

principles of philosophy rene descartes

Principles of Philosophy Rene Descartes: A Deep Dive into Cartesian Thought

principles of philosophy rene descartes serve as a cornerstone in the development of modern Western philosophy. Often hailed as the father of modern philosophy, René Descartes revolutionized the way we approach knowledge, existence, and the mind-body relationship. His work laid the groundwork for rationalism and influenced countless thinkers across disciplines. To truly appreciate the impact of Descartes, it's essential to explore the core concepts and principles that define his philosophical system.

Understanding the Foundations: What Are the Principles of Philosophy Rene Descartes Advocated?

At the heart of Descartes' philosophy is a quest for certainty—a desire to establish a foundation of knowledge that is absolutely indubitable. Unlike many earlier philosophers who relied heavily on sensory experience, Descartes sought to build knowledge through reason alone. This approach is best captured in his method of doubt, where he famously questioned everything that could possibly be doubted until he arrived at something undeniably true.

The Method of Doubt: A New Path to Knowledge

One of the most revolutionary principles of philosophy Rene Descartes introduced is methodological skepticism. By doubting all beliefs that could be questioned, he aimed to strip away falsehoods and arrive at an unshakable truth. This process led him to his famous declaration: "*Cogito, ergo sum*" ("*I think, therefore I am*").

The importance of this statement lies in its self-evident nature; even if all external realities are uncertain, the very act of doubting confirms the existence of the doubter. This principle became the foundation for Descartes' entire philosophical system and demonstrated a shift from relying on external authorities to trusting reason and introspection.

The Dualism of Mind and Body: Exploring Cartesian Dualism

Another vital principle in Descartes' philosophy is his dualistic view of human existence. He proposed that the mind and body are two fundamentally different substances:

- **The mind** (or soul) is an immaterial, thinking substance, characterized by consciousness and self-awareness.
- **The body** is a material, extended substance that occupies space and operates according to physical laws.

This concept, known as Cartesian dualism, challenges the previously dominant ideas that linked mind and body inseparably. Descartes argued that the mind could exist independently of the body, which sparked centuries of debate about the nature of consciousness and its relationship to the physical world.

Implications of Cartesian Dualism

Descartes' distinction between mind and body has profound implications for topics like free will, personal identity, and the philosophy of mind. It led to questions such as: How do two distinct substances interact? Where does the mind reside? Descartes himself hypothesized that the pineal gland acted as the point of interaction, though this explanation remains controversial.

The dualistic framework also paved the way for later discussions in psychology, neuroscience, and metaphysics, influencing how we think about mental states versus physical states.

Innate Ideas and Rationalism: Knowledge Beyond Experience

A significant aspect of the principles of philosophy Rene Descartes championed is the concept of innate ideas. Unlike empiricists who believe knowledge arises solely from sensory experiences, Descartes argued that certain ideas are inherent to human reason and exist independently of experience.

Examples of Innate Ideas

Descartes believed that fundamental truths, such as mathematical concepts and the idea of God, are innate. According to him, these ideas are deeply embedded in the mind's structure and can be accessed through rational reflection rather than empirical observation.

This belief aligns with his rationalist philosophy, where reason is the primary source of knowledge. For Descartes, senses can be deceptive, but the mind's innate faculties provide a reliable foundation for understanding the world.

How Innate Ideas Shape Knowledge Acquisition

The principle of innate ideas implies that learning is a process of uncovering knowledge already present in the mind, rather than acquiring it entirely from the outside world. This perspective influenced later thinkers like Leibniz and Spinoza and remains a pivotal topic in epistemology and cognitive science.

God and Certainty: The Role of the Divine in Cartesian Philosophy

Among the principles of philosophy Rene Descartes elaborated on, the existence of God holds a special place. Descartes sought to prove God's existence through reason, aiming to provide a secure foundation for knowledge and avoid skepticism.

