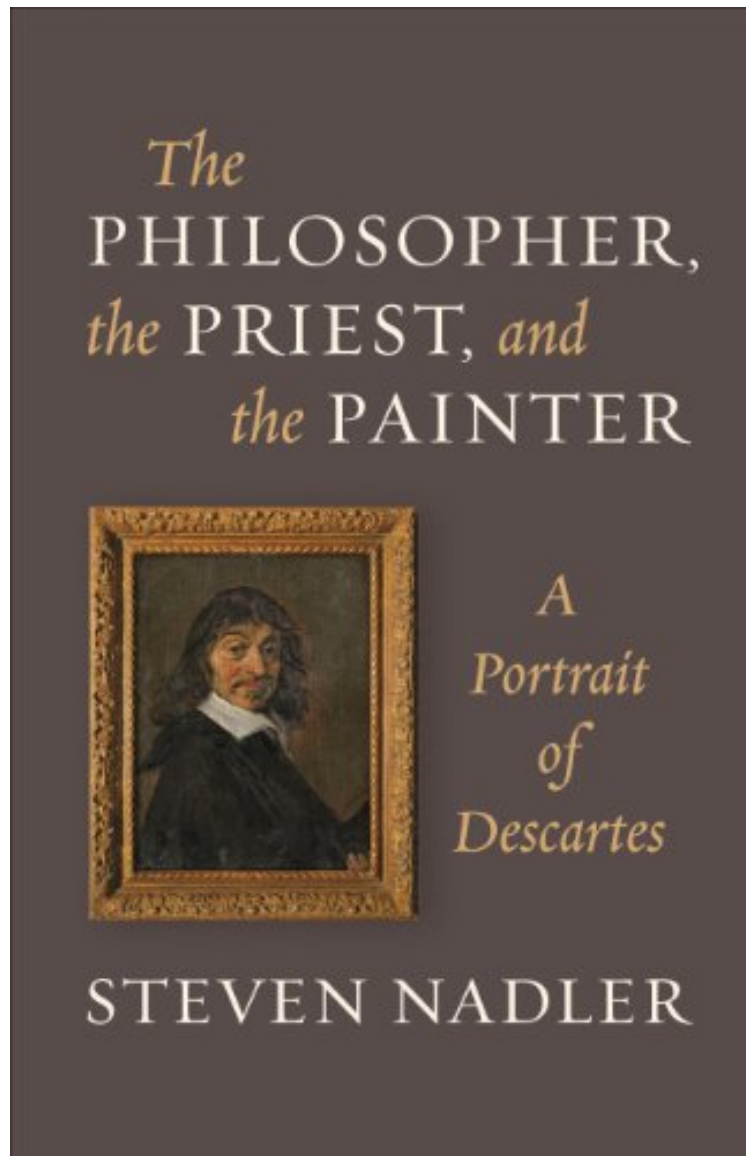


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## The Philosopher, the Priest, and the Painter: A Portrait of Descartes

*Steven Nadler*

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**Steven Nadler : The Philosopher, the Priest, and the Painter: A Portrait of Descartes** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Philosopher, the Priest, and the Painter: A Portrait of Descartes:

8 of 8 people found the following review helpful. A Closer Look at Descartes - the PaintingBy David B. JohnsonThis book is an example of what I call, for lack of a better term, 'popularized intellectual history' where the author takes some interesting historical event or puzzle and uses it to provide a non-technical introduction to a particular thinker. (Other examples of this type of work are Matthew Stewart's The Courtier and the Heretic: Leibniz, Spinoza, and the

Fate of God in the Modern World which is about whether Leibniz and Spinoza ever met and James R Gaines' Evening in the Palace of Reason: Bach Meets Frederick the Great in the Age of Enlightenment about Bach meeting Frederick the Great.) Steven Nadler, here, takes a look at the often used depiction of the French philosopher Descartes that hangs in Louvre and examines whether the portrait is by the painter it is usually attributed to or whether it is actually a copy of an earlier formal portrait. Along the way he reviews early Dutch culture and politics, explains why Descartes ended up living in the Netherlands, and the importance of portraiture during this period. He also provides an introduction to Descartes' thought during this period and the reactions of various friends and critics. The analysis of Descartes' writings are presented in a historical fashion. I'd recommend this book to anyone interested in a non-technical introduction to Descartes as well as anyone interested in the general milieu and painting history of the early Dutch Enlightenment. Readers well acquainted with Descartes looking for any new philosophical insight into his work should look elsewhere. Notes, bibliography, and index all first rate. In addition, several color plates as well as black and white figures. I gave this a 4 rating because the narrative was somewhat choppy, realizing however the difficulty of combining art history and philosophy in a single small book. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Good idea, okay execution By Massimo Pigliucci This is a good idea that didn't quite work out well enough. I'm fascinated by historical narratives that weave different types of cultural discourse. In this case the ingredients are all there: a fundamentally important philosopher (by some even considered the father of modern philosophy), a famous painter, the background of the religious wars in Europe, and the rise of a new nation state. And yet, those threads feel largely separate throughout the book, hardly weaved in together. And the most disappointing part is the one that covers Descartes' philosophy, which is too didactical and fails to engage, even though his thinking was revolutionary for the time and is still considered pivotal today. The book still makes for a good read, but it could have been so much more. 6 of 7 people found the following review helpful. Finally something different By Theofrastus Nihilus I must admit I am a bit tired to the biographies of Descartes that offer nothing new and are basically just copies of the earlier biographies. I don't really like books, that are structured around the "Cogito, ergo sum". Those kind of books have already been printed too many times. This book is different, in fact it is not an ordinary biography at all. In addition to the normal investigations concerning Descartes's natural science, metaphysics and mathematics, this offers a lot of information about the art history, religious, economical and political movements in 17th century Holland, publishing policy in Europe and other interesting stuff. As far as I can see all the traditional myths and misunderstandings concerning Descartes are avoided. This book is easy to read and do not require any knowledge about the subject, but the rare publications and letters from Descartes are used often, which is good for the advanced reader. The real page numbers are great, because you can't really refer to the Kindle E-book properly if these are missing. A great way to combine scientific reading and an adventure novel. I would love to read more this kind of books.

