

**THE THEORY OF PASSIONS
IN
CARTESIAN PHILOSOPHY**

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ABSTRACT
THE THEORY OF PASSIONS IN CARTESIAN PHILOSOPHY

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The aim of this thesis is to investigate the passions in Cartesian philosophy. It analyses the nature, characteristics and the causes of passions as discussed by Descartes in his correspondence with Princess Elizabeth and his last book *The Passions of the Soul* (*Les passions de l'âme*). This thesis purports to explain Descartes' ethical view by examining the physical mechanism of the passions and their relation to the soul. The reason, will and their essential roles in Cartesian ethics are discussed.

Key Words: Passions, Cartesian Physiology, Cartesian Ethics, Virtue, Reason, Will

ÖZ
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Bu tezin amacı Kartezyen felsefedeki tutku kavramını incelemektir. Descartes'in Prenses Elizabeth'e mektupları ve *Tinin Tutkuları*'nda (*Les passions de l'âme*) ortaya koyduğu tutkuların doğası, özellikleri ve nedenlerini incelenmektedir. Bu tez tutkuların fiziksel mekanizması ve tutkuların tinle olan ilişkisini inceleyerek Descartes'in etik anlayışını açıklamayı amaçlamaktadır. Bunun yanında Kartezyen etikte us ve istencin rolü ve gerekliliği tartışılmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Tutkular, Kartezyen Fizyoloji, Kartezyen Etik, Erdem, Us, İstenç

To Memory of My Mother

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

René Descartes is a mathematician, scientist and philosopher. He is one of the major philosophers of the modern era. His methodological doubt, views about certainty and relationship between mind and body have been influential over last three centuries. One of his famous works, *The Meditations* is very important in the sense that it reflects his metaphysical and epistemological view. Moreover, distinction between the mind and the body, which Descartes explains in his last book *The Passions of the Soul*, leads to a new way in philosophy of mind.

In *The Passions of the Soul*, (1649), Descartes investigates passions and explains how passions arise from the connection between mind and body. The preface of this book consists of two letters from an anonymous friend of Descartes and four replies written by Descartes. The main reason of writing *The Passions of the Soul* is Descartes' correspondence with Elizabeth of Bohemia. Correspondence between Descartes and Princess Elizabeth begins in 1643. Elizabeth's problems about herself and her family lead the discussions in letters. The princess wants to know more about the soul except "thinking thing" and is concerned with the "substantial union" between mind and body. Firstly, Descartes' approach is ethical. He sets out to explain the ways to achieve a happy life. However, after the insistence and criticism of Princess Elizabeth, he writes more detailed passages about passions, interaction between mind and body, functions of the body. Finally, in 1649, before his death, he publishes *The Passions of the Soul*.

The letters between Elizabeth of Bohemia and Descartes are important since they are main references in the sense that they inform us about his ethical view about passions.

In his letter of May 21, 1643, Descartes writes the following:

First, I consider that there are in us certain primitive notions, which are as it were the patterns of the patterns on the basis of which we form all our other conceptions. There are only a very few such notions. First, there are most general- those of being, of number, of duration etc- which apply to everything we can conceive. Then, as regards body in particular, we have only the notion of extension, which entails the notion of shape and motion; and as regards the soul on its own, we have only the notion of thought, which includes the perceptions of the intellect and the inclinations of the will. Lastly, as regards the soul and the body together, we have only the notion of their union, on which depends our notion of the soul's power to move the body, and the body's power to act on the soul and cause its sensations and passions.¹

In this letter, Descartes emphasizes three notions: body, soul and the union of both. Especially, his comments about the union of body and soul are important since they reflect the idea that the existence of passions depends on the body and the movement of body by the power of soul. In these letters Descartes asks the general questions about passions and the nature of the relation between mind and body.

Likewise, in *The Passions of the Soul*, Descartes emphasizes the substantial union between soul and body in spite of their being distinct or separate entities, he also explains the source and cause of passions and how sensory transmission can be possible by means of animal spirits and pineal gland. He also deals with the mastery over the passions by emphasizing the role of will and reason. In other words, in this work, he draws an outline of the passions of the soul by the help of theories of perception and moral psychology.

¹ Descartes, René (1991). *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. trans. Cottingham, J. Stoothoff, R. Murdoch, D. Kenny, A. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Vol.III, p.218. (Letters to Elizabeth).

In Part I, Descartes begins with the difference between the soul and the body. He says that our thoughts belong to our soul while every movement belongs to the body. Then he reflects on the union of the soul and the body in existence of passions. He states that passions cannot exist without the movement of the body. Then he examines the parts and the functions of the body. He concludes that the passions arise when animal spirits flow into the pineal gland. He emphasizes the intermediary role of animal spirits and pineal gland in occurrence of passions.

In Part II, Descartes gives detailed information about principal passions, which are *wonder, love, hatred, desire, joy and sadness*. He also deals with their physical existence and their relation to the soul.

In Part III, Descartes mentions particular passions and considers the possibility of mastery over the passions. From his point of view, while there is good and evil in the nature, choice depends on us. At this point, our will helps us to choose. Passions are in the mind and will forms volitions, which are useful for our well-being. For Descartes, passions may be excessive or we may have conflicting passions. Human beings can avoid this conflict by acquiring useful habits and using reason and will correctly. He also offers “generosity” as a key for all passions and emphasizes its necessity for virtuous ends. This study is mainly concerned with Descartes’ ethical solutions about the excess of our passions.

In Descartes’ understanding of philosophy, ethics is crucial. This is because ethics is concerned with the mastery over the passions, this requires a deep understanding of mind and body relation. At this point, in the preface of *Principles of Philosophy*, Descartes asserts the following:

[T]he whole of philosophy is like a tree. The roots are metaphysics, the trunk is physics, and the branches emerging from the trunk are all the other sciences, which may be reduced to three principal ones, namely medicine, mechanics and morals. By ‘morals’ I understand the highest and most perfect moral system,

which presupposes a complete knowledge of the other sciences and is the ultimate level of wisdom.²

As Cottingham puts it: “ Descartes’ ‘crowning project’ was to be the articulation of highest and most perfect moral system which presupposes a complete knowledge of the other sciences, and is the ultimate level of wisdom.”³

In this thesis, an outline of Descartes’ theory of passions will be given and I will investigate Descartes’ basic ethical views because, I think, this may also be useful to evaluate his metaphysical and epistemological standpoint.