The Ontological Argument and Descartes' Proof

Descartes presented a version of the ontological argument, suggesting that the idea of a perfect being necessarily entails its existence. Since humans possess an idea of a supremely perfect God, and existence is a perfection, God must exist. This argument helped Descartes justify why clear and distinct perceptions—those understood by reason—could be trusted.

God as a Guarantor of Truth

For Descartes, God's existence was crucial in overcoming radical doubt. If a benevolent God exists, then the human faculties are not systematically deceived, and knowledge obtained through reason can be reliable. This theological principle reinforced his epistemological system and provided a

metaphysical backdrop for his inquiries.

The Impact and Legacy of Descartes' Principles of Philosophy

The principles of philosophy Rene Descartes developed have had a lasting influence, shaping not only philosophy but also science, mathematics, and psychology. His insistence on doubt and reason as tools for acquiring knowledge laid the groundwork for the scientific method and emphasized the importance of critical thinking.

Moreover, Cartesian dualism sparked centuries of debate about the mind-body problem—a central issue in philosophy of mind. The idea of innate ideas challenged empiricist doctrines and encouraged new explorations into how knowledge is structured within the human mind.

Practical Lessons from Descartes' Philosophy

Descartes' principles encourage us to:

1. **Question assumptions:** Don't accept beliefs without scrutiny; develop a habit of critical thinking.
2. **Trust reason:** Use logical analysis to uncover truths, especially in complex or uncertain situations.
3. **Recognize the limits of sensory information:** Understand that senses can mislead, and verify information through multiple means.

These insights remain valuable across disciplines, from scientific research to everyday decision-making.

Exploring the principles of philosophy Rene Descartes laid out offers a fascinating journey into the origins of modern thought. His work challenges us to think deeply about existence, knowledge, and the nature of reality—questions that remain as relevant today as they were in the 17th century.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the main objective of René Descartes' 'Principles of Philosophy'?

The main objective of René Descartes' 'Principles of Philosophy' is to provide a comprehensive foundation for all scientific knowledge based on clear and certain principles derived through reason.

How does Descartes define the principle of doubt in 'Principles of Philosophy'?

Descartes defines the principle of doubt as a method of questioning all beliefs that can be doubted to establish a foundation of absolutely certain knowledge.

What role does the concept of 'Cogito, ergo sum' play in Descartes' philosophy?

The concept 'Cogito, ergo sum' ('I think, therefore I am') serves as the foundational truth in Descartes' philosophy, establishing the certainty of the self's existence through the act of thinking.

How does Descartes explain the relationship between mind and body in 'Principles of Philosophy'?

Descartes explains the mind and body as two distinct substances; the mind is immaterial and thinking, while the body is material and extended, interacting through the pineal gland.

What are the four rules Descartes proposes for acquiring knowledge in 'Principles of Philosophy'?

Descartes proposes four rules: (1) accept only what is clear and distinct, (2) divide problems into smaller parts, (3) start with the simplest problems, and (4) review thoroughly to ensure completeness.

How does Descartes incorporate the concept of God in his 'Principles of Philosophy'?

Descartes argues that the idea of a perfect God must have originated from a perfect being itself, using this to prove God's existence and to guarantee the truth of clear and distinct perceptions.

What is Descartes' view on the laws of nature in 'Principles of Philosophy'?

Descartes views the laws of nature as immutable and mathematical truths

established by God that govern the physical universe, forming the basis of scientific inquiry.

How did 'Principles of Philosophy' influence modern scientific thought?

Descartes' 'Principles of Philosophy' influenced modern scientific thought by emphasizing a rational and systematic approach to knowledge, encouraging the use of deduction, mathematical principles, and skepticism to advance science.

