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## **“The Passions of the Soul” by R. Descartes as an Explication of the Anthropological and Ethical Project**

**Słowa kluczowe:** Kartezjusz; natura ludzka; antropologia; etyka; umysł; jedność umysłu i ciała; samorozwój; pasja.

**Keywords:** Descartes; human nature; anthropology; ethics; mind; unity of mind and body; self-development; passion.

### **Introduction**

Rene Descartes by his works declared himself a profound philosopher of ethical and philosophical orientation. Today not only France is proud of him. However, over several centuries, discussions about the true role of Cartesius in philosophy have not faded. Is his legacy really related to a purely methodological arsenal of science, or does it have a profound humanistic load?

The problem of the ethics status is among the forms of expressiveness of the present era's features, as the most sought after and most neglected field of philosophical knowledge. One of the factors of constructive comprehending of ethics as a practical philosophy relevant for the modern era is the appeal to the history of thought, and, above all, to the landmark, though still not sufficiently appreciated contribution of the French thinker.

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Analysis of the circumstances that have led to nihilism in relation to understanding the anthropological and ethical motive of philosophizing in Cartesius' legacy involves referring to the 'mask principle' as the failure to proclaim his true intentions by virtue of the assessment of the spiritual atmosphere of his era. Equally important is the fundamental inattention of most researchers to the ethical issues of Descartes (Malivskyi A., 2017; Khmil V., & Malivskyi A., 2017). For us, the lack of due researchers' attention to the comprehension problem specifics of the proper principles of human existence, especially in the last years of his work is of key importance. It would seem that the problem is quite clearly stated in general terms on the pages of his metaphysical work "Meditations", where the idea of intellect priority in relation to human freedom is deeply comprehended. However, herewith the key significance of the substantive union of mind and body voiced at the end of its text is not always taken into account. Undoubtedly, the question whether a person can control his/her passions with the help of mind, as a form of expression of a substantive union of mind and body comes to the fore. Although in literature devoted to Descartes there is a shift in terms of recognizing the importance of Descartes' anthropological intentions, they are fragmentary in relation to his legacy (Antoine-Mahut D., Gaukroger St., 2017). In particular, with regard to the text "The Passions of the Soul", it is fairly proposed to qualify as an important work of anthropological direction of the thinker without going into substantiation of its meaningful and logical connection with other works related to the anthropological plan of the great Frenchman (Franco A., 2006, p. 322).

The meaningful substantiation of the position of Cartesius of 40-ies in relation to ethical issues involves intensified attention to the philosopher's interpretation of self-knowledge and self-development of a person in the process of controlling the human passions. A form of realization of his idea is an analysis of human nature in the dimensions of the being and the proper.

Since today, it is not easy to discover the totality of anthropological dominants in his writings, first of all it is reasonable to focus on Descartes' attempt to complete the Copernican revolution in the form of comprehension of the anthropological motive of philosophizing (Khmil V., & Malivskyi A. 2018).

## The problem of basic intention of Descartes' philosophizing

In the literature devoted to Descartes in recent times, more and more attention is drawn to the danger of attempts to comprehend the main motives of Descartes' work, based on simplified naive notions concerning 'technomorphic' content of his legacy. Accordingly, the focus of his search was to see through the prism of technocratic intentions and their extrapolation to all spheres of reality. As a result, in the research literature, attention was repeatedly focused on the difficulties in the authentic reading of the "Passions" text. As Liza Shapiro rightly points out, his last intravital work has a kind of tightness, that is, "The Passions of the Soul" are far from those basic ideas with which the works of the thinker are usually associated, and therefore this work is "the most impenetrable of Descartes' works" (Shapiro L., 2003, p. 31).

