

**Volume 18**

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**Descartes**

**Lead: Considered by many to be the seminal modern thinker, René Descartes remains an integral part of the philosophical canon.**

**Intro: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.**

**Content: Born in 1596, the year of the Declaration of Nantes with which French King Henry IV laid the foundation of religious toleration in Europe, Descartes' work came to symbolize a philosophical break with the way in which people fundamentally organized intelligence and considered the universe.**

**As a mathematician, he developed the Cartesian coordinate system in which a location in the cosmos can be marked by a set of numbers. He established analytical geometry which conjoined algebra and geometric formulation. As one of the early practitioners of a new way of approaching science, he helped midwife a revolution by rejecting the authority of philosophical predecessors or even trusting his own sensory instincts. Descartes even explored what today is called “emotions,” declaring in *Passions of the Soul* a marked independence of thought, asserting his intent to write “as if no one had written on these matters before.”**

He helped lay the foundation for 17<sup>th</sup>-century rationalism, later explored by Spinoza and Leibniz but opposed by the empiricists, Hobbes, Locke, and Hume. Not unlike the geographical explorers of the previous century who had brought Europeans to a so-called New World, Descartes was exploring a new way of thinking. However one approaches the work of modern thought, one is exploring a Cartesian world. His most-remembered assertion is in French *Je pense, donc je suis*, in Latin, *Cogito ergo sum*, in English, *I think, therefore I am*.

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## Resources

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