

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-61426-0 - Descartes: Discours De La Méthode

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Cambridge Plain Texts

DESCARTES
DISCOURS DE LA MÉTHODE

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-61426-0 - Descartes: Discours De La Méthode

Frontmatter

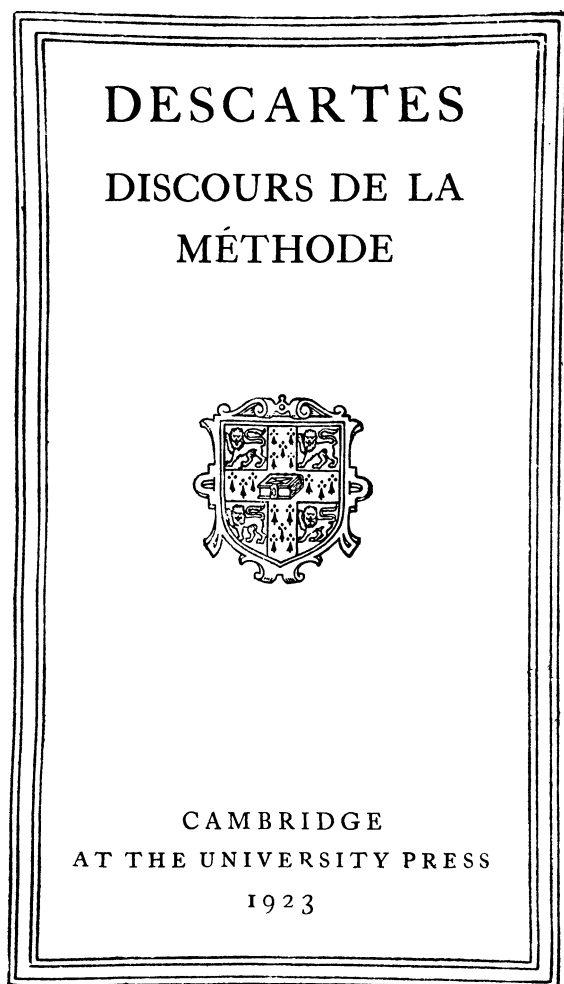
[More information](#)

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-61426-0 - Descartes: Discours De La Méthode

Frontmatter

[More information](#)



Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-61426-0 - Descartes: Discours De La Méthode

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town,
Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi, Mexico City

Cambridge University Press

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107614260

© Cambridge University Press 1923

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,
no reproduction of any part may take place without the written
permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 1923

Re-issued 2013

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-107-61426-0 Paperback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or
accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in
this publication, and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is,
or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-61426-0 - Descartes: Discours De La Méthode

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

NOTE

THE *Discours de la Méthode* is at once a fragment of autobiography (a confession of personal experience), and an engine of scientific and philosophical reform. The autobiography needs illustrating by a few dates and names.

René Descartes (1596–1650) was born and brought up in Touraine. His schooling (at La Flèche) ended, he went on service as a volunteer in the Thirty Years' War. It was in winter quarters at Neuburg in 1619 that he found his Method. Two years later he left the army and went wandering over Europe, like Odysseus seeing the towns and learning the minds of many men. In 1629 he betook himself to Holland in search of the quiet and freedom which France could not give. In 1637 he published his *Discours de la Méthode* by way of amends for the *Traité du monde*, which in a fit of caution, remembering Galileo, he had suppressed in 1633.

After the *Discours* he continued to live in Holland, the object of attack by Dutch theologians, until at length in 1649 he accepted the invitation of Queen Christina to come and teach her philosophy. The climate of Sweden was too rigorous for him and he died of inflammation of the lungs in February, 1650. His remains were brought to Paris in 1667 and laid in Saint-Étienne-du-Mont. In 1819 they were transferred to Saint-Germain-des-Prés.

Of more importance to Descartes—and to us—than

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-61426-0 - Descartes: Discours De La Méthode

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

vi

NOTE

the outward events of his life were the steps by which he reached his discovery of the *cogito ergo sum*¹ and the consequences that flowed therefrom. The great virtue of the *Discours de la Méthode*, apart from its value as a human document, lies in its deliberate substitution of Reason for authority as the ultimate tribunal. Descartes is as contemptuous of the schoolmen and their dogmas—*les philosophes* and *la philosophie*—as was Francis Bacon. Their discredit in Western thought is probably due more to him than to his English predecessor. For while Bacon founded no school, Cartesianism captured the thinking world, reigned without a serious rival for a hundred years, and may indeed claim to have inspired modern science and modern philosophy.

H. F. S.

March, 1923.

¹ It should be observed that the principle of the *cogito ergo sum* had suggested itself in turn to St Augustine of Hippo and to St Anselm.