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Martin Lenz • Anik Waldow
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Contemporary Perspectives on Early Modern Philosophy

Nature and Norms in Thought

 Springer

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Preface

The opposition between the natural and normative provides us with important philosophical distinctions, for instance, between causes and reasons, explanation and understanding, facts and values or determination and freedom. However, these seemingly clear lines of demarcation often turn out to be rather complicated, as is particularly evident in recent attempts to ‘naturalize’ intentionality and knowledge. Are our intentional relations to the world determined by factors that are explicable in terms of natural properties and laws? Or are they rather regulated by socially established norms? The fact that we can ask these questions shows that the distinction between nature and normativity, whose origin is commonly traced back to the early modern period, is still confusing, even though we might have become very familiar with it.

This book is an attempt to clarify how early modern philosophers construed the influence of nature and norms on thought, and it tackles this task by invoking a decidedly contemporary perspective. The idea for this book was born at a workshop on “Nature versus Normativity?” held at Humboldt University, Berlin, in July 2011, made possible by a grant of the German Research Foundation.

We owe much to the institutions and people who supported our workshop and through this helped us collectively to bring our work to the present stage. Thus, we would like to express our gratitude to Dominik Perler for hosting this event as well as for his unflinching collaboration and support. We would also like to thank the Topoi Excellence Cluster and Humboldt University for having provided us with the conference venue. Special thanks to Sebastian Bender, Sanja Dembić, Luz Christopher Seiberth and Simone Ungerer for administrative and logistic support. The Australian Research Council funded the related research project “The Rise of Empiricism,” and in this way offered great support in establishing the research collaboration between Berlin and Sydney. The School of Philosophical and Historical Inquiry, University of Sydney, funded a second workshop on a related topic in Sydney in September 2011 and gave three of the contributors the opportunity for further discussion of their papers.

Our warmest thanks, also, to Stephen Gaukroger for accepting to publish our volume in this series, to Lucy Fleet for her support in finalising the manuscript, to Annette Pierdziwol for her invaluable help with the editing of many of the chapters, as well as to our group of contributors.

Sydney and Groningen

The Editors

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