



# **Cartesian Theodicy: Descartes' Quest for Certitude (International Archives of the History of Ideas Archives internationales d'histoire des idées)**

*Z. Janowski*

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Almost all interpreters of Cartesian philosophy have hitherto focused on the epistemological aspect of Descartes' thought. In his *Cartesian Theodicy*, Janowski demonstrates that Descartes' epistemological problems are merely rearticulations of theological questions. For example, Descartes' attempt to define the role of God in man's cognitive fallibility is a reiteration of an old argument that points out the incongruity between the existence of God and evil, and his pivotal question 'whence error?' is shown here to be a rephrasing of the question 'whence evil?' The answer Descartes gives in the *Meditations* is actually a reformulation of the answer found in St. Augustine's *De Libero Arbitrio* and the *Confessions*. The influence of St. Augustine on Descartes can also be detected in the doctrine of eternal truths which, within the context of the 17th-century debates over the question of the nature of divine freedom, caused Descartes to ally himself with the Augustinian Oratorians against the Jesuits. Both in his *Cartesian Theodicy* as well as his *Index Augustino-Cartesian, Textes et Commentaire* Janowski shows that the entire Cartesian metaphysics can - and should - be read within the context of Augustinian thought.

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