



Descartes: His Life and Thought

Geneviève Rodis-Lewis

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Geneviève Rodis-Lewis is uniquely qualified to celebrate René Descartes. This major intellectual biography illuminates the personal and historical events of Descartes's life, from his birth and early years in France to his death in Sweden, his burial, and the fate of his remains. Concerned not only with historical events but also with the development of Descartes's personality, Rodis-Lewis speculates on the effect childhood impressions may have had on his philosophy and scientific theories. She considers in detail his friendships, particularly with Isaac Beeckman and Marin Mersenne. Primarily on the basis of his private correspondence, Rodis-Lewis gives a thorough and balanced discussion of his personality. The Descartes she depicts is by turns generous and unforgiving, arrogant and open-minded, loyal in his friendship but eager for the isolation his work required. Rodis-Lewis clarifies Descartes's school days, his family's circumstances and social status, the location of the famous "stove" where Descartes first discovered the foundations of his science, his military life, and the birth and death of his daughter. She is careful to point out the gaps that remain in the record of Descartes's life. Drawing on Descartes's writings and his public and private correspondence, she corrects the errors of earlier biographies and clarifies many obscure episodes in the philosopher's life.

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