

TOPIC OF THE WEEK

IS “BEING CERTAIN” A TRAP?

It can be.

Certainty is useful when it reflects something that is well-supported by evidence. We need some degree of certainty to cross a road, build a bridge, or trust a friend.

But certainty can become a trap when it closes off curiosity. If you become completely certain that you are right, you may stop asking questions, stop listening, and stop noticing new information. In that sense, certainty can imprison thought.

Many philosophers have wrestled with this. Socrates is often associated with the idea that wisdom begins with recognising the limits of one's knowledge. Bertrand Russell famously observed that people who are certain are not always the ones who have the strongest reasons to be.

There is also a paradox: if you are certain that certainty is a trap, that certainty may itself become a trap.

Perhaps the question is not whether certainty is good or bad, but whether it remains open to revision. A belief held firmly yet revisable is different from a belief held as unquestionable.

You might say:

- Doubt without commitment can lead to paralysis.
- Certainty without doubt can lead to blindness.
- Wisdom may lie somewhere between them.

What makes you ask? Are you thinking about certainty in everyday decisions, in religion, in politics, or in understanding life itself?