The following chapter is about historical background of passions and their physical existence and causes. Descartes’ view about passions differs from ancient and medieval philosophers like the Stoics, Thomas Aquinas and St. Augustine in the fact that he investigates passions by looking at their physical characteristics. From Descartes’ point of view, the movement of animal spirits, the muscles and the nerves have significant roles and also the pineal gland, which is the seat of the soul, constitutes the most important part of this system. He adds that the passions cannot be evaluated as illnesses; on the contrary, they are motivational states for right and useful actions.

Chapters 3 and 4 cover the definition of six principal and some particular passions. Descartes names six principal passions as wonder, love, hatred, desire, joy and sadness. He clearly depicts these kinds of passions in terms of their physical existence and their relation to soul. Chapter 4 is devoted to particular passions, which are either species or composites of six principal passions. Furthermore, this chapter includes a table that shows some species, composites and also opposites.

² Descartes, René (1985). *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. trans. Cottingham, J. Stoothoff, R. Murdoch, D. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Vol.I, p.186. (*Principles of Philosophy*).

³ Cottingham, J. (1998). *Philosophy and the Good Life: Reason and the Passions in Greek, Cartesian and Psychoanalytic Ethics*. New York: Cambridge University Press. p.168.

Last chapter is about Descartes' evaluation of passions in terms of ethics. While physical existence of passions is the most remarkable point for understanding the nature of them, reason and will are the most important concepts for their assessment from an ethical perspective. The mastery of the passions is crucial for training ourselves and gaining useful habits with the guidance of will and reason. This chapter also deals with the ultimate goal of life, which is happiness or supreme contentment in Descartes' terms. Furthermore, Descartes offers "generosity" for the mastery over the passions. According to him, generosity is both virtue and cardinal passion.

This study is about how the passions occur and what their causes are, the importance of six principle passions and their ethical meaning for Descartes. Furthermore, Descartes' views about mind-body distinction and mind-body union can be understood by means of ethics and physiology.

CHAPTER 2

PASSIONS IN DESCARTES' PHILOSOPHY

2.1 Historical Background of the Passions

There are many works about passions in ancient and medieval philosophy. Many questions related to this issue had been analyzed and answered from various points of view. Ancient and medieval theories of the passions are important to understand Descartes' view. Descartes criticizes ancients in *The Passions of the Soul* as follows:

The defectiveness of the sciences, we inherit from the ancients is nowhere more apparent than in what they wrote about the Passions. For even though this is a topic about which knowledge has always been vigorously sought, and though it does not seem to be one of the most difficult- because, as everyone feels them in himself, one need not borrow any observation from elsewhere to discover their nature- nevertheless what the Ancients taught about them is so little, and for the most part so little believable, that I cannot hope to approach the truth unless I forsake the paths they followed. For this reason I shall be obliged to write here as though I were treating a topic which no one before me had ever described.⁴

It is better to start with the Stoics' view about passions in order to understand what Descartes means. The Stoics believed in unity of rational soul and thought that passions are harmful and mistaken as they are based on egocentricism. From their point of view, passions occur as results of human beings' mistakes, false beliefs and misuse of reason.⁵ According to them, one must live without passions, improve the character and acquire rational habits.

⁴ Descartes, René (1989). *The Passions of the Soul*. trans. Voss, S. Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Article 1. pp.18-19.

⁵ "What distinguishes the Stoic theory most clearly is the conviction that passions are causally dependent on intellectual mistakes about values, that in principle one eliminates passions and the underlying psychological instability by correcting one's beliefs." Algra, K. Barnes, J.

According to the Stoics there are four types of passions called pleasure and pain, desire and fear. They claim that pleasure and desire are related to good things while pain and fear are related to bad things. While Descartes emphasizes the passive nature of passions by saying that whatever is not an action is a passion, Stoics' perspective is completely different. They claim the resemblance between an action and a passion.⁶

Stoics follow a fashion in Greek thought and their categorization is associated with ethics and virtue. Stoic philosophy has been very influential in medieval times and many philosophers have adopted this theory.⁷

On the other hand, St. Augustine deals with theological status of passions and explains the nature of passions by examining bodily passions in the light of Christian theology. According to St. Augustine, if there is good in the world, there is also evil. God is absolutely good and therefore human beings are responsible for evil. The most important means to solve the problem of good and evil is free will.

For Thomas Aquinas, passions are caused by external objects and judgments are accompanied by physical impulses. He divides passions into two: irascible passions and concupiscible passions. Irascible passions directed towards a good object are hope and despair and fear. Courage and anger are directed towards an evil object. On the other hand, concupiscible passions directed towards a good object are love, desire, pleasure or joy. Hate, aversion

Mnasfeld, J. Schofield, M. (2005). *The Cambridge History of Hellenistic Philosophy*. New York: Cambridge University Press. p.699.

⁶ "A passion is, like an action, a reaction to an impression; the way things look to the agent gives him his starting point. And also like an action, a passion cannot occur unless the agent gives his assent to the way things look and to the notion that a certain course of action is reasonable." Algra, K. Barnes, J. Mnasfeld, J. Schofield, M. (2005). *The Cambridge History of Hellenistic Philosophy*. New York: Cambridge University Press. pp.700-701.

⁷ "The fourfold Stoic classification of the types of emotions (pleasure, pain, hope, fear) was the most popular systematization in the twelfth century. It was commonly known the works of Augustine and Boethius." Lagerlund, H. Yrjönsuuri, M. (2002). *Emotions and Choice from Boethius to Descartes*. Dordrecht; Boston, Mass: Kluwer Academic Publishers. p.66.

and pain or sorrow are directed towards an evil object.⁸ In other words, Aquinas explains passions by distinguishing between irascible and concupiscent appetites. He points out the likeness of passions to motions.⁹ St. Augustine and Thomas Aquinas share the same belief pointing out Stoics' confusion of sensitive and rational appetites. However, in *The Passions of the Soul*, Descartes approaches the subject of passions neither from a theological nor from an ethical view. He categorizes principal or primitive passions as perceptions.

