Reflections on the various works in the exhibit

**Imprints and Impressions: Milestones in Human Progress**

Highlights from the Rose Rare Book Collection, Sept. 29-Nov. 9, 2014

Roesch Library, University of Dayton

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René Descartes

*Discours de la méthode pour bien conduire sa raison, et chercher la vérité dans les sciences* *(Discourse on the Method)*

- Leiden, 1637
- First edition

One of the most fundamental principles of modern philosophical thinking can be traced to Rene Descartes’s famous assertion, “Je pense donc je suis” (“I think; therefore, I am.”), which appears in Part 4 of Discourse on the Method. Descartes intended the treatise as a response to prevailing Aristotelian principles of knowledge reliant on the senses. Divided into six sections (dealing with optics, meteorology, and geometry), the work is both philosophical and autobiographical in that Descartes uses his own intellectual development to explain how he arrived at his method. In essence, Descartes “considers false any belief that falls prey to even the slightest doubt,” thus arriving at what he saw as incontrovertible truth. His method of investigation became the basis for the scientific method of inquiry.

We are fortunate to be able to view this first edition, published in 1637. That it was printed in Descartes’s native French and not Latin, as was the accepted practice for scientific and philosophic works, suggests Descartes’s attempt to reach beyond a scholastic audience.

—Margaret Strain, PhD, Professor, English

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**Sources**
