

**I publish, therefore I perish...or do I**  
**Cartesian Agitations on Print and Publication**

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This paper focuses on statements running through Descartes' correspondence and his *Discourse on Method* concerning his reluctance to publish because of a fear of persecution by church and state authorities, by opposing scientists, and even by the larger public. While I shall argue these statements are rhetorical fictions, I shall also argue that, read as a whole, these statements provide the outlines of a Cartesian discourse about publishing and print in which Descartes presents himself as seeking privacy, secrecy, and solitude, even while he is advocating the universality of his method and seeking support from a number of correspondents. The question is how to read the vacillating positions Descartes' takes on the publication in the *Discourse on Method*, a text itself built around the suppression (or the fiction of a suppression) of one work, the supposedly too controversial treatise on physics, *Le Traité du monde*, via the publication of another. The *Discourse* is thus a fascinating text because it offers a rich field on which to explore the tension between suppression and publication, isolation and alliance, at the nexus of the 17<sup>th</sup>-century notion of publication. I argue that the articulations around this problematic ultimately allow Descartes to perform as a solitary author-philosopher *and* to emerge out of and into the ferment of the francophone world of 1637, crossing between scientific and *honnête* society and reinforcing the link between the two against the *doctes* and the *docteurs de l'Ecole* and marking the waning influence of both the church and university theologians in an increasingly absolutist political culture. Indeed Descartes' turmoil (or his fiction of such a turmoil) over whether to publish is a kind of limen or boundary discourse that prepares and organizes the terrain for the broader reordering of scientific discourse that would take place in the 1660's and obviously beyond into the 18<sup>th</sup> century and which would reconfigure not only the bases of scientific thought, but also, the procedures of its articulation, the nature of its audience, and of course its status in society. I shall not be taking such a broad sweep in my paper however. My discussion will offer a more modest assessment of the Cartesian discourse on publication via a close reading of Descartes' fictions about print and publication in order to raise a series of larger questions about the status of Descartes' *Discourse* in the mid-1630's as it relates to choices to go public in print and thus to the nature of seeking publicity for oneself and one's ideas.