Descartes also rejects the doctrine that the soul has two parts. Again, he criticizes the ancients, especially Plato in the sense that the theory of the lower and higher parts of the soul seems senseless. Descartes argues:

[A]ll the struggles that people customarily imagine between the lower part of the soul, which is called sensitive, and the higher, which is rational, or between the natural appetites and the will, consist only in the opposition between the movements which the body by its spirits and the soul by its will tend to excite simultaneously in the gland. For there is only a single soul in us, and this soul has within itself no diversity of parts; the very one that is sensitive is rational, and all its appetites are volitions.¹⁰

Moreover, Descartes' classification or enumeration of the passions differs from the ancients. In *The Passions of the Soul*, article 68, he rejects the classification based on sensitive part of the soul. Actually, he does not agree with Aquinas because he thinks that it is impossible to categorize passions based on two appetites of the sensitive part of the soul like concupiscent and irascible. Besides, the enumeration of the passions, which ancients had made,

⁸ Gaukroger, S. (1998) "Descartes' Theory of the Passions" in *Descartes*, ed. by Cottingham J. New York: Oxford University Press. p. 213.

⁹ "[A]ll concupiscent emotions with respect to good object are motions toward that object and those with respect to an evil object are motions away from that object." Lagerlund, H. Yrjönsuuri, M. (2002). *Emotions and Choice from Boethius to Descartes*. Dordrecht; Boston, Mass: Kluwer Academic Publishers. p.73.

¹⁰ Descartes, René (1989). *The Passions of the Soul*. Article 47. p.44.

is far from including all principal passions. Actually, Descartes establishes the theory of passions especially by focusing on their definition and explanation in terms of physiology.

2.2 Passions in Physical Sense for Descartes

Descartes' famous work *The Meditations*, (1641), is important in the sense that it contains his metaphysical and epistemological views. In *The Meditations*, Descartes examines the sources and the nature of knowledge, the nature of man, the existence of God, mind-body distinction and the substantial unity between them. Especially the Sixth Meditation explains the unity between mind and body, which forms the ground of the existence of the passions.

In the Sixth Meditation, Descartes defines mind as unextended and indivisible in contrast to body, which has extension and division. For instance, the body might lose one of its parts but it can continue its function. Nevertheless, for mind it is impossible to think the same because the mind cannot be divided. The essence of the body is extension. On the other hand, thinking is the essence of mind. In other words, mind and body are metaphysically distinct. Our body is an extended and non-thinking thing and our mind is essentially a thinking thing.

In the Sixth Meditation, Descartes says the following:

[S]imply by knowing that I exist and seeing at the same time that absolutely nothing else belongs to my nature or essence except that I am a thinking thing, I can infer correctly that my essence consists solely in the fact that I am a thinking thing. It is true that I may have (or, to anticipate, that I certainly have) a body that is very closely joined to me. But nevertheless, on the one hand I have a clear and distinct idea of myself, in so far as I am simply a thinking, non-extended thing; and on the other hand I have a distinct idea of body, in so far as this is simply an extended, non-thinking thing. And

accordingly, it is certain that I am really distinct from my body, and can exist without it.¹¹

After defining mind and body as separate entities, Descartes considers the unity between them. His view about unity between body and mind has led to controversies.¹² Descartes' contemporaries questioned how it could be possible for two distinct substances to form a union.

From Descartes' point of view, the human being consists of mind and body and while metaphysically these two things exist apart from one another, in this life they form a union and they interact. Descartes maintains that although mind functions differently from body, they are joined or form a union. He explains this as follows:

Nature also teaches me, by these sensations of pain, hunger, thirst and so on, that I am not merely present in my body as a sailor is present in a ship, but that I am very closely joined and, as it were, intermingled with it, so that I and the body form a unit. If this were not so, I, who am nothing but a thinking thing, would not feel pain when the body was hurt, but would perceive the damage purely by the intellect, just as a sailor perceives by sight if anything in his ship is broken. Similarly, when the body needed food or drink, I should have an explicit understanding of the fact, instead of having confused sensations of hunger and thirst. For these sensations of hunger, thirst, pain and so on are nothing but confused modes of thinking which arise from the union and, as it were, intermingling of the mind with the body.¹³

According to Descartes, the body is a machine and it is mechanical. It functions differently from the soul. The mind is the master of the body. The

¹¹ Descartes, René (1984). *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. trans. Cottingham, J. Stoothoff, R. Murdoch, D. Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press. Vol.II, p.54. (*The Meditations*).

¹² Cottingham points out that Descartes' explanation in terms of physiology satisfies the readers that the nerves are mediators between the brain and sense organs. Nonetheless, his approach about the union of mind and body leads philosophical perplexity. Cottingham, J (1988). *The Rationalists*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. pp. 125-126.

¹³ Descartes, René (1984). *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. Vol.II, p.56. (*The Meditations*).

mind is synonymous with soul. The interaction of the soul and body takes place in a specific part in the body. For him, this place, which is between the two hemispheres of the brain, is called the “pineal gland”.¹⁴

In *The Passions of the Soul*, Descartes insists on the substantial union between the soul and the body in spite of their being distinct or separate entities. He also explains the source and the causes of passions and how sensory transmission can be possible by means of animal spirits and the pineal gland. Descartes begins with the difference between the soul and the body. He states that our thoughts belong to our soul while every movement belongs to the body. Then he examines the parts and the functions of the body. As we know, some organs like heart, brain, muscles, and nerves, liver have important roles for our survival. The circulation of blood is crucial for the functions of all organs. We have two major veins called superior and inferior vena cava, which carry dirty blood to right cavity of the heart. After having been cleaned in the lungs, blood spreads throughout the body from the left side of the heart by means of the great artery. Then, blood circulation occurs. Descartes adopts the theory of the movement of blood, which was discovered by William Harvey. In *Discourse on the Method*, Descartes says the following:

