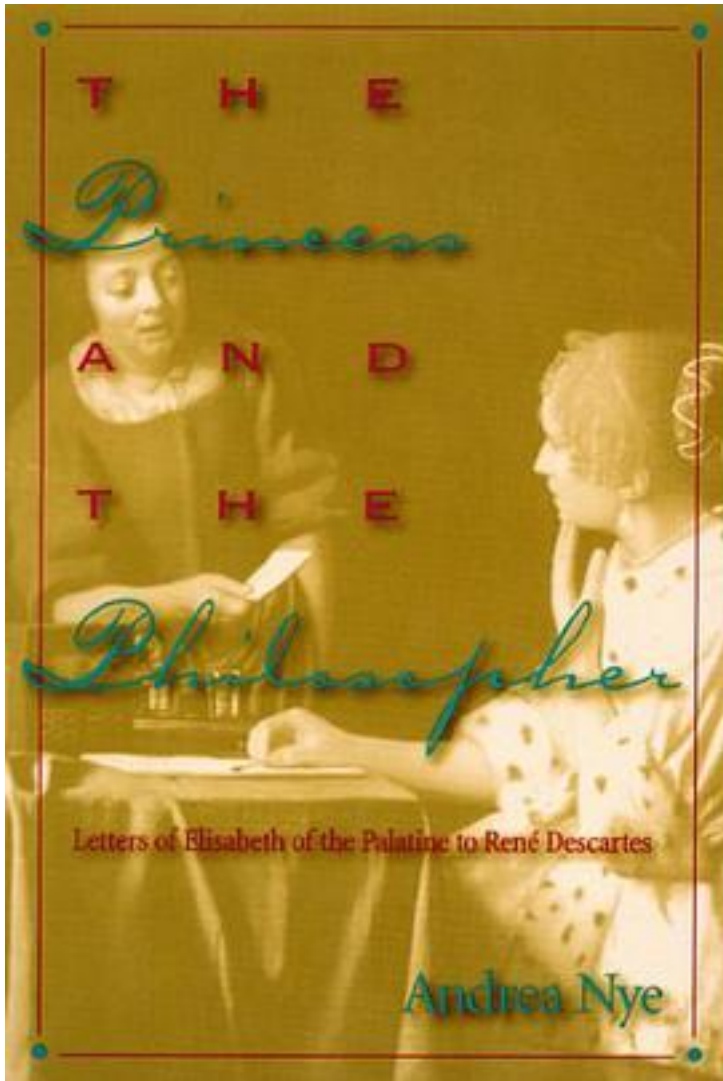


The Princess and the Philosopher



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For a number of years, those interested in recovering women's thought have known about Princess Elisabeth, a seventeenth-century correspondent and friend of Descartes whose questions provoked the philosopher to think more seriously about ethics and the passions. Up to now, only a few of her letters have found their way into print. This volume includes translations of all of Elisabeth's extant letters to Descartes, as well as of other materials relevant to understanding her philosophical perspective and her life. Nye has supplemented the translations with a running commentary on the historical, biographical, and intellectual context of the letters. The letters were during a tumultuous time in European history. A devastating Thirty Years War had ruined Elisabeth's family and devastated their principality, the Palatine. On his part, Descartes was increasingly embroiled in bitter controversies surrounding his work in relatively free-thinking Holland. In her commentary Nye shows how personal experiences energized his and Elisabeth's different views of the relation between mind and body, the existence of God, and the nature of morality. What Nye evokes, along with the thinking of an extraordinary woman, is an alternative model for philosophy, a nonadversarial form of dialogue that does not pretend to objective theorizing. Such a philosophy depends on mutual respect and trust, on concern for the other's sensibilities and views, on friendship between women and men with a common concern for human life.

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