Analyzing the factors of the 'tightness' mentioned, one should remember that in his earlier texts the French philosopher created an illusion concerning the reduction of his position to the immediate end of the Copernican worldview revolution through the prism of 'narrow' understanding of physics. Herewith, the hidden anthropological and ethical interest as a key motive for the philosophical pursuit of Cartesius remained unaddressed. In the text of the "Passions" as the last intravital published work, he makes a significant step towards the explication of anthropological motive, noting in the title of its first part that it refers to "the entire nature of human". It is noteworthy that although the text of the author's letter to the French translator of "Principles of Philosophy" was written after the completion of the work on "Passions", that is, in 1647, it still contains an anthropological motive. Suffice it to mention the famous tree image, which is specified in the form of metaphysics as a root, physics as a trunk and mechanics, medicine and ethics as separate branches.

As was already mentioned, among the serious obstacles on the way to authentic understanding of the anthropological and ethical project of his philosophy is the discussion thesis on the key role of physics in his philosophical doctrine. However, the question arises: how convincing is the interpretation of physics as a general methodology for understanding his work? Already at the beginning of the sixth part of "Discourse on the Method", Descartes focuses on the central role of physics for philosophy. It is also appropriate to recall a letter to Mersenne, where the text "Meditations" is characterized as a kind of physics apology. This refers to the letter of 1640, which clearly states that the work "Meditations" "contains all

the principles of my physics” (Descartes R., AT III: 323). An additional argument in favor of Descartes alleged total devotion to the natural-science worldview is considered his well-known letter, which is usually printed as an introductory word to the text of “Passions” (except for the Russian publication of 1989). It emphasizes the desire “to explain the passions only as a natural philosopher, and not as a rhetorician or even as a moral philosopher” (Descartes R., AT IX, p. 326).

However, the illusion of the unambiguousness and categoricalness of the above argumentation to a large extent loses its power, especially if we recall, first, the concealment of anthropology in the form of interpreting physics as the basic intention of the search, and, secondly, the essential differences between the ‘narrow’ and the ‘broad’ values of the concept of nature, where it is identical to God.

The pages of the above-mentioned letter of the translator of “Principles” (1647) are among the unvalued arguments for analyzing the Cartesius legacy. This letter openly refers to the meaningful connectivity of physics in the broad sense of the word and ethics: “By ‘morals,’” Descartes wrote, “I understand the highest and most perfect moral system, which presupposes a complete knowledge of other sciences and is the ultimate level of wisdom” (Descartes R., AT IXB, p. 14). A thesis in the letter to Chanut, in which he claims, “these truths of physics are part of the foundation of the highest and more perfect morality”, is also close in spirit and content. (Descartes R., AT V: 291)

The unified vision of Cartesius legacy regarding the relation between physics and ethics also involves attention to his line for recognition of their fundamental difference, as it was already outlined in the “Discourse”. Analyzing the peculiarity and self-sufficiency of morality, he emphasizes “... in practical life it is sometime necessary to act upon opinions which one more knows to be quite uncertain just as if they were indubitable” (Descartes R., AT VI, p. 31). Later, during the replies to the objections, the fundamental difference between epistemology and ethics again refers to the text of “Meditations”: “As far as the conduct of life is concerned, I am very far from thinking that we should assent only to what is clearly perceived. On the contrary, I do not think that we should always wait even for probable truth” (Descartes R., AT VII, p. 149).

Explicating the boundary principles of human nature, which underlie its behavior; Cartesius focuses on free will to create life, since it most fully manifest our resemblance to God. The meaningful outline of the mentioned Descartes’ approach is described on the pages of “Meditations” and “Passions”, where he calls “free will and our power over our own desires”, the basis for self-esteem which makes us in a way equal to god. It is easy

to see that it is a question of distancing a person from the world of finite things as a prerequisite for meaningful deification with God. Therefore, its correct use is our greatest blessing, he emphasizes in the letter to Queen Christina of November 20, 1647: "Free will is in itself the noblest thing we can have, since it makes us in a way equal to god and seems to exempt us from being his subject; and so its correct use is greatest of all the good we possess" (Descartes R., AT V, p. 85).