One may ask, however, why the blood in the veins is not used up as it flows continually into the heart, and why the arteries are never too full of blood, since all the blood that passes through the heart flows through them. To this I need give no reply other than that already published by an English physician, who must be praised for having broken the ice on this subject. He is the first to teach that there are many small passages at the extremities of the arteries, through which the blood they receive from the heart enters the small branches of the

¹⁴ John Cottingham asserts: “Descartes’ physiological reflections led him to believe that the soul exercised its functions in one particular portion of the brain: the *conarion* or pineal gland. In his primitive ‘pneumatic’ theory of the nervous system, the muscles of the body are activated by a kind of fine gas known as the ‘animal spirits’, which flows back and forth via the nerves between the brain and the relevant organs.” Cottingham, J (1988). *The Rationalists*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p.125.

veins, from there going immediately back to the heart, so that its course is nothing but a perpetual circulation.¹⁵

The movements of the muscles and all sensation depend on our nerves. In his extensive physiological research, Descartes uses the concept “animal spirits” to explain the mechanism of sensations. The nerves contain little tubes in which animal spirits flow. Animal spirits, in other words, air or wind flow through the nerves. In the modern sense, they can be called neurological impulses, which move through the axons. Descartes explains how the animal spirits are produced in the brain:

[A]ll of the liveliest and finest parts of the blood that the heat has rarefied in the heart ceaselessly enter the cavities of the brain in great numbers. And the reason they go there rather than anywhere else is that all the blood leaving the heart by the great artery flows toward the place in a straight line and since they can not all enter it because there are only very narrow passages, only the most agitated and the finest of its parts gets there, while the rest spread out into all the other places in the body. Now these fine parts of the blood compose animal spirits.¹⁶

Since he deals with the physical examination of body and its relation to the soul, by animal spirits Descartes means bodies or physical components. In *The Treatise on Man*, he gives a detailed analysis of the movements of muscles and explains reflex actions by means of animal spirits. He gives the following example:

[I]f fire A is close to foot B, the tiny parts of this fire (which, as you know, move about very rapidly) have the power also to move the area of skin which they touch. In this way they pull the tiny fibre *cc* which you see attached to it, and simultaneously open the entrance to the pore *de*, located opposite the point where this fibre terminates— just as when you pull one end of a string, you cause a bell hanging at the other end to ring at the same time. When the entrance to the pore or small tube

¹⁵ Descartes, René (1985). *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. Vol.I, p.136. (*Discourse on the Method*).

¹⁶ Descartes, René (1989). *The Passions of the Soul*. Article10. p.23.

de is opened in this way, the animal spirits from cavity F enter and are carried through it— some to muscles which serve to pull the foot away from the fire, some to muscles which turn the eyes and head to look at it, and some to muscles which make the hands move and the whole body turn in order to protect it...¹⁷

After examining and considering all the functions of the body, he mentions functions of the soul, which are two types, actions and passions of the soul. Descartes means by action that of our volitions. The others are passions that are perceptions and emotions that have their origin in the body.

Descartes gives a detailed description that perceptions, sensations or emotions are the passions of the soul that are caused by the movements of the animal spirits. We have to distinguish emotions from perceptual sensations, which are related to external objects outside us such as sounds, colors etc. and from sensations of our body like hunger, thirst and pain. At this point, Descartes says that we have to know how interaction and unity between soul and body occur in order to understand the nature of passions.

[T]he soul is truly joined to the whole body, and that one can not properly say that it is in any one of its parts to the exclusion of the others, because (the body) is one, in a way indivisible, in proportion to the disposition of its organs, which are so related to one another that when any of them is removed this renders the whole body defective; and because (the soul) is of nature which has no relation to extension or to the dimensions or other properties of the stuff of the body is composed of, but only to the whole collection of its organs.¹⁸

At the level of the union of mind and body, the passions originate in the body by means of the animal spirits. There is a part of the brain, which has a crucial role in holding the unity between the soul and the body. This small organ located between the two lobes of the brain is called the pineal gland. Animal spirits are means of sensation and pass through the pineal gland. The

¹⁷ Descartes, René (1985). *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. Vol.I, pp.101-102. (*Treatise on Man*).

¹⁸ Descartes, René (1989). *The Passions of the Soul*. Article 30. p.35.

animal spirits reach the pineal gland and the parts enter the cavities, hence passions arise. In other words, animal spirits transmit sensation to the pineal gland and return through the nerves to the muscles by carrying potential motion.

The intermediary role of the pineal gland is very significant in Descartes' comprehensive physiological theory. Lokhorst and Kaitaro argue that Descartes' theory is original. Although some historians like Soury, Thorndike and Sherrington claim that this theory was defended before Descartes by some of his contemporaries, Lokhorst and Kaitaro support their view with some historical evidences.¹⁹

The pineal gland is the seat of the soul and the reason of choosing of this place is that mostly our sense organs are double such as our eyes, our hands and our ears. If one of these organs is the seat, it leads us to sense two images instead of one.

Descartes says the following:

The reason which convinces me that in all the body the soul can have no other place than this gland in which to exercise its functions immediately is that I observe that the other parts of our brain are all double, just as we have two eyes, two hands, two ears, and, in short, all the organs of our external senses are double; and that, inasmuch as we only have a single and simple thought of a given thing at a given time, there must necessarily be some place where two images coming through the two eyes, or the two other impressions coming from a single object through the double organs of other senses, can coalesce into one before they reach the soul, so that they do not represent two objects to it instead of one. And we can easily understand these images or other impressions to unite in this gland by the mediation of the spirits filling the brain's cavities, but there is no place else in the body where they can thus be united unless it is done in this gland.²⁰

¹⁹ Lokhorst, Gert-Jan C. Kaitaro, Timo, T. (2001). "The Originality of Descartes' Theory about the Pineal Gland". *Journal of the History of the Neurosciences*, Vol.10, No.1 6-18.

²⁰ Descartes, René (1989). *The Passions of the Soul*. Article 32. pp.36-37.