Additional Resources

****Exploring the Principles of Philosophy René Descartes****

principles of philosophy rene descartes signify a foundational pillar in Western thought, marking a profound shift from scholastic traditions to modern rationalism. Descartes, often hailed as the "father of modern philosophy," developed a systematic approach to knowledge that continues to influence diverse fields such as epistemology, metaphysics, and the philosophy of mind. His work, particularly in **Principles of Philosophy** (1644), offers a comprehensive framework that intertwines methodical skepticism, dualism, and the quest for certainty.

Understanding the principles of philosophy René Descartes presents requires delving into his method of doubt, the cogito argument, and his dualistic ontology. These elements collectively challenge prior philosophical assumptions, emphasizing reason as the primary tool for acquiring true knowledge. This article investigates these core ideas, analyzing their implications and enduring relevance.

The Methodological Foundation: Radical Doubt and Certainty

At the heart of Descartes' principles lies his methodological skepticism, a rigorous process designed to discard all beliefs that could be subject to even the slightest doubt. This approach is famously encapsulated in his **Meditations on First Philosophy** but is also foundational in his **Principles of Philosophy**. Descartes sought to establish a secure foundation for scientific knowledge by first stripping away unreliable beliefs.

Radical Doubt as an Investigative Tool

Descartes' method begins with doubting everything that can be doubted—sensory experiences, the external world, even mathematical truths—until he arrives at

something indubitable. This radical doubt serves not as an end, but a means to clear away uncertainty. The process leads to his seminal assertion: **Cogito, ergo sum** ("I think, therefore I am"). This statement stands as the first principle of philosophy René Descartes proposes—self-awareness is undeniable proof of existence.

From Skepticism to Foundationalism

The transition from skepticism to certainty illustrates Descartes' foundationalist epistemology. He posits that knowledge must be built upon clear and distinct ideas, which are self-evident truths immune to doubt. The cogito is the archetype of such clarity, serving as an unshakeable base from which further knowledge can be derived. This epistemic structure contrasts sharply with the then-dominant Aristotelian and scholastic frameworks that relied heavily on tradition and authority.

Mind-Body Dualism: Distinguishing the Mental and the Physical

One of the most influential and debated aspects of the principles of philosophy René Descartes articulates is his dualistic view of reality. Descartes famously distinguishes between **res cogitans** (thinking substance) and **res extensa** (extended substance), positing that mind and body are fundamentally different kinds of entities.

The Nature of the Mind

Descartes characterizes the mind as a non-material, thinking substance. It is defined by consciousness, self-awareness, and the capacity for reasoning. Unlike physical objects, the mind does not occupy space and is indivisible. This conceptualization of the mind paved the way for subsequent philosophical inquiries into consciousness and personal identity.

The Physical Body as Extension

Conversely, the body belongs to the realm of physical substance, measurable and divisible. It operates according to mechanical laws, a view that aligned with emerging scientific perspectives in the 17th century. By framing the body as a machine, Descartes contributed to the mechanistic understanding of nature, influencing fields such as physiology and physics.

Interaction Problem and Legacy

While Descartes posited that mind and body interact—most famously via the pineal gland—this interactionist dualism has faced persistent criticism. The so-called "mind-body problem" remains a central issue in philosophy of mind, with challenges centered on explaining how immaterial consciousness can affect physical processes. Nonetheless, Descartes' dualism marked a critical departure from monistic views and has spurred extensive debate and development in metaphysics.

Mathematics and the Primacy of Reason

Descartes' principles of philosophy also emphasize the role of mathematics as a model for certainty and clarity. He admired the precision and universality of mathematical knowledge and sought to extend its method to philosophy and natural sciences.

Analytical Geometry and Systematic Doubt

Beyond philosophy, Descartes' invention of analytical geometry reflects his commitment to applying rigorous reasoning to complex problems. His belief that the universe operates according to orderly principles accessible through reason underpins his philosophical method. This alignment between mathematics and philosophy exemplifies his rationalist stance, which prioritizes reason over empirical observation.

