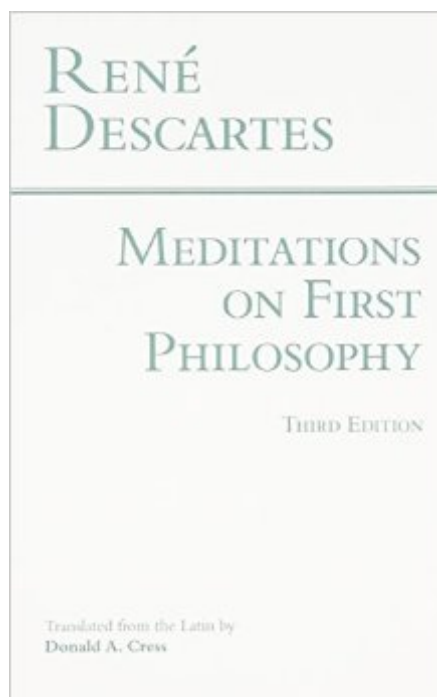


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Meditations On First Philosophy (Hackett Classics)



Synopsis

Descartes's Meditations on First Philosophy, the fundamental and originating work of the modern era in Western philosophy, is presented here in Donald Cress's completely revised edition of his well-established translation, bringing this version even closer to Descartes's original, while maintaining its clear and accessible style.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

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. Moreover, Descartes was capable of posing questions of great intrinsic interest in prose accessible to everyone. So the *Meditations* is a work of value to both newcomers to philosophy and to those with a great deal of philosophical background. The First Meditation is Descartes's implementation of his method of doubt.

When I was in the midst of my educational pursuits, I took my first course in philosophy. One day my professor stumped the class with the question: "What do humans have that is distinct from non-human animals? Is there anything unique about humans?" The professor then contended that when one surveys all animal species there isn't anything fully unique about mankind. Although the class tried, no one was able to mount an effective argument that refuted his premise. Nevertheless, one thing that human beings do that no other species attempts is epistemology: asking how we know what we know. The whole mass of the animal world lacks the ability to build an epistemic view. And Rene Descartes was one of the chief thinkers who helped birth modern epistemology. Descartes aspired to set in motion human knowledge afresh through finding a place to ground indubitable knowledge. He sought to thrust aside the collected mass of rational predispositions, preconceptions, prejudices, partialities, and biases of the past and construct from the epistemic ground up, constructing one logical certainty upon another. Descartes was mathematician; philosopher and a true mastermind in the early epistemological pursuits as he embraced dualism. Additionally he's the author of the controversial: "I think therefore I am" formulation; since I am thinking, I must exist. His aim was to find an immovable impossibility of the contrary foundation as the starting point within a fuller epistemic scheme. Most, from all epistemic schools, believe that Descartes failed and at best made a case for solipsism. Nonetheless his work helped launch countless valuable epistemological pursuits.

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