He gives an example for how two images are formed into one in the brain. When we see an animal, our eyes portray two images by means of optic nerves and animal spirits, which fill the cavities of brain, then images reach the pineal gland and they are formed as one image. After arrival of the spirits to pineal gland passions occur. Descartes explains why the same figure causes different passions in different persons.²¹ Since all brains are not identical, our passions and our actions differ from each other. One person may run away as a result of fear but another may fight with the animal.

Descartes divides passions into three: the first type is perceptual sensations caused by external objects such as seeing light of a torch or hearing the sound of a bell. The second type is our bodily sensations referred to our bodies such as pain, thirst, and hunger.²² The last type of passions is the passions of the soul like feelings of love, hate, wonder, anger, joy etc. The third type of passions is the main subject of *The Passions of the Soul*.

Descartes also gives the causal sequence of the passions as the action of the external object, its representation, the bodily change and lastly the passion itself. When we see a dangerous animal, we perceive it by means of the animal spirits and the pineal gland. Then, we have certain internal and external physical changes like trembling, change in the rate of blood circulation and change in the color of our faces. We fear and this directs us to think what is useful for us. We think of the danger and our will leads us either to run away or to overcome the danger by fighting. After the effect of the will, action takes place. Nonetheless, Descartes' causal sequence is a little problematic since generally it is thought that bodily changes come after passions. In other words, we tremble, turn pale and our rate of pulse fastens as we fear.

²¹ “[Descartes] simply translates differences in response into differences in the disposition of the brain. The idea is that the spirits are reflected differently in different people depending on the initial disposition of their brain, and hence pineal gland, something which results in different responses.” Gaukroger, S. (1998) “Descartes’ Theory of the Passions” in *Descartes*, ed. Cottingham J. New York: Oxford University Press. p. 220.

²² Descartes, René (1989). *The Passions of the Soul*. Articles 23-24. pp.31-32.

2.3 Causes of Passions

After defining the physical existence of passions, Descartes explains causes of the passions. For him, the soul has two functions: actions and passions. Passions have a passive nature as they arise from the perceptions, knowledge and representations of external things. He argues that the functions of the soul are of two types:

[T]he first, namely, are the actions of soul; the others are its passions. The ones I call its actions are all of our volitions, because we find by experience that they come directly from our soul and seem to depend only on it; as, on the other hand, all the sorts of cases of perception or knowledge to be found in us can generally be called its passions, because it is often not our soul makes them such as they are, and because it always receives them from things that are represented by them.²³

Furthermore, Jean-Luc Marion says the following concerning this article: “ the passions appear first of all to consist of “perceptions”, “cases of knowledge”, “representations”; they are imposed on the soul by “things” that act on it; it is consequently passive.”²⁴

For Descartes, external things are one of the causes of passions. He says that the nature of body and also agitation of spirits are other causes of them. He supports this idea in Article 51: “...the last and most proximate cause of the passions of the soul is nothing other than the agitation with which the spirits move the little gland in the middle of the brain”.²⁵ Besides, there is an exceptional and the most important cause for Descartes. This exceptional cause of the passions is the soul, in other words, soul sometimes causes its own passions. This is exceptional, since soul does not always cause passions directly by itself.

²³ Descartes, René (1989). *The Passions of the Soul*. Article 17. p.28.

²⁴ Marion, Jean- Luc (1999). *Cartesian Questions*. Chicago & London: The University of Cambridge Press. p.107.

²⁵ Descartes, René (1989). *The Passions of the Soul*. Article 51. p.50.

Descartes defines the real cause of passions as the movement of animal spirits. As underlined above, passions that are related to external things are sounds, colors etc. and those related to body are hunger, thirst and pain. What Descartes really means by saying that passions of the soul are emotions, perceptions that are “caused, maintained and strengthened by some movement of the spirits.”²⁶ Descartes also mentions the cause of passions in one of his letters to Elizabeth of Bohemia:

[T]he term ‘passion’ can be applied in general to all the thoughts which are thus aroused in the soul by cerebral impressions alone without the concurrence of its will, and therefore without any action of the soul itself; for whatever is not an action is a passion. Commonly, however, the term is restricted to thoughts which are caused by some special agitation of the spirits. For thoughts that come from external objects, or from internal dispositions of the body- such as the perception of colours, sounds, smells, hunger, thirst, pain and the like- are called external or internal sensations.²⁷

Descartes defines this exceptional cause as inner excitations in the soul caused by itself. Descartes gives definition that “...though they [passions] may sometimes be caused by the action of the soul, which decides to conceive of this or that object, and also by the temperament of the body alone or by impressions haphazardly encountered in the brain, as happens when one feels sad or joyful without being able to say why...”²⁸

Here, Descartes introduces intellectual joy, sadness and love which exist as a result of inner excitations of the soul. In fact, love as a passion occurs by means of the movement of animal spirits and depends on the object’s representation of being good and suitable. On the other hand, intellectual love exists as a result of action of the soul. Besides, Descartes maintains that

²⁶ Descartes, René (1989). *The Passions of the Soul*. Article 27. p.34.

²⁷ Descartes, René (1991). *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. Vol.III, p.218. (Letters to Elizabeth). (October 6,1645).

²⁸ Descartes, René (1989). *The Passions of the Soul*. Article 51. p.51.

passionate love and intellectual love can be together due to the soul's unity with the body.

