet and then I had an idea that I am now dying. I also, have idea that dead person if you are dying meant you are like you cannot like breathe right. So, I have tried my best to hold my breath right because now I am dead. I cannot breathe and then finally So, the idea is sometimes this dream is So, real that even after you realize that is a dream it is a bit difficult to accept that it was a dream or sometimes you are like praying thanks God it was a dream right. I have a kid I mean when she was my daughter when she was two years old and one day she first time she had a very bad dream. She started crying and me and my wife took another two hours to convince her that that was a dream. That was so real for her right. Now we are like used to it. We are dreaming every day then after that we are discussing oh you are sometimes smiling oh look how he had this idea. The idea is how do you know that this is what we are discussing is not dream. This is real. How do you know that? Do you have any distinguish mark So, that you can say oh this is dream this is not dream or maybe even suppose this is not dream someone else other than a devil a demon who is controlling my mind and projecting this world. So, I am not the person he is like or maybe deceiving. So, in any case this is not real. I hope you are getting this idea. Now Descartes is what he is doing. He is applying this method of doubt. In the second point if you see he is pushing this in the limit right maximum limit with doubting everything. Now let us see that in the argument for example it seems to me now, I am walking in IIT campus. It is an IIT Dhanbad and we are like supposed to example in evening time I am walking, evening walk. I have an experience that in the past I dreamt I was walking in IIT campus. When it was false that I was. So, I was dreaming that I am like walking the campus and later on I realized oh it was not real. Hence, I have no reason to think it is possible that I am dreaming that I am walking in the IIT campus. I have reason to believe that it may be false that I am. And I can be absolutely certain that A only if I don't have any reason to believe that A may be false. Now therefore I can be absolutely certain that I am now walking in the IIT campus only if I do not have a reason to think it is a possible, I am dreaming. Unless there are certain marks to distinguish dreaming for from waking. It is not the case that I do not have a reason to think it is the possible that I am dreaming. But I see that there is no certain mark to distinguish dreaming from waking. Hence, I cannot be absolutely certain that I am now walking in IIT campus. You remember I mean Descartes argued that if there is any possibility of not X do not accept X. So, there is a no possibility. But here we can see that there is a possibility of not X. Because there is no any distinguish mark for example based

on that I can say that oh this is X and this is not X. Where I can say we can argue that oh look this is we are in real or this is I am dreaming. This is no mark distinguish mark based on that I can argue that okay this is dream and this is not dream. There is if you see this argument very carefully. First let it simplify, I am doubting everything. What are the possibilities? One possibility is this is real. One possibility is I am dreaming. Maybe another possibility is some demon deceiving. But in all the possibilities if you think carefully in all the possibilities and I am doubting everything. But again, in all the possibilities I is common. So, for example I am thinking that I am dreaming. I am dreaming. "I" is there. Or also, there is a possibility that this is real. This world is real. And also, possibility is there is something else. In all the possibility, I is common. And I am able to doubt my body. I am doubting whether it is real or not real. But still, I is something which is common. And this is how Rene Descartes concluded *Cogito Ergo Sum* that is I think therefore I. I hope this is a very clear that, he started doubting each and everything. Now doubting everything is the body. This world like we are discussing even I am doubting that the discussion is what I am doing now is real or is just not part of dream. Or maybe something else. A demon who is controlling my mind. But even all the three possibilities I is common. I realize if you think very carefully realize that I is beyond this doubt. I am not able to doubt myself. I am able to doubt everything. I have laptop, this computer, this everything what I am doubting. But what I am not able to doubt is I. And I is common in all the possibilities. So, we doubted everything. We thought of the possibilities and realized that I is something which is I cannot doubt. And therefore it means what? That I is beyond this doubt. And now Rene Descartes based on this argument he argued claimed that I think therefore I am. Now this is how he started a philosophy where he argued that I is different from this body. Then I mean the self is what can think. Now again I am thinking thing. I can think right? So, I is something which can think. Thought is the property essential to me.

Here is the conclusion. Thought is the only property essential to me. I am essentially a thinking thing not essentially material. I hope it is clear about the Rene Descartes and how Rene Descartes used this mathematical method and applied in used mathematical method in philosophy and concluded that, that something I which is different from this body, different from this matter. In conclusion, in western philosophy Descartes is the most significant philosopher of early modern who defends the dualism. Dualism in the sense I and the body. The two things. You remember in the starting I said who am I? So, Rene Descartes will say I is not this body. So, I is something else. So, there is something else I and then body, the two things, so, dualism. Descartes is in process of doubt. This is a radical doubt and through this process of radical doubt he found something that is beyond this doubt. Descartes was led to this conclusion by the fact that while he could doubt the body but could not doubt the mind. And this is how he believed that when I am saying this is me I, I is what, Mind. And mind is not different from this body. So, he accepted, he argued the existence of two things is called mind and body. This is what we call dualism. Yeah, so,

thank you and this lecture was based on these two important books. Thank you So, much for your kind attention. Thank you.