

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.