Descartes also argues that we feel joy and sadness as a result of possessing some good or evil. He adds that intellectual joy and sadness occur when "...someone feels sad and joyful without for all that being able to take distinct notice of the good or evil which is its cause".²⁹ He gives a specific example in article 147:

For example, when a husband mourns his dead wife, whom (as sometimes happens) he would be upset to see resuscitated, it may be that his heart is constricted by the Sadness which funeral trappings and the absence of a person to whose company he was accustomed excite in him; and it may be that some remnants of love or pity, presented to his imagination, draw genuine tears from his eyes- in spite of the fact that at the same time he feels a secret Joy in the innermost depths of his soul, whose excitation has so much power that the Sadness and tears accompanying it can diminish none of its strength.³⁰

What can be concluded from Descartes' example of the mourning husband is that imagination carries an important role in the inner excitations of the soul. That is because, the husband in the example experiences sadness when he thinks of his lost wife or when he feels loneliness because of losing his wife's company. However, he feels a secret joy when he remembers their happy old days. In the letter written to Chanut, (February 1,1647), Descartes gives a further example about intellectual love. Again, he points out the importance of imagination. Although God has no physical existence, generally we have the feeling of intellectual or rational love. We love God intellectually by just thinking of his existence. At this point, Descartes criticizes the Christian belief and the ancients who tried to imagine gods as physical objects. Descartes claims that these external objects such as idols may

²⁹ Descartes, René (1989). *The Passions of the Soul*. Article 93. p.70.

³⁰ Descartes, René (1989). *The Passions of the Soul*. Article 147. pp.100-101.

confuse our belief. However, for a continuous love we have to meditate attentively.

We have seen Descartes' criticism of the ancients like Stoics, St. Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. For Descartes, their theories are not acceptable in the sense that the passions are not illnesses or ailments. He says that the passions are good and they motivate the soul for right and useful actions. According to Descartes, it is important to express physical existence of the passions in the light of mind-body union. In *The Passions of the Soul*, Descartes concentrates on the nature and physical existence of the passions. In his physiological research, Descartes emphasizes the movement of the animal spirits which is the real cause of the passions. He also mentions a specific organ, pineal gland, in which the animal spirits reach and hence the passions arise. While Descartes says that the movement of the animal spirits is the real cause of the passions, he mentions an exceptional cause. Sometimes the soul causes its own passions. These passions are called as intellectual or rational passions.

After explaining the physical existence of the passions, Descartes defines the principal passions. We will deal with the nature and the use of principal passions in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3

SIX PRINCIPAL PASSIONS

3.1 Definitions of the Six Principal Passions

According to Descartes, the cause of the passions is purely physical in the sense that they are caused by the movements of animal spirits, which move the pineal gland. Since the passions direct the soul to the will and hence we decide what is useful and beneficial to us, it is essential to enumerate the passions.

There are six principle or primitive passions called wonder, love, hatred, desire, joy and sadness. All the others are called composite passions, which are species or compositions of the principal ones. For Descartes, the crucial point is to list the six principal passions, define them and show the way how others originate from them.

Descartes emphasizes the difference between his theory and the ancients. The ancients distinguish passions as concupiscent and irascible according to two appetites. Descartes criticizes such a distinction and claims that faculties of loving, fearing, hating, wondering exist in the same way. Moreover, ancients' enumeration fails to refer to all principal passions. For Descartes it is important to conceive basic or principal passions since all others are species or composites of them. As a result, the number of passions is not definite. In the order of the passions, wonder is the first of all the passions because it does not have an opposite. Descartes defines wonder as follows:

[W]hen we first encounter with some object surprises us and we judge it to be new, or very different from what we knew in the past or what we supposed it was going to be, this makes us wonder and be astonished at it. And since this can happen before we know in the least whether this object is suitable to us or not, it seems to me that wonder is the first of all the passions.³¹

³¹ Descartes, René (1989). *The Passions of the Soul*. Article 53. p.52.

Wonder is the result of a new object's representation. The object's being completely new means it had not been seen in the past or will not be expected to be seen in the future. Thus, new object is a matter of the present. There is a second definition in the article 70: "wonder is a sudden surprise of the soul which makes it tend to consider attentively those objects which seem to it rare and extraordinary."³²

Descartes argues that esteem or scorn may be joined to the passion called wonder, and that sometimes veneration arises from esteem and disdain from scorn. Descartes tells us how the passion of wonder arises physically. Its occurrence is the same of all others, in other words, it exists by means of movements of animal spirits. However, there seems to be a peculiarity that changes in the heart and the circulation of the blood are not observed in wonder. For Descartes, this is simply because this passion does not excite good or evil. Although we define wonder as a sudden surprise that changes the motion of spirits, "this surprise is proper but peculiar."³³ According to Descartes, changes can be seen when wonder is found in others. New objects affect the tender and less firm parts of the brain. Descartes says that surprise or astonishment occurs when we want to acquire specific knowledge about the object that we perceive. Although passions are useful and serviceable, the excess of passions is harmful. The only possible solution for excessive wonder is to acquire knowledge about things or objects, which seem unusual to us. Descartes asserts that "astonishment is an excess of wonder which can never be anything but bad."³⁴ Hence, excessive passions such as astonishment have to be corrected since they may become harmful habits.

Love and hatred, which are basically opposite to each other, arise from an object's perception as good or bad. In other words, these passions depend on the object's representation. If an object is represented as good or suitable for

³² Descartes, René (1989). *The Passions of the Soul*. Article 70. p.56.

³³ Descartes, René (1989). *The Passions of the Soul*. Article 72. p.58.

³⁴ Descartes, René (1989). *The Passions of the Soul*. Article 73. p.58.

us, this causes love. On the contrary, if it is presented as bad or evil, this causes hatred in us:

Love is an excitation of the soul, caused by the motion of the spirits, which incites it to join itself in volition to the objects that appear to be suitable to it. And Hatred is an excitation, caused by the spirits, which incites the soul to will to be separated from the objects that are presented to it as harmful.³⁵

Descartes states that love and hatred are passions and occur by means of spirits. We differentiate them by using our will in choosing and deciding on them. In other words, we try to reach conclusions that are beneficial and trustworthy. Descartes talks about two sorts of love. One of which is called love of benevolence that comes from our will to good. The other sort is called love of concupiscence, which is a strong desire for a thing that we love. Descartes enumerates some other species of love: "...passions on ambitious person has four glory, an avaricious person for money, a drunkard for wine, a brutish man for a woman he wants to violate, a man of honor for his friend or his mistress and a good father for his children..."³⁶ Nevertheless, they differ from each other in the sense that they all have desire mixed with other passions except a good father's love for his children. On the other hand, love of a good father is not mixed with other passions since he wants and seeks nothing except his children's good and well-being. However, although man of honor's love is considered to be similar to father's love, it is less perfect and pure.

