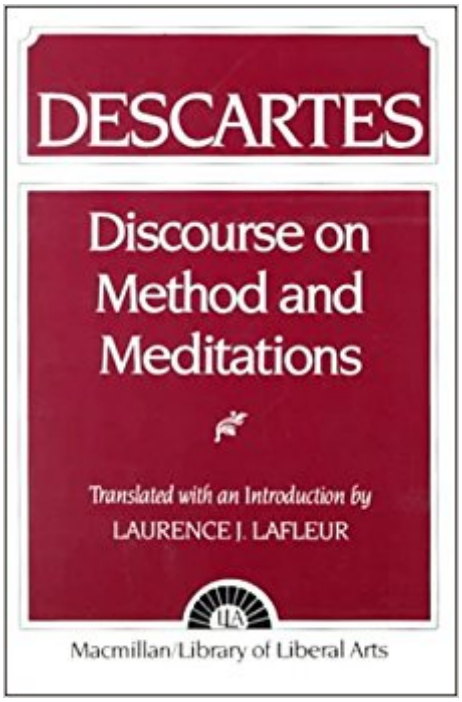
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Descartes: Discourse On Method And The Meditations



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Synopsis

Is it possible to be certain of anything? If so, how? The father of modern philosophy and the founder of rational method in philosophical thought, RenÃƒÂ© Descartes (1596Ã¢â ¬â œ1650) sought the answers to these questions and in doing so, addressed the most important of methods of thinking and understanding truth. In Discourse on Method, he applies a scientific approach to philosophy that comprises four principles: to accept only what reason recognizes as "clear and distinct"; to analyze complex ideas by dividing them into smaller elements; to reconstruct the ideas; and to make accurate and complete enumerations of the data. His Meditations proceed according to this method, exploring the mind/body distinction, the nature of truth and error, the existence of God, and the essence of material things. --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

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Customer Reviews

Library of Liberal Arts title.

The Yale Edition is so worth it. Lots more info in that book than this one. Also the text itself is different.

Nice and clean pages!

great

There is no question that this book contains great philosophy, but I have some misgivings about the translation here. It's not just that the translation of the Meditations often seems somewhat misleading in the details that are likely to concern serious readers of this work, but that Lafleur's decision to translate various editions of the Meditations and to run them together wasn't a very wise one. Not only does it make the book somewhat harder to read than it should be, but it's questionable whether this provides one with an accurate picture of Descartes's thought. This is an especially important concern since one of the three editions of Descartes's Meditations on which Lafleur relies is a French translation of the Meditations that Descartes approved for publication. To the best of my knowledge, it's not know just how closely Descartes read this text before giving it his approval. So relying on it in providing a translation of the work seems pretty dubious to me. (To his credit, Lafleur makes clear where he's providing material from each translation and he relies on Descartes's original Latin edition as the basic text. Material from the other editions is added in brackets.) Also, the book has a very out-of-date bibliography, one that doesn't appear to have been updated since the translation was first published in the 50s.That said, there is great philosophy on display here. Descartes's Meditations on First Philosophy is one of the few works of philosophy that absolutely every educated person needs to read at least once. This is required reading for anyone interested in philosophy or its history, and honestly I don't see how this work can be ignored by anyone interested in the history of ideas. It's also a work that I'd recommend to anyone who wants to be introduced to philosophy by reading the work of a great philosopher. And don't worry: it shouldn't take you more than an afternoon to read through it. But you can, of course, spend the remainder of your life thinking about the ideas contained in this work.The Meditations has had an incalculable influence on the history of subsequent philosophical thinking. Indeed, according to nearly every history of philosophy you're likely to come across, this work is where modern philosophy begins. It's not that any of Descartes's arguments are startlingly original--many of them have historical precedents--but that Descartes's work was compelling enough to initiate two research programs in philosophy, namely British empiricism and continental rationalism, and to place certain issues (e.g. the mind-body problem, the plausibility of and responses to skepticism, the ontological argument for the existence of God, etc.) on the philosophical agenda for a long time to come.All of this is material, and a lot more, is covered in roughly sixty pages of text, and it is presented in some of the clearest, most straightforward philosophical prose ever written. Plus, the reader needn't have mastered any arcane jargon or previous work in philosophy to understand Descartes's views. And because it is written as a series of meditations in which Descartes leads us through something like his own process of through about these issues, it makes for relatively easy

reading. So the Meditations is a work of value to both newcomers to philosophy and to those with a great deal of philosophical background.This edition also includes Descartes's Discourse on Method, which, though it isn't as important or philosophically sophisticated as the Meditations, is an essential text for understanding Descartes's conception of his own project. The book begins with interesting intellectual biography involving an account of his disillusionment with the intellectual culture of his time and of how this disillusionment led him to the project of finding a philosophical basis for a systematic scientific conception of the world. This is followed by a short presentation of an early version of the main lines of Descartes's philosophical argument that he would go on to develop in the Meditations. Then Descartes shows how he applied his method to discover a priori "solutions" to certain scientific problems. The Discourse, then, provides one with a better sense of Descartes's self-conception as a philosopher and the role he thought his philosophical system should play in the thinking of his times.The primary benefit of purchasing this translation of Descartes is that it's quite cheap. It's an adequate edition of the Meditations and the Discourse for students, and I'm sure it's fine for the average reader.

Rene Descartes is often considered the founding father of modern philosophy. A true Renaissance man, he studied Scholastic philosophy and physics as a student, spent time as a volunteer soldier and traveler throughout Europe, studied mathematics, appreciated the arts, and became a noted correspondent with royals and intellectual figures throughout the continent. He died in Sweden while on assignment as tutor to the Queen, Christiana.Descartes 'Discourse on Method' is a fascinating text, combining the newly-invented form of essay (Descartes was familiar with the Essays of Montaigne) with the same kind of autobiographical impulse that underpins Augustine's Confessions. Descartes writes about his own form of mystical experience, seeing this as almost a kind of revelation that all past knowledge would be superseded, and all problems would eventually be solved by human intellect.In the Discourse, Descartes formulates logical principles based on reason (which makes it somewhat ironic that this came to him almost as a revelation). Descartes had some appreciation for thinkers such as Francis Bacon and Thomas Hobbes, but he thought that Bacon depended too much upon empirical data, and with Hobbes he disagreed on what would be the criteria for ascertaining certainty.Descartes was a mathematician at heart, and perhaps had a carry-over of Pythagorean mystical attachment to mathematics, for his sense of reason led him to impute an absolute quality to mathematics; this has major implications for metaphysics and epistemology. Descartes method was a continuation in many ways of the ideas of Plato, Aristotle and the medieval thinkers, for they all tended toward thinking in absolute, universal terms in some

degree.Descartes in his first section discounts much of Scholasticism, stating that the only real absolutes are theology and mathematics; because theology is based upon revelation, it is therefore beyond reason, and thus, mathematics becomes the only rational truth. Descartes develops this idea further with rules of method, which include ideas of intuition, analysis and deduction. He uses some of his method to come up with his greatest proposition:Cogito ergo sum - - I think, therefore I am'The Cogito is a first principle from which Descartes will now deduce all that follows.' This permits Descartes to deal both with rational elements and empirical data.This is an important text; the 'Discourse on Method' is one that I read the summer before I went to college, and makes a good study for those who wish to see the personal element in the development of philosophy.

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