Realizing the doctrine of metaphysical interpretation of human nature in the text of "Passions", Descartes continues the doctrine of the differentiation between ethics and physics specified in the text of "Discourse", demonstrating the limitation and insufficiency of cause and effect as the key categories of the mechanistic picture of the world, which means the rehabilitation of the mystery. It is important that when comprehending the correlation between corporal movements and passions it is expedient to distance from impersonal world perception, since the same cause can result in different emotions for different people. It is difficult not to notice the meaningful relationship of Descartes' thesis with the related thought on the last pages of "Meditations": "God could have made the nature of man such that this particular motion in the brain indicates something else to the mind" (Descartes R., AT VII, p. 88). In the above-mentioned approach, it is difficult not to notice the meaningful proximity of the Cartesius' ideas with the teaching of Kant after writing two "Critiques". However, the similarity of the positions of great thinkers is not confined to confronting the kingdom of necessity and the kingdom of freedom. They also coincide in the main features of variants of constructive overcoming of the mentioned problem. Both in Cartesius, and in Kant, the field of expediency as a neutral area that allows the synthesis of opposite dimensions comes into view.

However, as evidenced by the reference to research literature, not all researchers are inclined to recognize Descartes' going beyond the limits of the reductionist methodology. Stephen Voss' position is representative. Recognizing the key role of the French thinker's legacy in the process of building New Early Age anthropology, the researcher at the same time denies the existence of deep doctrine. The manifestation of such skepticism is a somewhat provocative title of his article – "Descartes: The End of Anthropology", in which the researcher considers the texts of "Principles" and "The Passions of the Soul" the mature form of manifestation of Descartes's anthropology, assessing the attempt of the French thinker as failure in the whole. It is about the inability to find anthropology in Descartes and to insert human existence into that new rational universe, which gradually acquires visible features on the pages of the philoso-

pher's texts. Voss is firmly convinced that attempts to explicate the doctrine of man are groundless, since "Descartes no longer believes in man," and "anthropological silence of the *Principle*" is the consequence of the destruction of this faith (Voss S., 1994, p. 291–292). The author's observations of the disappearance of the very concept of man from the title of works of the last period – "The Description of the Human Body" and "The Passions of the Soul" claim the role of weighty and convincing arguments about the death of anthropology in the Descartes' doctrines. Therefore, the result looks categorical and negative: anthropology does not have a place in the doctrine of Descartes, because "man has disappeared from the Cartesian universe" (Voss S., 1994, p. 300).

The level of categorical position of the researcher is significantly mitigates the search for forms of synthetic combination of physics and ethics in Descartes' works. This is about the Principle of Nature and Habituation. In other words, he proposes the idea of abandoning the monistic position and recognizing the presence of ambivalent methodological doctrine. (Descartes R., 1989, p. 42–43).

Abel Franco demonstrates a profoundly close approach in research literature. He insists on the expediency of abandoning the monistic doctrine and the recognition of the presence of an ambivalent methodological doctrine in the course of comprehending the "Passions". It is about the presence of two substantially different basic doctrines in the text, one of which coincides with the above-mentioned focus on physics, and the second one differs significantly. It is difficult not to recognize the persuasiveness of the author's thesis about the secondary nature of physiological details and the dominance of the relationship problem between the passions, virtues and happiness. An important argument is the final paragraph of each of the three parts, which emphasizes the key importance of "peace of mind" (Franco A., 2006, p. 2). The significance of the latter observation is greatly enhanced by taking into account the emphasis on the importance of leisure and emotional balance on the pages of the "Discourse".

In this regard, Aaron Spink suggested a deeper and more convincing interpretation of the Cartesius' position, which emphasizes the organic combination of two opposing methods, oriented on the empirical and metaphysical cognition (Spink A., 2017).