Descartes differentiates between affection, friendship and devotion:

For when we esteem the object of our Love less than ourselves, we have only a simple Affection for it, when we esteem it equally with ourselves, this is named Friendship and we esteem it more, the passions we have may be named Devotion.³⁷

³⁵ Descartes, René (1989). *The Passions of the Soul*. Article 79. p.62.

³⁶ Descartes, René (1989). *The Passions of the Soul*. Article 82. p.63.

³⁷ Descartes, René (1989). *The Passions of the Soul*. Article 83. p.64.

The difference between affection, friendship and devotion lies in their effects. In all of them there is a union between the thing we love and us. It might be concluded from Descartes' words about love that there has to be a degree in love: we can only have a feeling of fondness for animals, flowers or other objects that are less valued than human beings. When the degree of esteem is equal to us, it is called friendship. Furthermore, the degree of love, which is higher than anything, is called devotion. For example, we may have a feeling of devotion for our country or for a particular person. However, for Descartes hatred does not have so many species as love, since there is no degree in hatred. In other words, the feeling of hatred cannot be measured. There is a similarity between love and hatred because they are internal senses, they affect our reason and judgment about the things that are good or evil. But we have external senses for beautiful or ugly things. There are only two species of hatred. One arises from bad or evil things; the other arises from ugly things, which is called abhorrence or aversion. For instance, a fly may cause the feeling of aversion only because we perceive it as ugly. The passion does not depend on the fly's being bad or evil.

All other passions arise from the same representation of good and bad in us. For instance, when we desire something we wish the acquisition of good. Descartes says the following:

[W]hen one takes into consideration as well whether the likelihood of obtaining what one desires is great or small, what represents to us that it is great excites Hope in us, and what represents to us that it is small excites, Apprehension, of which Jealousy is a species. When hope is extreme, it changes its nature and is named Confidence or Assurance, as, on the other hand, extreme Apprehension becomes Despair.³⁸

The greatness or smallness of desire is important to define the related passions such as hope and apprehension. If we have a great desire for something to happen in the future, it is called hope. However, if the desire is

³⁸ Descartes, René (1989). *The Passions of the Soul*. Article 58. p.53.

small, it only causes a kind of apprehension or jealousy as a part of it, and ends with despair. Desire depends on present values or on the expectation of obtaining those values in the future. In the article 86 of *The Passions of the Soul* Descartes states the following:

The passion of Desire is an agitation of the soul, caused by spirits, which disposes soul to will for the future the things it represents to itself to be suitable. Thus we desire not only the presence of absent good but also the preservation of the present, and in addition the absence of evil, both what we already have and what we believe we might receive in time to come.³⁹

In other words, we desire good things to happen at present and also in the future. For the ancients, the desire is a tendency to search for good, which is the opposite of avoidance of evil. That is to say, desire is the opposite of aversion. For Descartes when we desire health, we desire to avoid sickness. Desire towards good things occurs with love, hope and joy, whereas, desire to avoid evil things occurs with hatred, apprehension and sadness.

It is noteworthy that desire is different in different species, such as species of love and hatred. Desire, which arises from delight and abhorrence, is important. For instance, abhorrence is the execution of the soul, which leads us to avoid a present evil. On the other hand, delight is the opposite of abhorrence, and leads us to enjoy. There are different kinds of delight. For instance, when we see beautiful flower, when we look at it or smell it, or when we see a delicious fruit we tend to taste it. However, the most important cause of desire comes from the nature of man. That is because; man wants to possess the highest good and in some cases wants to be another person.

Next, Descartes defines another principal passion, joy, as a delightful excitation of soul. On the other hand, sadness arises from evil and causes distress. Descartes says the following:

³⁹ Descartes, René (1989). *The Passions of the Soul*. Article 80. p.66.

[We] see from their definitions that Joy arises from one's opinion that one possesses some good and Sadness from one's opinion that one has some evil or defect. But it often happens that someone feels sad or joyful without for all that being able to take distinct notice of the good or evil which is its cause, namely when the good and the evil form their impressions in the brain without the meditation of the soul- sometimes because they belong only to the body, and sometimes also, though they belong to the soul...⁴⁰

In general, we have the feeling of joy as a result of present good. On the contrary, possession of a present evil leads to the feeling of sadness. Nonetheless, sometimes due to the impression of good and evil in the brain there might be a particular reason for feeling of both.

After defining six principal passions and explaining their characteristics, Descartes deals with their physical account. As all passions arise by means of the movement of animal spirits, there are some physical changes in some of the organs.

3.2 Physical Account of the Principal Passions

Descartes begins to explain physiological changes of five opposite passions except wonder before explaining them separately. If movements of the blood and the animal spirits cause passions, then other parts of the body such as the heart, the liver and all other parts have important roles in the production of blood and spirits.

Descartes says the following:

[I] observe in Love when it is by itself, that is when it is not accompanied by any strong Joy or Desire or Sadness, that the pulse beat is regular and much greater and stronger than usual, that a mild warmth is felt in the chest and that digestion of food is carried out very rapidly in the stomach – so that this Passion is beneficial to the health.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Descartes, René (1989). *The Passions of the Soul*. Article 93. p.70.

⁴¹ Descartes, René (1989). *The Passions of the Soul*. Article 97. p.73.

Conversely, Descartes maintains that, in hatred the pulse beat is quick and not regular, warmth is not usual and digestion is not normal since we have tendency not to eat or to vomit. Therefore, this passion is not beneficial to health. He adds:

In Joy (I observe) that the pulse is regular and quicker than usual but not so strong or so great as in Love, that a pleasant warmth is felt, not only in the chest but also spreading into all the external parts of the body with the blood we see entering them abundance, on the meanwhile the appetite is sometimes lost because digestion is carried out less than usual.⁴²

On the other hand, in sadness, the pulse beat is not quick and the warmth of the body decreases and sometimes we want to eat more, our stomach does not work well. Moreover, desire is different from all in the sense that it excites the heart more strongly and actively. Descartes explains the movement of blood and animal spirits in principal passions in detail. For him, their movement is not same in all passions; furthermore, the rate of the pulse, heat of the body differs. Besides inner changes, the external signs of the passions, which accompany internal signs, are noteworthy. These external signs are changes in the color of the face, movements of face and eyes, fainting, trembling, crying etc...

