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# Descartes In 90 Minutes



## Synopsis

Rene Descartes spent most of his childhood in solitude, a situation that also came to characterize his adult life. Fortunately, these countless lonely hours helped Descartes produce the declaration that changed all philosophy: "I think, therefore I am." Eventually convincing himself to doubt and disregard sensory knowledge, Descartes found he could prove his existence through his thoughts. This internal information, he believed, was the true reality and external forces were hopelessly deceiving. In *Descartes in 90 Minutes*, Paul Strathern offers a concise, expert account of Descartes' life and ideas and explains their influence on man's struggle to understand his existence in the world.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Strathern is a master at this kind of work, which mixes biography, critical analysis, historical context and humor all in a concise, informative & entertaining package. He lists a time line for the philosopher, his place in world/philosophic history & a selection of works for further reading. This series of books by Strathern is a wonderful course in Philosophy 101 without ever having to go to college, all presented in plain, easy to understand English without being bogged down with philosophy's often confusing vernacular.

Anyone who attempts to make philosophy accessible to non-academics certainly has the tip of my hat, but *DESCARTES IN 90 MINUTES* sacrifices too much substance in the interest of readability. This book would be OK for a high school student preparing a short paper or presentation on French

philosopher/mathematician Rene Descarte, but for those of us who are motivated by anything more than casual curiosity about philosophers will be left unsatisfied. I did learn quite a few facts from this very clearly-written book, such as Descarte's odd sleeping habits, his apparent facility in composing musical verse, and his compulsive wanderlust. The problem is that biographies of Great Thinkers just don't have a lot of impact without including some exposition of their Great Thoughts. "I think, therefore I am," is about as deep as it gets here.

Descartes, is the second of Paul Strathern 90 min philosophy books I read. While reading the third (after 75 min) I had to find out if there are other books by Strathern. I was worried that I will run out of his books. The description of historic relevance, the irony of the situation described in this book are excellent. I must admit that the philosophy bit goes over my head, but the crumbs I understand are sufficient to please me. I am definitely going to read a few more books by Strathern

Starthern's goal is to provide a quick, flawless guide to the major thinkers of the world: I'm unclear as to whether he succeeded or not. I suppose he succeeds simply because he has published these works, people buy them, and they are quite popular. I am not a stickler for erudition, I would have like to have learned from this series, but there just isn't enough information on the philosopher's work. If you're in a philosophy class and want to get a quick preview of what you're going to learn, chances are you will find more or less the same information in the introduction of your text. If you just want to learn on your own, it's your decision as to what you're looking for. For example, this is what I learned about Descartes from this book: 1) He was an eccentric who liked to sleep in 2) His theories on mathmatics were contraversial 3) He believes that we exist simply because we think 4) He died for a silly reason. That's it folks. #2 & 3 may seem exciting, but there is no explanation as to why or how these manifests themself.

If one is studying the inefficiencies of deconstructionism in biographies this biography would be a perfect example. The biographer spends very little time on the actual works of Descartes, and as a previous reviewer wrote is fixated on what time Descartes would wake-up, which in congruence with deconstructionist methodology serves the purpose of bringing Descartes down below the level of the biographer himself. This biography seems to be more about the biographer than the individual he is supposed to be writing about. Additionally, the biographer did very little research, and cites almost nothing. The biographer also fails to discuss as previously mentioned any of the actual work of Descartes AT ALL, except in often condescending language. The page or less he uses to discuss

the paramount work of Descartes in his 'Meditations' gave me the impression that the man did not even read it! This book is a total joke, and it is absolutely SHOCKING that a publisher actually accepted it.

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