In the course of the modern analysis of the compatibility of physics and anthropology, evolutionary changes in the position of Paul Hoffman, one of Descartes' first researchers in English literature (Hoffman P., 2009, p. 3), are indicative. He considers individuality underestimation a serious disadvantage of the modern method of anthropology reception. The authors of this article are particularly impressed by the emphasis of

the French thinker as an anthropologist on the importance of a holistic image of man. Among the important visions of his position concerning Descartes' legacy is, firstly, the attention to the substantial succession with Aristotle, namely, the hylomorphic vision of man as a union of mind and body, form and matter, and secondly, the focus on the forms of his delimitation from Occam and Suarez as predecessors. Observing the pioneering nature of this monograph, in terms of the special significance of anthropological themes for Descartes, it is impossible to ignore the controversial nature of the title of the last section – "Moral Psychology", as well as the uncritical reproduction of established stereotypes in the form of the tendency to identify the nature of man with mind (Hoffman P., 2009, p. 199–200), which becomes more apparent against the background of the recognition of essential value in the sense of passions for man.

Another manifestation of the tendency to go beyond the boundaries of the fragmentary (reduced and gnoseologized) vision of man is manifested in the form of rehabilitation of the authentic image of Descartes. One of the representative manifestations of this tendency is the publication of Deborah Brown. In the sixth chapter of the monograph, the object of critical rethinking becomes the Cartesian epistemological subject, and a holistic person occupies his place. In other chapters, devoted to the problem of the metaphysical status of the Cartesian man, the object of attention becomes a separate holistic person as a union of mind and body. It is impressive that the author meaningfully expounding her position concentrates on the manifestations of the uniqueness and absoluteness of human nature that are associated with emotions. Since the main forms of their manifestation are nobility and amazement, the researcher reasonably focuses on the amazement (which Descartes describes as the first of the passions) and nobility (based on self-esteem and determination) (Brown D., 2006, p. 231).

A prerequisite for comprehension of the modern interpretation peculiarity of the nature of passions in the last *intravivam* text of Cartesius is the attention to his emphasizing the individual-personal components in early works. It is about the succession of the "Rules" and "Discourses", in which the constitutive influence of the circumstances of his personal life is unambiguously felt. Belonging of this component to the number of essential features of the philosophic position of the thinker is confirmed by the texts of the mature period. Analyzing the establishment factors of the text of "The Passions of the Soul" in the research literature, today the constitutive significance of human emotions is noted. Cartesius emphasized the role of passion as a kind of germ of "Passions" in the letter to Princess Elisabeth from September, 1645: "I have always had an inclina-



tion to look at thing from the most favorable angle and to make my principal happiness depend upon myself alone, and I believe that this inclination caused the indisposition, which was almost part of my nature, gradually to disappear completely" (Descartes R., AT I, p. 221).

The prerequisite for the authentic comprehension of the text of "Passions" as a meaningful extension of the line for comprehension of the world and man pointed out in the previous works is the attention to the fact that Descartes preserved the doctrine of recognizing the limited possibilities of theoretical reason. The perception of the soul for him is those actions which, although occur in the very soul, but "we do not normally know any proximate cause to which we can refer them" (Descartes R., AT XI, p. 347).

## Passions and human nature

In the context of the study of the end-to-end problem of the proper principles of human behavior for Descartes' legacy, the key attention in the "Passions" focuses on human emotionality. At the end of the treatise, the thinker clearly emphasizes their belonging to the main components of human nature: "People are strongly inclined by nature to the emotion of joy, pity, fear and anger...". The power of emotions over people in the vast majority of cases is so strong that few of those people who live naively and uncritically are prepared enough to deal with passions of any kind (Descartes R., AT XI, p. 486).

The representation of the fundamental changes in the Cartesius' position during the interpretation of human nature on the pages of "Passions" is his rejection of the inherent uniqueness of early works, that is, the transition from 'control' and 'direction' (in the "Rules" and "Discourses") to the more voluntaristic notion of 'inclination'.