Pros and Cons of Rationalism in Descartes' Framework

- **Pros:** Descartes' rationalism provides a clear, systematic approach to knowledge, enabling progress in science and philosophy by emphasizing certainty and logical deduction.
- **Cons:** Critics argue that his dismissal of sensory experience undervalues empirical evidence, and his reliance on innate ideas remains contentious.

Principles of Philosophy René Descartes in

Historical Context

Published in 1644, *Principles of Philosophy* sought to unify Cartesian philosophy with the emerging scientific worldview. It was intended as a comprehensive textbook that replaced Aristotelian natural philosophy, reflecting the intellectual upheaval of the Scientific Revolution.

Influence on Modern Philosophy and Science

Descartes' insistence on doubt and reason influenced Enlightenment thinkers and laid groundwork for modern epistemology. His dualistic ontology challenged existing metaphysical frameworks and shaped discussions in cognitive science and psychology.

Comparative Overview with Contemporary Philosophers

Unlike empiricists such as John Locke, who emphasized sensory experience as the basis of knowledge, Descartes championed innate ideas and deduction. His rationalist approach contrasts with the empiricism that dominated later in the 17th and 18th centuries, highlighting ongoing dialectics in philosophical methodology.

Key Takeaways from Descartes' Principles of Philosophy

- **Methodological Skepticism:** Systematic doubt as a tool to achieve certainty.
- **Cogito as Foundational Truth:** Self-awareness as the indubitable starting point for knowledge.
- **Mind-Body Dualism:** Clear distinction between thinking substance and physical extension.
- **Rationalism and Mathematics:** Reason as the ultimate path to knowledge, modeled on mathematical clarity.
- **Scientific Revolution Context:** Integration of philosophy with emerging scientific principles.

By dissecting the principles of philosophy René Descartes put forth, one

appreciates the depth and complexity of his thought. His work not only redefined philosophical inquiry but also set the stage for modern science and epistemology, a legacy that continues to resonate in contemporary debates on knowledge, consciousness, and the nature of reality.

Principles Of Philosophy Rene Descartes

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principles of philosophy rene descartes: The Principles of Philosophy Rene Descartes, 2019-01-09 *Principles of Philosophy* is a book by Rene Descartes. It is basically a synthesis of the

Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy. It set forth the principles of nature—the Laws of Physics—as Descartes viewed them. Most notably, it set forth the principle that in the absence of external forces, an object's motion will be uniform and in a straight line. Newton borrowed this principle from Descartes and included it in his own Principia; to this day, it is still generally referred to as Newton's First Law of Motion. The book was primarily intended to replace the Aristotelian curriculum then used in French and British Universities. Descartes's use of the word philosophy in the title refers to natural philosophy, which is what science was called at that time.

principles of philosophy rene descartes: *Selections from the Principles of Philosophy* Rene Descartes, 2017-09-18 I. THAT in order to seek truth, it is necessary once in the course of our life, to doubt, as far as possible, of all things. As we were at one time children, and as we formed various judgments regarding the objects presented to our senses, when as yet we had not the entire use of our reason, numerous prejudices stand in the way of our arriving at the knowledge of truth; and of these it seems impossible for us to rid ourselves, unless we undertake, once in our lifetime, to doubt of all those things in which we may discover even the smallest suspicion of uncertainty.

principles of philosophy rene descartes: Selections from the Principles of Philosophy René Descartes, 2017-04-09 Selections from the Principles of Philosophy - Rene Descartes - Translated by John Veitch - Principles of Philosophy is a book by René Descartes. In essence it is a synthesis of the Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy. It was written in Latin, published in 1644 and dedicated to Elisabeth of Bohemia, with whom Descartes had a long-standing friendship. A French version (*Les Principes de la Philosophie*) followed in 1647. It set forth the principles of nature—the Laws of Physics—as Descartes viewed them. Most notably, it set forth the principle that in the absence of external forces, an object's motion will be uniform and in a straight line. Newton borrowed this principle from Descartes and included it in his own Principia; to this day, it is still generally referred to as Newton's First Law of Motion. The book was primarily intended to replace the Aristotelian curriculum then used in French and British Universities. The work provides a systematic statement of his metaphysics and natural philosophy, and represents the first truly comprehensive, mechanistic account of the universe.

