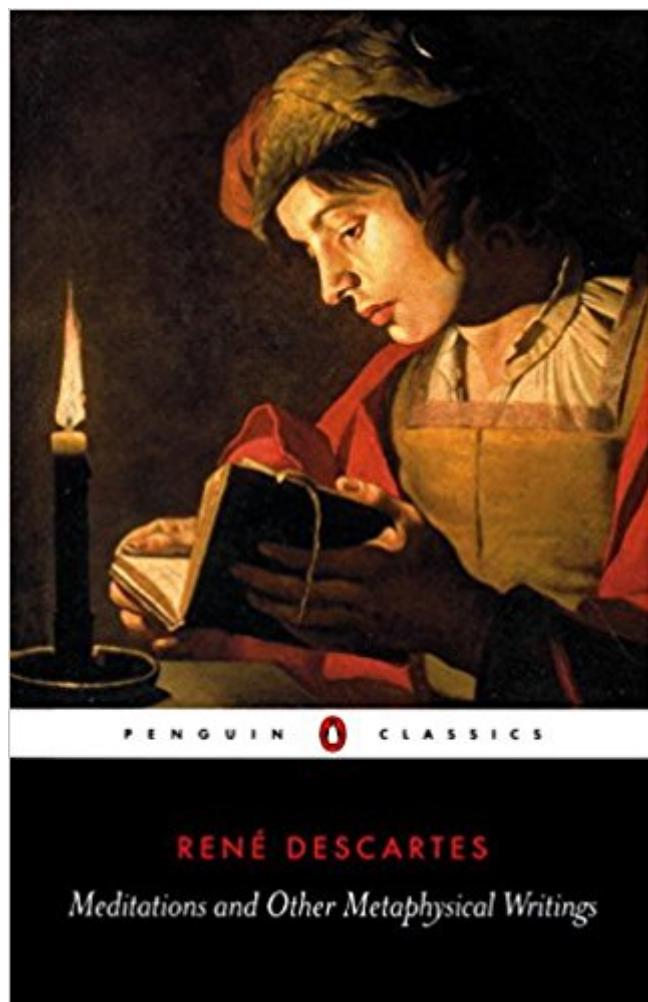


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# Meditations And Other Metaphysical Writings (Penguin Classics)



## Synopsis

One of the foundation-stones of modern philosophy Descartes was prepared to go to any lengths in his search for certainty— even to deny those things that seemed most self-evident. In his *Meditations* of 1641, and in the *Objections and Replies* that were included with the original publication, he set out to dismantle and then reconstruct the idea of the individual self and its existence. In doing so, Descartes developed a language of subjectivity that has lasted to this day, and he also took his first steps towards the view that would eventually be expressed in the epigram *Cogito, ergo sum* ("I think, therefore I am"), one of modern philosophy's most famous—and most fiercely contested—claims. The first part of a two-volume edition of Descartes' works in Penguin Classics, the second of which is *Discourse on Method & Related Writings*. For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

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## Customer Reviews

Text: English (translation) Original Language: French, Latin

TRANSLATED WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY DESMOND M. CLARKE

Of all the works of the man claimed by many as the father of modern philosophy, the *Meditations* (1641), must surely be René Descartes' masterpiece. The six *Meditations* and accompanying selections from the *Objections and Replies* provide a definitive statement of what Descartes intended as the foundations of his whole philosophy. His project was to resolve the epistemological questions brought about by the prevailing scepticism of his age; to build, from the basis of self-awareness (*Cogito, ergo sum*), through the notion of a benevolent God, to a systematic and novel approach to metaphysics, and to construct a secure starting-point for science. The first part of a new two-volume edition of the works of Descartes in Penguin Classics, this volume consists not only of a new translation of the original Latin text and extensive selections from the *Objections and Replies*, but also includes relevant correspondence from the period 1643-49, Part One of *The Principles of Philosophy* and *Comments On a Certain Manifesto*, as examples of Descartes' other metaphysical writings from the period 1641-49.

An excellent work that helps explain how Western European thinkers arrived at where we are intellectually. These thoughts are so ingrained in and important for our culture that we do not think about them consciously.

great

Thank you, I have enjoyed the book greatly. In addition, I revised the book in less than a week. Also, it was like new.:D

School requirement

the front cover was ripped, and I bought it new.

2 stars for the historical significance, but I will never understand how these feverish rants managed to make the hall of fame of philosophy...

