René Descartes: 1596 – 1650

(pronounced: Day – Kart)

from France

• a mathematician, scientist, and philosopher

• known as the father of modern philosophy, he had the famous quote “I think therefore I am”

• was critical of Greek geometry for being tedious and overly complicated

• used rectangular coordinates, which were invented by Fermat despite the fact that they are name Cartesian Coordinates after Descartes, to represent geometric figures and prove theorems algebraically

• solved several physics problems using his new geometric techniques, including the law of refraction for light

• his use of symbols such as $x$, $y$, and $z$ for variables became the standard and greatly simplified all forms of mathematics

• his use of coordinate systems and variables led to the development of analytic geometry and calculus