The presence of anthropological component in the text of "Passions" will become even more expressive if we take into account its meaningful succession with "Mediations". In both cases, Descartes is focused on comprehending the forms of human self-development based on freedom and his/her ability to live in harmony with the world created by God. It should be noted that in "Passions", the main role in self-development belongs to the emotions "person whom the passions can move most deeply are capable of enjoying the sweetest pleasures of this life" (Descartes R., AT XI, p. 488).

Finding out those individual principles that made it possible for Cartesius to identify his own positions in the text of "The Passions of the Soul" as a complete ethics that qualitatively differs from the 'incomplete'



by him, one should focus on private correspondence. The letter to Chanut from June 15, 1646, with cautious enthusiasm reported on the achievement of 'satisfactory conclusion' during the elaboration of an ethical project, namely the establishment of the 'sure foundations in moral philosophy'. And since the recipient had an unhidden interest in the problems of morality, Descartes shows the existence of internal meaningful connections between 'proper' and 'existing' in the nature of man: "The safest way to find out how we should live is to discover first what we are, what kind of world we live in, and who is the creator of this world, or the master of the house we live in", Cartesius expresses his convictions (Descartes R., AT IV, p. 441). Despite the elevation of style and pathos, he modestly mentions a certain conditionality and relationality of his own approach, pointing out that his attempt to develop a human problem is of a kind of exploration, since he still did not touch on it, that is, it refers to "the detailed knowledge of the nature of man, which I have not discussed" [Descartes R., AT IV, p. 441].

These words of the thinker regarding insufficient attention to human nature deserve special attention and require comments. One unwittingly remembers the repeated appeals of the thinker to the nature of man and efforts to understand it in his earlier texts. It is about the final chapter of the treatise "The World" devoted to man, the first title of "Discourses" and the meaningful continuation of this line in the text of the main metaphysical work "Meditations", where the substantive union of mind and body is evident. Today looking for an explanation of the above-mentioned modest Descartes' estimate of his merits, we consider it worthwhile to draw attention to the originality of the context, namely, the comprehension of moral problems.

As for the specifics of the meaningful vision of human nature in previous years and the established stereotype concerning the reduction of man to mind, they are largely determined by the naive reception of the context of the scientific revolution. In other words, the fact of a fragmentary vision of a person in the previous period was not neglected by Cartesius himself. Explicating the factors of long dominance of such vision of man, Descartes in the letter to Elisabeth from May 21, 1643 indicates its causation by the specifics of the set tasks and emphasizes the expediency of a broader comprehending of man: "There are two facts about the human soul on which depend all the knowledge we can have of its nature. The first is that it thinks, the second is that, being united to the body, it can act and be acted upon along with it. About the second I have said hardly anything; I have tried only to make the first well understood. For my principal aim was to prove the distinction between the soul and body, and

to this end only the first was useful, and the second might have been harmful” (Descartes R., AT III, p. 664–665).

As it is easy to see, in the given letter attention is not paid to the aspect of comprehension of the human nature that is in the center of “Passions”. The reference to the first paragraph of the latter makes it possible to ascertain the meaningful interconnection with the ideas of this letter, because here to obtain knowledge about passions a ‘new way’ is needed. Therefore, Descartes’ own position regarding the place of passions in human nature, first, significantly differs from the negative attitude towards them as something alien (stoicism), and secondly, it is characterized by their interpretation as a positive beginning in the human nature, that is, “they are good by nature”, and therefore one should not be afraid of them, and thirdly, the proper use of emotions can ensure ‘peace of mind’ for a person. Moreover, the paradox of human nature lies in the fact that the category of people who are most affected by passions, can enjoy their life as much as possible (Descartes R., AT XI, p. 486–488).