In the Louvre museum hangs a portrait that is considered the iconic image of Reneacute; Descartes, the great seventeenth-century French philosopher. And the painter of the work? The Dutch master Frans Hals--or so it was long believed, until the work was downgraded to a copy of an original. But where is the authentic version, and who painted it? Is the man in the painting--and in its original--really Descartes? A unique combination of philosophy, biography, and art history, *The Philosopher, the Priest, and the Painter* investigates the remarkable individuals and circumstances behind a small portrait. Through this image--and the intersecting lives of a brilliant philosopher, a Catholic priest, and a gifted painter--Steven Nadler opens a fascinating portal into Descartes's life and times, skillfully presenting an accessible introduction to Descartes's philosophical and scientific ideas, and an illuminating tour of the volatile political and religious environment of the Dutch Golden Age. As Nadler shows, Descartes's innovative ideas about the world, about human nature and knowledge, and about philosophy itself, stirred great controversy. Philosophical and theological critics vigorously opposed his views, and civil and ecclesiastic authorities condemned his writings. Nevertheless, Descartes's thought came to dominate the philosophical world of the period, and can rightly be called the philosophy of the seventeenth century. Shedding light on a well-known image, *The Philosopher, the Priest, and the Painter* offers an engaging exploration of a celebrated philosopher's world and work.

"Steven Nadler has produced another gem of original research and lively and lucid writing."--Catherine Wilson, *Times Literary Supplement* "Riveting. . . . In *The Philosopher, the Priest, and the Painter*, Nadler has . . . written his most inviting book yet. . . . Nadler's detective work makes for fascinating reading. . . . [T]he resulting survey of Golden Age Dutch culture, Cartesian philosophy and art connoisseurship . . . makes for . . . very welcome intellectual entertainment."--Michael Dirda, *Washington Post* "[B]y situating him firmly in his time and place, [Nadler] makes clear what made Descartes the intellectual superstar of his day. . . . [A]n original, intriguing set-up. . . . [A]s an introduction to Descartes' philosophy, it is excellent."--David Wolf, *Slate* "As one would expect from a distinguished philosopher such as Nadler, the description of Descartes's philosophy, and in particular his *Discourse* (1637) and *Meditations* (1641), is flawless."--Jerry Brotton, *Literary* "Cartesian iconography centers around a widely known portrait of Descartes attributed to Frans Hals. In this book, Nadler uses the story of that painting's origin to present a study of Descartes and his philosophy that will be accessible to a wide audience. . . . [T]his volume serves as a very

good introduction to Descartes's philosophy in historical context."--Choice "[C]harming. . . . Nadler, an American philosopher and author, has written an immensely readable introduction to Descartes."--Australian "[A] landscape (or at least a well-turned charcoal sketch) of religious, artistic, and economic life in the Netherlands during the first half of the 17th century. . . . Nadler's book . . . takes us back upstream a ways--beginning, rather than exempting us from, a dialog with the dead."--Scott McLemee, Inside Higher Ed "[A]bsorbing."--France Magazine "Nadler is appealing to a wider audience that is looking less for hard-nosed scholarship and more for a story to follow, some intrigue to pique the mind while telling the reader something interesting and informative about the life and work of Descartes. Insofar as the work is meant for a general audience, it accomplishes its aims well enough and should be well-received and enjoyed by those readers."--Aaron Massecar, European Legacy "Nadler gives us a remarkably accessible and historically rich picture of Descartes's life and thought. The book provides a reliable and lively introduction to Descartes for the general reader and for scholars a pleasant portrait of Descartes."--Peter M. Distelzweig, Journal of the History of Philosophy

From the Back Cover "The famous painting of Descartes by Frans Hals that hangs in the Louvre is, in fact, not by Frans Hals. And a similar things-are-not-what-they-seem quality applies to this clever little book. For behind the telling of the story of a clutch of paintings and a group of friends in the seventeenth century, Nadler gives us a brisk and lively account of Descartes' philosophy, which, more than any other, would become the foundation of modernity."--Russell Shorto, author of Descartes' Bones "This lucid and readable book serves as a biography, an exposition of philosophy, and a rich tapestry of Dutch history and culture."--Larry Silver, University of Pennsylvania "The Philosopher, the Priest, and the Painter is an excellent introduction for general readers to Descartes and his thought. Nadler brings the story and ideas to life."--Daniel Garber, Princeton University

About the Author Steven Nadler is the William H. Hay II Professor of Philosophy at the University of Wisconsin--Madison. His books include Rembrandt's Jews, which was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize; Spinoza: A Life, which won the Koret Jewish Book Award; and A Book Forged in Hell: Spinoza's Scandalous Treatise and the Birth of the Secular Age (Princeton).