principles of philosophy rene descartes: Selections from the Principles of Philosophy Rene Descartes, 2019-10-08 René Descartes (31 March 1596 - 11 February 1650) was a French philosopher, mathematician, and scientist. A native of the Kingdom of France, he spent about 20 years (1629-1649) of his life in the Dutch Republic after serving for a while in the Dutch States Army of Maurice of Nassau, Prince of Orange and the Stadtholder of the United Provinces. One of the most notable intellectual figures of the Dutch Golden Age, [19] Descartes is also widely regarded as one of the founders of modern philosophy. Many elements of Descartes' philosophy have precedents in late Aristotelianism, the revived Stoicism of the 16th century, or in earlier philosophers like Augustine. In his natural philosophy, he differed from the schools on two major points: first, he rejected the splitting of corporeal substance into matter and form; second, he rejected any appeal to final ends, divine or natural, in explaining natural phenomena.[20] In his theology, he insists on the absolute freedom of God's act of creation. Refusing to accept the authority of previous philosophers, Descartes frequently set his views apart from the philosophers who preceded him. In the opening section of the *Passions of the Soul*, an early modern treatise on emotions, Descartes goes so far as to assert that he will write on this topic as if no one had written on these matters before. His best known philosophical statement is I think, therefore I am (French: *Je pense, donc je suis*; Latin: *cogito, ergo sum*), found in *Discourse on the Method* (1637; written in French and Latin) and *Principles of Philosophy* (1644; written in Latin). Descartes laid the foundation for 17th-century continental rationalism, later advocated by Spinoza and Leibniz, and was later opposed by the empiricist school of thought consisting of Hobbes, Locke, Berkeley, and Hume. Leibniz, Spinoza, and Descartes were all well-versed in mathematics as well as philosophy, and Descartes and Leibniz contributed greatly to science as well. Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641) continues to be a standard text at most university philosophy departments. Descartes' influence in mathematics is equally apparent; the Cartesian coordinate system was named after him. He is

credited as the father of analytical geometry, the bridge between algebra and geometry--used in the discovery of infinitesimal calculus and analysis. Descartes was also one of the key figures in the Scientific Revolution.

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principles of philosophy rene descartes: The Philosophical Writings of Descartes: Volume 1 René Descartes, 1984 A completely new translation of the works of Descartes is intended to replace the Haldane and Ross edition, first published in 1911. All material from that edition is translated here, with a number of other texts crucial for understanding Cartesian philosophy.

principles of philosophy rene descartes: The Selections from the Principles of Philosophy René Descartes, 2016-05-10 [...] SELECTIONS FROM THE PRINCIPLES OF PHILOSOPHY OF DESCARTES TRANSLATED FROM THE LATIN AND COLLATED WITH THE FRENCH LETTER OF THE AUTHOR TO THE FRENCH TRANSLATOR OF THE PRINCIPLES OF [...].

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principles of philosophy rene descartes: Rules for the Direction of the Mind René Descartes, 2024-05-09 Descartes is rightly considered the father of modern philosophy - Schopenhauer A modern translation of Descartes' famous work Rules for the Direction of the Mind. This edition contains a timeline of Descartes' life and works, a glossary of Cartesian terminology, and Afterword by the translator that explains the significance of Descartes' contributions to modern philosophy and science, particularly his method of skepticism and rationalism. This scholarly apparatus nests this work into Descartes' larger body of work and the place of his philosophy into the broader history of western ideology. Descartes' focus on clear, logical reasoning is a hallmark of his philosophy, and his influence on fields such as mathematics and physics is profound, with his work laying the foundation for later scientific advances. Here, Descartes lays out a method for approaching problems and seeking knowledge. The importance of this work lies in the fact that it established the scientific method as a way of investigating the world, and had a significant influence on the development of modern science. This work is one of the foundational texts of Western Philosophy according to Nietzsche and Schopenhauer. Rules for the Direction of the Mind, Regulae ad directionem ingenii

