

### RENÉ DESCARTES, DISCOURSE ON METHOD (1637)

As a multitude of laws often only hampers justice, so that a state is best governed when, with few laws, these are rigidly administered; in like manner, instead of the great number of precepts [axioms] of which Logic is composed, I believed that the four following would prove perfectly sufficient for me . . .

The first was never to accept anything for true which I did not clearly know to be such; . . .

The second, to divide each of the difficulties under examination into as many parts as possible, and as might be necessary for its adequate solution.

The third, to conduct my thoughts in such order that, by commencing with objects the simplest and easiest to know, I might ascend by little and little, and, as it were, step by step, to the knowledge of the more complex; . . .

And the last, in every case to make enumerations [lists] so complete, and reviews so general, that I might be assured that nothing was omitted.

The long chains of simple and easy reasonings by means of which geometers [people who work with geometry] are accustomed to reach the conclusions of their most difficult demonstrations, had led me to imagine that all things, . . . are mutually connected in the same way, and that there is nothing so far removed from us as to be beyond our reach, or so hidden that we cannot discover it, provided only we abstain from [avoid] accepting the false for the true, and always preserve in our thoughts the order necessary for the deduction of one truth from another.

René Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, translated by John Veich (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1873), pp. 61-62, 74-77, 83-87, 96-100.

## MODERN VERSION OF DESCARTES' DISCOURSE ON METHOD



René Descartes

Because too many laws often get in the way of justice, a country is best guided by having a few laws which are strictly enforced. In the same way, instead of following many rules of logic, I have decided to narrow it down to four rules, which work very well for me.

First of all, I have decided never to believe something is true unless I know it for certain.

Secondly, I will divide each thing which I do not understand about the problem into as many parts as possible so that I can begin to solve them one by one.

Third, I will start with the easiest and most simple part of the problems, and work through to the most difficult and complex parts, until I have solved the whole problem.

Lastly, I will keep complete notes of the method of investigation I have used and of the results I have reached, so that I am sure I have not forgotten anything.

The logical procedure used by people who work in geometry, is to begin with the simplest problem and work through to the most difficult. This lets them solve their most complex problems easily. Using them as a good example, it seems to me that there is nothing too difficult in the world to understand if we will only remember two things: One, to stop blindly accepting as true those things we are unsure about, and two, to always investigate problems using a step-by-step procedure which will allow the deduction of one truth from another.