This new Penguin edition includes the *Meditations* and selections from *Principles of Philosophy* and avoids repetition by omitting the simpler *Discourse on Method*. The *Meditations* is a keystone of 'modern' (as opposed to Medieval) philosophy and takes as its starting point the reconstruction of knowledge on a basis of absolute certainty. Hence Descartes begins by enumerating his inherited

beliefs and subjecting them to the famous 'Cartesian doubt' ('Cartesian' from 'des Cartes'). This reduces him to the famous 'I think, I am' as indubitable. From there, he builds up a system of knowledge on the basis of arguments, starting with the existence of God and modeled on mathematical argumentation. Used as a teaching text, Descartes can reduce students to a frustrated scepticism, as can Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature* (Penguin Classics). One wise professor who used Descartes as a class text taught it alongside Francis Bacon's writings which summarise the wealth and detail of knowledge, classified into history, poetry and philosophy to counteract scepticism. Descartes was also contrasted in the 19th century with Blaise Pascal's *Pensées*, which says that 'the heart has its reasons that reason does not know' and thus rounds out the rationalistic idea of experience. Amongst modern critics, John Macmurray's *The Self as Agent* argues that it is incoherent to separate knowledge and practice.

The translator of this text (Desmond M. Clarke) chose to annex several of the Objections and Replies, correspondence between Descartes and his supporters, part one of The Principles of Philosophy, and Comments on a Certain Manifesto in order to broaden and contextually illuminate the essence of what comprises the core of this compilation, *Meditations On First Philosophy*, by René Descartes. Ambitious - but the result clearly imparts one a deeper understanding of what Descartes was trying to convey, and also puts his philosophy in the proper historical context. I'm actually quite glad that I purchased this text as opposed to merely the *Meditations on First Philosophy* alone, for The *Meditations* themselves are probably the least interesting part of this book. That's not to imply that what comprises The *Meditations* is uninteresting, just that greater things lie elsewhere. The *Meditations* themselves are clearly written and present several philosophical arguments to the reader - mind-body duality, an ontological argument for God, how to reason and judge correctly, etc - but suffers at times from simplistic over-explanation. However, this is scarcely a detriment, and is to be somewhat expected whenever one confronts the task of philosophizing logically and thoroughly. Following the *meditations* comes a selection of objections and replies, in which Descartes attempts to defend objections to what is expounded in The *Meditations*. The Principles of First Philosophy follow, which is a somewhat more concise reiteration of ideas explored in The *Meditations*. The correspondence is extremely interesting, as the majority occurs between Descartes and Queen Elizabeth. Comments on a Certain Manifesto also adds greatly to this book, as Descartes explains and clarifies his views and responds to critics who attack him without having properly digested said views. The comments also include something which is

only really touched upon in *The Meditations*; that is, that Descartes suggests that although much of what we judge and understand is based largely on sensory perception - and the abilities to reason and judge truthfully greatly benefit from this knowledge - that the capacity to think and reason is innate, and not something learned via sensory perception. He offers this in refutation to someone that he feels is bastardizing his views in *Comments*, and as support for the evidence of God in *Meditations*, but only explores it in detail in the former, opting for subtlety in the latter. Personally, I feel Descartes made somewhat of a mistake by - not so much simplifying so to speak - but being a little too ambiguous in *Meditations*. He was evidently attempting to rely on reason and reason alone, and it doing so, many people confused or misunderstood his ideas, as evidenced in the objections and replies. But the careful reader should not be prone to such misunderstanding(s). Was Descartes correct in his reasoning? Much of it is logically sound, such as the assumption that thinking inherently necessitates existence, but many of it can and has been refuted or argued by subsequent philosophers. Some of the more obvious objections I have personally with Descartes's philosophy are assumptions - things like, although the mind appears indivisible, that does not make it evidently so, and although the body appears divisible - so much so that it can be separated from the mind without affecting the mind - this surely only remains true to the point where one tries to separate the mind from the brain. Although the brain can surely be separated from the mind, it is impossible to separate the mind from the brain, or the essence of what we understand to be the mind. The ontological argument for God is also a little fishy, somewhat of a tautology, and only really true if you believe in the necessity of an omnipotent, omniscient God to begin with. However, Descartes contributions to philosophy and general science should not be overlooked or diminished, and much of what is explored here remains logically sound. This edition also includes a general introduction by the translator, notes on the translation wherever appropriate, and brief introductions before each particular section. This book proves to me, once again, why Penguin remains one of my favorite publishers of philosophy.

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