(sometimes translated Cartesian Discipline), represents Descartes' ambitious attempt to establish a universal method for attaining truth, though he never completed the planned 36 rules, stopping at 21. Written during his formative years in the Netherlands, this unfinished work lays out his vision for a unified scientific method based on mathematical reasoning, marking a decisive break from the Scholastic tradition that dominated European universities. The text articulates several key principles that would become foundational to Cartesian philosophy: the need to accept only clear and distinct ideas as true, the importance of breaking complex problems into simpler components, and the power of mathematical reasoning as a model for all rational inquiry. His emphasis on systematic doubt and methodical analysis emerges clearly here, though in a less radical form than in his later works. What makes the *Regulae* particularly fascinating is how it reveals Descartes wrestling with fundamental questions about human knowledge and understanding. Unlike his later works, which often begin with metaphysical foundations, the *Regulae* approaches epistemology through practical methodology - how can we reliably distinguish truth from falsehood? Here we see Descartes developing his characteristic focus on method over content, arguing that the right way of thinking matters more than accumulated knowledge. The text's unfinished state offers unique insights into his evolving thought, showing him working through problems that would later crystallize in the *Discourse on Method* and *Meditations*. The work remained unpublished during his lifetime, first appearing in a Dutch translation in 1684, but its influence can be traced through his subsequent writings. Written around 1628 but unpublished during his lifetime, this work outlines his approach to knowledge and scientific inquiry. In this treatise, Descartes presents 21 rules designed to guide the mind toward truth through a structured method of reasoning. Although incomplete, it laid the groundwork for his later development of the Cartesian method, which emphasized clarity, logical deduction, and the importance of starting with self-evident truths. The work was heavily influenced by mathematics, which Descartes admired for its certainty and precision. His central goal was to find a method that could apply the same level of rigor to all areas of human knowledge, not just mathematics. The Rules also highlight Descartes' break with scholasticism and his desire to reject traditional methods of inquiry based on authority and ancient texts. He advocates the direct use of reason and intuition, urging the thinker to discard unnecessary complexity and focus on simple, clear ideas that can be built upon. This work is significant because it marks the early development of Descartes' methodological skepticism, which he would later refine into his famous *cogito, ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am) in his *Meditations*. The Rules represent a transitional phase in Descartes' thought, bridging the gap between Renaissance humanism and the systematic, analytical philosophy he would pioneer in the modern era.

principles of philosophy rene descartes: [Selections from the Principles of Philosophy](#) René Descartes, 2018-06-08 Selections from the Principles of Philosophy of Rene Descartes. Principles of Philosophy is a book by René Descartes. In essence it is a synthesis of the *Discourse on Method* and *Meditations on First Philosophy*. It was written in Latin, published in 1644 and dedicated to Elisabeth of Bohemia, with whom Descartes had a long-standing friendship. A French version (*Les Principes de la Philosophie*) followed in 1647. It set forth the principles of nature-the Laws of Physics-as Descartes viewed them. Most notably, it set forth the principle that in the absence of external forces, an object's motion will be uniform and in a straight line. The version of my principles which you have been at pains to make, is so elegant and finished as to lead me to expect that the work will be more generally read in French than in Latin, and better understood. The only apprehension I entertain is lest the title should deter some who have not been brought up to letters, or with whom philosophy is in bad repute, because the kind they were taught has proved unsatisfactory; and this makes me think that it will be useful to add a preface to it for the purpose of showing what the MATTER of the work is, what END I had in view in writing it, and what UTILITY may be derived from it. But although it might be my part to write a preface of this nature, seeing I ought to know those particulars better than any other person, I cannot nevertheless prevail upon myself to do anything more than merely to give a summary of the chief points that fall, as I think, to be discussed in it: and I leave it to your discretion to present to the public such part of them as you

