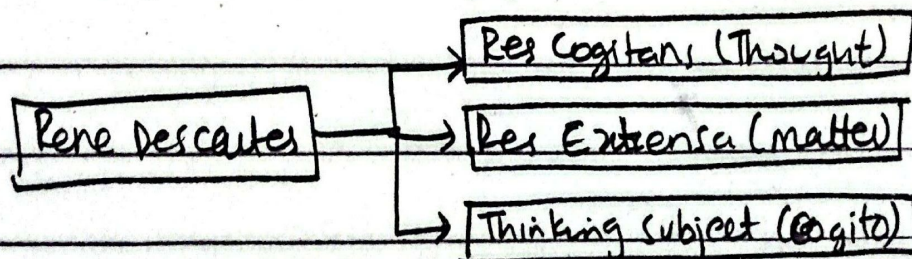


Qno:4 Suppose the weaknesses of Rene Descartes' Cogito argument. Outline the influence of Cogito on later modern philosophy.

ANSWER:

(1) INTRODUCTION

Rene Descartes was a French philosopher who is called the Father of Modern philosophy. He published his famous work 'Discourse on the Method', where he introduced the line 'Cogito ergo sum' ('I think, therefore I am') to find certain knowledge and laid the foundation for rationalism. He shifted philosophy from scholasticism to a critical, individualist framework. Also, he created the mind/body problem, shaping centuries of debate in metaphysics.



② Weaknesses of the Cogito Argument

(a) Presupposition of the 'I'

Descartes assume that the act of thinking implies a distinct subject ("I"). Critics argue that he assume there is a real "I" (a full individual self) behind this thinking without proving it first.

4 The self might not be as stable or "Real as Descartes thinks." — Hume.

(b) Cartesian Circle (Circularity)

Descartes says that he knows his ideas are clear and true because God (non-deceiver) guarantees them. He then says that he knows that God is not a deceiver because his ideas tell him so. That's a circle where each point leans on the other. There is no independent proof and this tangled logic is the Cartesian circle.

(c) Infallible Introspection

Descartes believed that the first-person

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point of view is the most reliable source of knowledge. However, mind can be tricked into illusions and delusions.

(4) Ambiguity of Thinking

Descartes believed that the act of thinking proves the existence of the self. But 'thinking' involves a broad range of mental activities. Thinking itself is not enough to prove 'I' exists. Not all these states ranging from doubting to feeling show a unified, conscious thinker.

(5) Solipsistic Drift

Descartes' cogito guarantees only the existence of the self doing the thinking. Without a secure bridge from that self to the external world, it risks the solipsistic drift.

"Even if I know that I think, how do I know you're not just a figment of my own mind?" - Descartes

(6) Mind-Body Dualism Fallacy

In meditations on first philosophy, Descartes said: "I am a thinking thing (*cogito*)" - a mind distinct from the body.

The body ^{is} proven only indirectly, while the *cogito* proves mind's existence through thought.

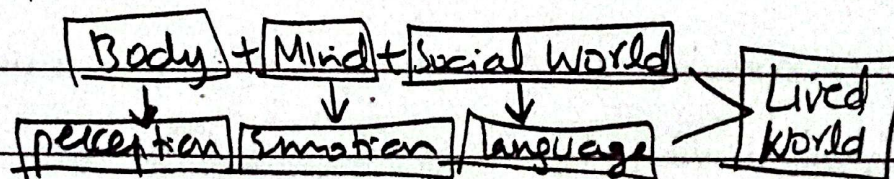
This sharp ontological split was mocked by philosophers as "ghost in the machine".

"If the mind is immaterial and the body is physical; how do they interact?"

(7) Neglect of Embodiment

Cogito overlooks that we are physical

social beings. He focused on pure thinking, apart from the body. He treated the thinking self as separate from the flesh-and-blood existence. By ignoring embodiment, Descartes exclude bodily experience.



(3) Influence of Cogito on Later Modern Philosophy

(a) Birth of Subjectivity

Before Descartes, thinkers often focused on God, nature, or abstract principles as the starting point. With cogito, Descartes shifted this objectivity and introduced the first-person perspective.

(b) Rationalist Epistemology

Descartes inspired Leibniz and Spinoza to seek knowledge through reason alone, reinforcing the rationalist tradition. He was the father of modern rationalism based on deductive logic.

(c) Empiricist Challenge

Descartes said that thinking proves there is a thinking subject - the "I". It inspired Hume to posit his theory of bundle of self. All we have are fleeting thoughts and

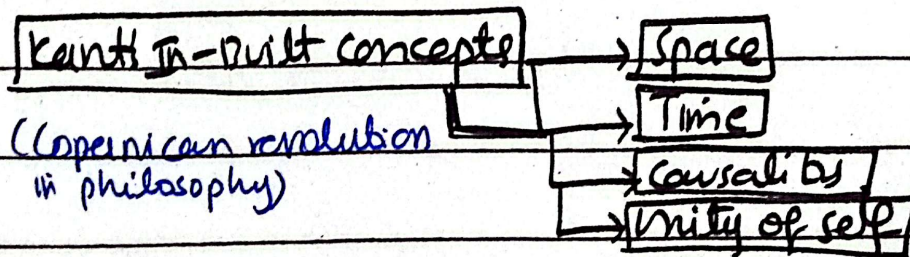
and there is no proof of a stable "I".

There is just the stream, no permanent (you)!

D) Kant's Transcendental Time

Kant adopted Descartes' focus on the conditions for possibility of experience.

He turned the focus from the object of knowledge to the subject itself (the human mind). However, Descartes was interested in what we know, not how we know it.



(5) Phenomenology and Consciousness

Phenomenologists like Husserl and Heidegger criticized Descartes for treating mind as something floating alone. Instead, they stressed consciousness is always connected to the body and the world we live in.

The everyday world (Lebenswelt) we live in

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shapes our mind and the way we experience the world.

Rise of (6) Existentialism

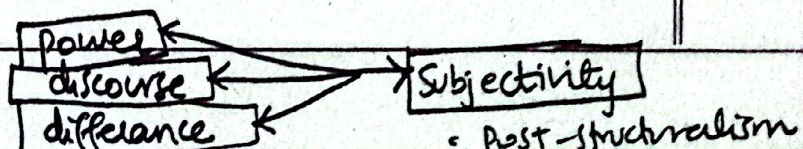
Sartre, a 20th-century existentialist, agreed that consciousness proves existence and he rejected Descartes' idea of a fixed, unchanging self. Sartre asserted that we are not fixed beings, but always free to shape and change who we are.

"Consciousness is nothing in itself. It is always becoming." — Sartre

Provoked (7) Post-structural Critique

Derrida, a post-structuralist, argued that Descartes' cogito argument depends on a stable, self-present self ('I'). He argued that this 'I' is a textual construct which is bound on language. It relies on other signs and contexts.

"I" is always deferred, never fully present." — Derrida.



(18) Lasting Impact on Modern cognitive Science

Modern research in cognitive science and neuroscience challenges Descartes' idea of a single, clear, and stable thinking self. Studies show that our mind is deeply connected to body, emotions and external world. So, "I" cannot exist in isolation rather it is dynamic, embodied, and complex.

Conclusion

Descartes' cogito argument laid the cornerstone of modern philosophy by grounding knowledge in certainty of thought. It initiated a new era of subject-centered rationalism but has its own limitations such as mind-body dualism, solipsistic tendencies, and disembodied introspection. Yet, its influence on Kantian transcendentalism and Sartre's existentialism to Heidegger's deconstruction has greatly enriched philosophical discourse.