A prerequisite for a more prominent vision of Descartes’ authentic position in the text of “Passions” is the attention to its peculiarity, associated with the mastery of passions as an internal nature. The latter is fundamentally different from the intention of technomorphism, aimed at mastering the external nature. Being firmly convinced of the ability of man to positively resolve the task of controlling our desires, Cartesius qualifies a perfect ethical system as the ultimate level of wisdom, which lies in the ability to “be masters of our passions” (Descartes R., AT XI, p. 488). If one takes into account a certain meaningful relationship of the Cartesius’ position with Stoicism, then the peculiarity of his vision of the proper, as ideal existence, implies the need to live not so much in accordance with the external nature as with one’s own human nature.

The originality of Cartesius’ position becomes even more apparent upon condition of attention to the impartial assessment of A. Schopenhauer, who considered a person unable to overcome his/her passions, although he did not deny the relevance of Swedish Queen Christina’s characteristics of Descartes’ way of life as an example of happy life, which is the result of successful overcoming the passions (Schopenhauer A., 1992, p. 278).

## Conclusions

Modern philosophy demonstrates a powerful demand for human comprehension and anthropological reading of the history of philosophy. The analysis of Descartes’ legacy, and especially the text of “The Passions of

the Soul" is a convincing evidence of the falseness of interpretation of this work exclusively in the context of the scientific revolution of the New Early Age, the expression forms of which are the universalization of the natural sciences methodology and the reduction of the inner world of man to a mind. The emphasis on the uniqueness of the authentic image of the thinker's doctrine involves attention to his metaphysical anthropology and passions as a form of expression of the substantive union of mind and body. The authors defend the relevance of the "Passions" interpretation as an extension of the anthropological approach, outlined in the earlier works. Prospects for further research on Descartes' legacy are associated with a critical rethinking of his outstanding ideas during the last centuries.

### NAMIĘTNOŚCI DUSZY R. DESCARTESA JAKO EKSPIKACJA ANTROPOLOGICZNEGO I ETYCZNEGO PROJEKTU

(STRESZCZENIE)

Autorzy niniejszego artykułu podjęli się wyjaśnienia antropologicznego oraz etycznego kontekstu ukrytego w filozoficznych rozważaniach Kartezjusza. U podstaw ich podejścia leży wizja nowożytnej epoki, która jest związana przede wszystkim z potrzebą rozwoju antropologii, której implementacja w tekstach myśliciela jest tradycyjnie przedstawiona w sposób fragmentaryczny oraz powierzchowny. Odwołując się do tekstów Kartezjusza, a szczególnie do jego pracy *Namiętność duszy*, autorzy bronią tezy, która traktuje rozumienie oraz postrzeganie jako integralną część natury człowieka. Opierając się na wcześniejszych tekstach, przedstawiono koncepcję rozważań dotyczących antropologicznej pozycji Kartezjusza, która została ujęta w *Namiętności duszy*. Obejmuje swoim zasięgiem takie aspekty, jak nacisk na znaczenie metafizyki, skupienie się na pojęciu wolnej woli, zainteresowanie wolicjonalnym składnikiem ludzkiej natury oraz wizją namiętności jako formą wyrażania merytorycznego zjednoczenia umysłu i ciała.

### THE PASSIONS OF THE SOUL BY R. DESCARTES AS AN EXPLICATION OF THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL AND ETHICAL PROJECT

(SUMMARY)

The authors set and solve the task of explication of the anthropological and ethical motive of philosophizing hidden in the Cartesian legacy. At the heart of their approach is the vision of the Modern Age, first of all, as a request for the development of anthropology, the implementation of which in the texts of the thinker is traditionally perceived fragmentarily and superficially. In the course of addressing his writings and the text of *The Passions of the Soul*, the authors defend the thesis of the possibility

of their reception and as a manifestation of interest in the integral nature of man. Based upon the earlier texts, the content features of the anthropological position of Descartes in *The Passions of the Soul* are outlined. They include the emphasis on the significance of metaphysics, the focus on freedom of will, the interest in the volitional component of human nature, and the vision of passions as a form of expression of a substantive union of mind and body.

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