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978-0-521-76330-1 - Descartes' Deontological Turn: Reason, Will, and Virtue in the Later Writings

Noa Naaman-Zauderer

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DESCARTES' DEONTOLOGICAL TURN

This book offers a new way of approaching the place of the will in Descartes' mature epistemology and ethics. Departing from the widely accepted view, Noa Naaman-Zauderer suggests that Descartes regards the will, rather than the intellect, as the most significant mark of human rationality, both intellectual and practical. Through a close reading of Cartesian texts from the *Meditations* onward, she brings to light a deontological and non-consequentialist dimension of Descartes' later thinking, which credits the proper use of free will with a constitutive, evaluative role. She shows that the right use of free will, to which Descartes assigns obligatory force, constitutes for him an end in its own right rather than merely a means for attaining any other end, however valuable. Her important study has significant implications for the unity of Descartes' thinking and for the issue of responsibility, inviting scholars to reassess Descartes' philosophical legacy.

NOA NAAMAN-ZAUDERER is senior lecturer in the Department of Philosophy at Tel Aviv University. She is the author of *Descartes: The Loneliness of a Philosopher* (2007) and co-editor of *Discourse and Dialogue: Multi-Perspective Philosophy* (2003).

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To Yochai, Shira, Ella and Lihi

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In his conversation with the young Dutch scholar Frans Burman in 1648, Descartes expressed his expectations about the future treatment of his metaphysical writings: “A point to note is that one should not devote so much effort to the *Meditations* and to metaphysical questions, or give them elaborate treatment in commentaries and the like. Still less should one do what some try to do, and dig more deeply into these questions than the author did; he has dealt with them quite deeply enough” (CB 48 = AT v 165: CSMK 346–47).

In the process of writing this book, I found myself recurrently wondering whether I was not acting against Descartes' expressed wish. Though I would certainly not credit myself with the sin of digging into Descartes' metaphysical questions more deeply than he had himself, I may have failed to comply with the first half of his wish. Fortunately, though, I am not alone in committing this sin, and we can only speculate about what the father of modern philosophy would have thought and felt had he been acquainted with the huge interpretive enterprise that his tree of philosophy has yielded. Three hundred and sixty years after Descartes' death, and despite the enormous wealth and diversity of interpretations that have since become available, the possibility of revealing new layers and striking perspectives in his thought was an exciting discovery in the course of my writing.

My endeavor in this book is to reconsider the place that the will occupies in Descartes' mature epistemology and ethics. Departing from the widely accepted view, I argue that Descartes regards the will, rather than the intellect, as the most significant mark of human rationality, both intellectual and practical. The overarching theme of the book is that the right use of free will, to which Descartes assigns obligatory force, constitutes for him an end in its own right and not only a means for acquiring true knowledge, happiness, or any other valuable end. My hope is that this study will invite scholars to reassess the legacy of Descartes'

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philosophical edifice as well as the dialogue that later philosophers have conducted with his thinking, either implicitly or explicitly – from Spinoza and Leibniz, through Kant and Nietzsche, and up to postmodern critics in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

I feel extremely fortunate and grateful for the invaluable encouragement and assistance I have received all along from colleagues, friends, students, and family. I extend my gratitude to Marcelo Dascal, who introduced me to the world of early modern philosophy, sparking my interest in the philosophy of Leibniz. Working with him, first as a student and then as a colleague, has privileged me with the lesson not to be deterred from posing difficult questions, yet at the same time to be rigorous in answering them. Zvi Tauber has been a constant source of intellectual enhancement and wisdom. I am deeply grateful for his thoughtful observations, caring involvement, and unfailing support all along. I am indebted to Martha Bolton for the fruitful and stimulating dialogue we have had over the years. Her inspiring responses and enduring encouragement were invaluable to the development of my ideas. I wish to thank Daniel Garber for stimulating me to pursue this project at its initial phase, and for his outstanding attentiveness and insights. I take great pleasure in thanking Hilary Gaskin, the philosophy editor at Cambridge University Press. Her thoughtful suggestions and supportive enthusiasm made the publication of this book an exciting and gratifying experience. I owe much to two anonymous referees for Cambridge University Press, whose insightful remarks helped me refine and clarify several important issues in an earlier version of this text. I am grateful to Amihud Gilead for his support and his enriching ideas. Thanks also to Saul Smilansky for his sound advice and his warm encouragement.

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My immense love and gratitude to my parents, whose wisdom, care, and endless love have enriched my spirit and sustained me through this intellectual voyage. My mother, Oshra Zauderer, was a reassuring friend and a worthy philosophical partner at many crossroads. My father, Zvi Zauderer, the most giving person I have ever known, went out of his way to assist me during these long years of contemplation and writing. Thanks also to my brother, Arik Zidon, a close and loving intellectual companion, and to my uncle, Itzhak Gottlieb, my philosophical interlocutor since childhood.

I owe more than I can express in words to my husband, Yochai, an endless source of strength, love, and intellectual enthusiasm. I dedicate this book to him and to our three wonderful daughters, Shira, Ella, and Lihi, who never lost faith in their mother bringing this project to a close. Their wit, beauty, and love are for me the sweetest source of happiness and delight.

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- AT *Oeuvres de Descartes*, ed. Charles Adam and Paul Tannery, 12 vols. Paris: Vrin, 1964–76.
- CB *Descartes' Conversation with Burman*, trans. John Cottingham. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976.
- CSM *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, ed. and trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch, 2 vols. Cambridge University Press, 1985.
- CSMK *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes: The Correspondence*, ed. and trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch, and Anthony Kenny. Cambridge University Press, 1991.

References to Descartes' works are made in parentheses in the main body of the text, by volume and page number of the original language edition (AT) and of the English translation, if available (CSM or CSMK). Two exceptions are Descartes' *Principles of Philosophy*, where parenthetical references are by part and article number, and *The Passions of the Soul*, where numbers refer to articles. Unless otherwise indicated, I adhere to the translation of these works by Cottingham, Stoothoff, and Murdoch (CSM), vol. I.