

Discourse on method, Optics, Geometry, and Meteorology.

Bobbs-Merrill - Descartes René (ed.), Discourse on Method, Optics, Geometry, Meteorology, translated by Paul J. Olscamp



Description: -

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Discourse on Method, Optics, Geometry, and Meteorology

But what pleased me the most with this method was that with it I was confident of using all my reason, if not perfectly, at least as well as was in my power. For that would have been contrary to the order which my method prescribed. Rene Descartes 1596—1650 was a seminal figure in the scientific revolution of the 17th century.

Ep. 231: Descartes's "Discourse" on Wisdom and Certainty (Part One)

By doing that, it seems to me, I found the heavens, the stars, and earth, and even on the earth water, air, fire, minerals, and some other things, the sort which are the most common of all and the simplest, and thus the easiest to know. But, by contrast, once I returned to an examination of the idea which I had of a perfect being, I found that that being contains the idea of existence in the same way as the fact the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles is contained in the idea of a triangle, or that in a sphere all the parts are equidistant from the centre, or something even more evident, and that, as a result, it is at just as certain that God, this perfect being, is or exists as any geometric proof can be. But I learned from my college days on that one cannot imagine anything so strange and so incredible that it has not been said by some philosopher and, later, in my traveling, I learned that those who have views very different from our own are not therefore barbarians or savages, but that several use as much reason as we do, or more.

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Translates as Galileo Studies, John Mepham trans. Then, there are the ones who, having sufficient reason or modesty to judge that they are less capable of differentiating truth and falsehood than several others from whom they can be instructed, must content themselves with following the opinions of these others rather than searching for better opinions on their own. The Discourse is intended to introduce the scientific method that Descartes has invented and to explain how his views came about and why he has been so hesitant to publish them, while the essays are meant to serve as evidence of the fruits of his labor.

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And, in addition, I do not boast that I am the first inventor of any of them, although I have never accepted them merely because they were said by others or because they have not been said by others, but simply because reason persuaded me to accept them. And finally, as for bad doctrines, I thought I already understood sufficiently what they were worth in order not to be taken in either by the promises of an alchemist, by the predictions of an astrologer, by the impostures of a magician, or by the artifice or the bragging of any of those who made a profession of knowing more than they know. The second test is that, although these machines might do several things as well or perhaps better than we do, they are inevitably lacking in some other, through which we discover that they act, not by knowledge, but only by the arrangement of their organs.

Discourse on Method: Summary

For if that were true, because they have several organs related to our own, they could just as easily make themselves understood to us as to the animals like them.

The Geometry of Rene Descartes

And evidently it is no less repugnant that falsity or imperfection, in itself, should come from God than that utility or truth should come from nothingness. Finally, what is most remarkable in all this is the generation of animal spirits which resemble a very slight wind or rather a very pure and lively flame which, by climbing continually in great quantities from the heart into the brain, goes from there through the nerves into the muscles and gives movement to all the limbs, without it being necessary to imagine any other cause which has the effect of making the most agitated and most penetrating parts of blood, those most appropriate for making up these animal spirits, move towards the brain rather than elsewhere, other than that the arteries which carry these parts of the blood are those which come from the heart toward the brain by the most direct route and that, following the laws of mechanics, which are the same as nature's laws, when several things collectively tend to move towards the same place where there is insufficient room for all of them, as the parts of blood which leave the left cavity of the heart tend towards the brain, the most feeble and less agitated parts must be turned away from the brain by the strongest parts.

Discourse on Method: Summary

And I concluded that obviously this must be something with a nature which was, in effect, more perfect. He thinks about whether he wants to be a public intellectual or whether he should just let his works be published after his death.

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Discourse VI, AT 6: 76, CSM 1: 150 The suppositions Descartes refers to here are introduced in the course of experiment; they describe the shapes, sizes, and motions of the bodies that cause the effects observed in an experiment. AT 7: 18, CSM 2: 17 Instead of running through all of his opinions individually, he decides to place them in definite classes and examine one or two members of each particular class, in order to see whether he has any reason to doubt them. That is to say, I would carefully avoid being over hasty or prejudiced, and I would understand nothing by my judgments beyond what presented itself so clearly and distinctly to my mind that I had no occasion to doubt it.

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