shall judge proper. I should have desired, in the first place, to explain in it what philosophy is, by commencing with the most common matters, as, for example, that the word PHILOSOPHY signifies the study of wisdom, and that by wisdom is to be understood not merely prudence in the management of affairs, but a perfect knowledge of all that man can know, as well for the conduct of his life as for the preservation of his health and the discovery of all the arts, and that knowledge to subserve these ends must necessarily be deduced from first causes; so that in order to study the acquisition of it (which is properly called philosophizing), we must commence with the investigation of those first causes which are called PRINCIPLES.

principles of philosophy rene descartes: The Principles of Philosophy René Descartes, 2018-07-30 The Principles of Philosophy: Large Print by René Descartes as to lead me to expect that the work will be more generally read in French than in Latin, and better understood. The only apprehension I entertain is lest the title should deter some who have not been brought up to letters, or with whom philosophy is in bad repute, because the kind they were taught has proved unsatisfactory; and this makes me think that it will be useful to add a preface to it for the purpose of showing what the MATTER of the work is, what END I had in view in writing it, and what UTILITY may be derived from it. But although it might be my part to write a preface of this nature, seeing I ought to know those particulars better than any other person, I cannot nevertheless prevail upon myself to do anything more than merely to give a summary of the chief points that fall, as I think, to be discussed in it: and I leave it to your discretion to present to the public such part of them as you shall judge proper. We are delighted to publish this classic book as part of our extensive Classic Library collection. Many of the books in our collection have been out of print for decades, and therefore have not been accessible to the general public. The aim of our publishing program is to facilitate rapid access to this vast reservoir of literature, and our view is that this is a significant literary work, which deserves to be brought back into print after many decades. The contents of the vast majority of titles in the Classic Library have been scanned from the original works. To ensure a high quality product, each title has been meticulously hand curated by our staff. Our philosophy has been guided by a desire to provide the reader with a book that is as close as possible to ownership of the original work. We hope that you will enjoy this wonderful classic work, and that for you it becomes an enriching experience.

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preface of this nature, seeing I ought to know those particulars better than any other person, I cannot nevertheless prevail upon myself to do anything more than merely to give a summary of the chief points that fall, as I think, to be discussed in it: and I leave it to your discretion to present to the public such part of them as you shall judge proper. I should have desired, in the first place, to explain in it what philosophy is, by commencing with the most common matters, as, for example, that the word PHILOSOPHY signifies the study of wisdom, and that by wisdom is to be understood not merely prudence in the management of affairs, but a perfect knowledge of all that man can know, as well for the conduct of his life as for the preservation of his health and the discovery of all the arts, and that knowledge to subserve these ends must necessarily be deduced from first causes; so that in order to study the acquisition of it (which is properly called philosophizing), we must commence with the investigation of those first causes which are called PRINCIPLES. Now these principles must possess TWO CONDITIONS: in the first place, they must be so clear and evident that the human mind, when it attentively considers them, cannot doubt of their truth; in the second place, the knowledge of other things must be so dependent on them as that though the principles themselves may indeed be known apart from what depends on them, the latter cannot nevertheless be known apart from the former. It will accordingly be necessary thereafter to endeavour so to deduce from those principles the knowledge of the things that depend on them, as that there may be nothing in the whole series of deductions which is not perfectly manifest. God is in truth the only being who is absolutely wise, that is, who possesses a perfect knowledge of all things; but we may say that men are more or less wise as their knowledge of the most important truths is greater or less. And I am confident that there is nothing, in what I have now said, in which all the learned do not concur.

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