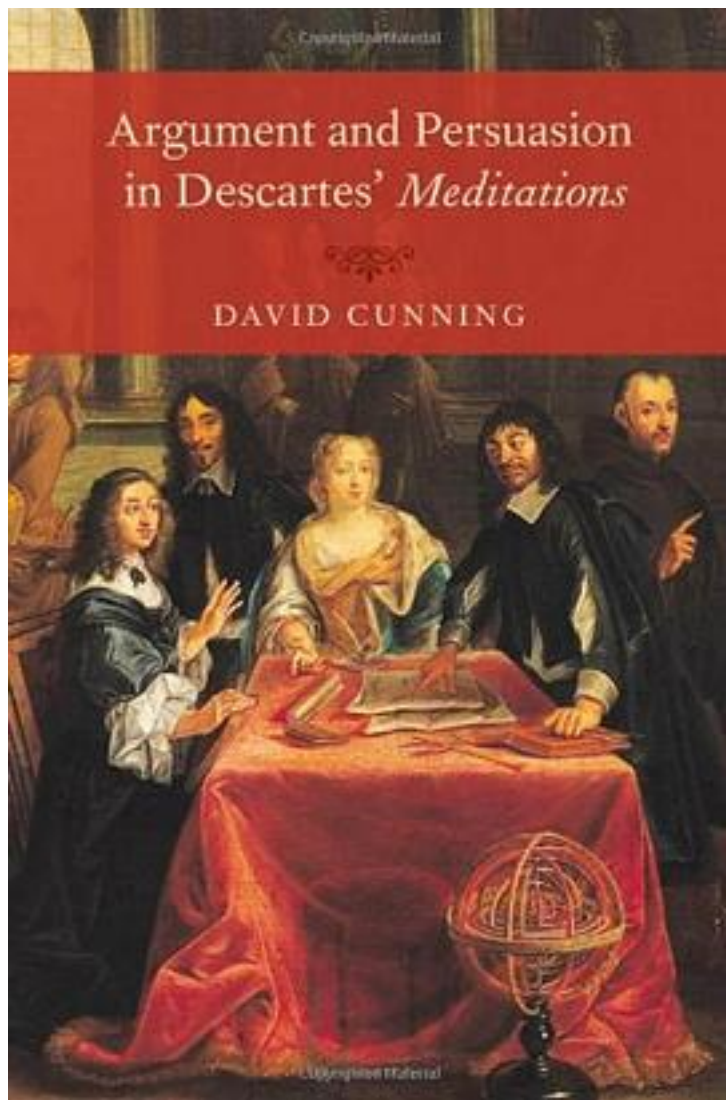


Argument and Persuasion in Descartes' Meditations



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出版者:Oxford University Press, USA

出版时间:2010-8-3

装帧:Hardcover

isbn:9780195399608

Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy* has proven to be not only one of the canonical texts of Western philosophy, but also the site of a great deal of interpretive activity in scholarship on the history of early modern philosophy over the last two decades. David Cunniff's monograph proposes a new interpretation, which is that from beginning to end the reasoning of the *Meditations* is the first-person reasoning of a thinker who starts from a confused non-Cartesian paradigm and moves slowly and awkwardly toward a grasp of just a few of the central theses of Descartes' system. The meditator of the *Meditations* is not a full-blown Cartesian at the start or middle or even the end of inquiry, and accordingly the *Meditations* is riddled with confusions throughout. Cunniff argues that Descartes is trying to capture the kind of reasoning that a non-Cartesian would have to engage in to make the relevant epistemic progress, and that the *Meditations* rhetorically models that reasoning. He proposes that Descartes is reflecting on what happens in philosophical inquiry: we are unclear about something, we roam about using our existing concepts and intuitions, we abandon or revise some of these, and then eventually we come to see a result as clear that we did not see as clear before. Thus Cunniff's fundamental insight is that Descartes is a teacher, and the reader a student. With that reading in mind, a significant number of the interpretive problems that arise in the Descartes literature dissolve when we make a distinction between the Cartesian and non-Cartesian elements of the *Meditations*, and a better understanding of surrounding texts is achieved as well. This important volume will be of great interest to scholars of early modern philosophy.

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