In all passions, it is easy to observe eye movements. We can understand someone's happiness, anger or sadness from his/her eyes. Moreover, actions of the face can easily be perceived. Sometimes it is difficult to perceive these movements since there are differences between individual persons. Descartes says the following:

Almost the same can be said of the actions of the face which also accompany the passions, for even though they are more extensive than those of the eyes, it is nevertheless hard to distinguish them; they differ so little

⁴² Descartes, René (1989). *The Passions of the Soul*. Article 99. p.73.

that there are men who have almost the same look when they cry as others when they laugh.⁴³

However, it is obvious that we can easily observe lip and nose movements in most cases. Besides, movements of the face and the eyes, the changes in color are signs that we can perceive somebody's being affected by passions. It is not nerves and muscles, but the flow of blood to the face that causes this change. For instance, in joy we smile or laugh and also our color turns fresh and rosy. Whereas, when we are sad, our color turns pale or red because of the motion of blood. While the heart and the blood cause changes in color, trembling has a different cause. Trembling is caused by very few animal spirits entering the nerves or sometimes too many spirits. Languor is like trembling: adequate spirits don't enter the nerves. However there is a slight difference between trembling and languor in the sense that the pineal gland does not drive spirits to the muscles in languor. The result is tiredness or laziness of the body. Descartes states the following:

Languor is a disposition, felt in all the members, to relax and be motionless. Like trembling, it comes about because not enough spirits are entering the nerves, but in a different manner. For the cause of trembling is that there are not enough of them in the brain to obey the determinations of the gland when it drives them toward some muscle, whereas languor comes about because the gland does not determine that they go toward some muscles rather than others.⁴⁴

Languor is possible in all passions: when we want to achieve the good end but when we see that it is impossible to attain the idea or form of the good object, this may result in languor. Furthermore, Descartes states that fainting is possible when we encounter extreme joy.

These are the physical changes that our body is affected. As the passions have their root in our body, for Descartes these internal changes in the

⁴³ Descartes, René (1989). *The Passions of the Soul*. Article 113. p.79.

⁴⁴ Descartes, René (1989). *The Passions of the Soul*. Article 119. p.81.

circulation of the blood, the heart rate and the pulse and external changes in color of the face, movements of face and eyes, fainting, trembling, crying etc. is normal. While the passions have the physical origin, they have a strong relationship with our soul in the sense that they direct our soul to right actions.

3.3 Use of Five Passions

After defining the six principle passions and talking about the way they physically exist, Descartes deals with the use of these passions. However, the first passion, wonder, is again excluded by Descartes because of its having no opposite and not originating from an object's being good or bad. The use of the five passions; love, hatred, desire, joy and sadness is explained as follows:

[I]t should be noted that, according to the institution of Nature, they all have reference to the body, and are given to the soul only insofar as it is joined with (the body), so that their natural use is to incite the soul to consent and contribute to actions which can serve to preserve the body or render it more perfect in some way.⁴⁵

For Descartes the use of passions is as important as their definitions and the bodily changes they cause. Although all passions originate from body, they are also linked to the soul, because mind and body are united. Except from their physical mechanism, passions direct the soul to right actions, which are important for our well-being. Descartes supports this view about the significance of the use of five passions by referring to their general use:

And in this context, Sadness and Joy are the first two that are employed. For the soul is immediately informed of things that harm the body only by the sensation it has of pain, which produces in it first the passion of Sadness, next Hatred of what causes the pain, and in the third place the Desire to get rid of it. So also the soul is immediately informed of things useful to the body only by some sort of titillation, which, exciting Joy in it, next arouses love of what one believes to be its cause, and

⁴⁵ Descartes, René (1989). *The Passions of the Soul*. Article 137. p.92.

finally the desire to acquire what can make one continue having this Joy or enjoy one like it later on again. This shows that all five of them are very useful with respect to the body- and even that Sadness is in a way primary and more necessary than Joy, and Hatred than Love, because it is more important to repel the things that harm and can destroy than to acquire those that add some perfection without which one can survive.⁴⁶

If the use of passions is metaphorically akin to a wounded man's walking through a corridor at the end of which he would be healed, the first door that he comes across is "sadness". Because sadness is a result of harmful things which give pain to the body; the "hatred" is always a next door neighbor to sadness due to its being the real source of pain. However, unlike the ancients who considered hatred as an illness, Descartes claims that sadness and hatred are useful as they incite the soul to "desire" which is necessary for refraining from pain. Therefore, the third door should be desire since it directs this man to the place called "joy" where he would be healed. Finally, in order to continue his well-being he experiences the feeling of "love".

Descartes explains the use of these five passions one by one in the second chapter of *The Passions of the Soul*. He begins with explaining the use of love:

This would suffice if we only had the body in us or if it were the better part of us, but inasmuch as it is the lesser, we must consider the Passions principally insofar as they belong to the soul, with respect to which Love and Hatred originate from knowledge and precede Joy and Sadness, except when these latter two, which are species of knowledge, take its place. And when this knowledge is true- that is, when the things it inclines us to love are truly good and those it inclines us to hate are truly bad- Love is incomparably better than Hatred, it cannot be too great, and it never fails to produce Joy.⁴⁷

Here, Descartes states that love should be generated from true knowledge and it should not be too great. Otherwise, joy cannot precede. As

⁴⁶ Descartes, René (1989). *The Passions of the Soul*. Article 137. p.92.

⁴⁷ Descartes, René (1989). *The Passions of the Soul*. Article 139. pp.93-94.

for hatred, he points out that it should not be too little or too great. It should be balanced so as to get rid of pain and to direct us to right actions. Sadness and hatred go hand in hand and again their source is clearly the knowledge of evil.

Descartes explains:

Hatred, on the other hand, cannot be so little that it fails to harm; and it is never without Sadness. I say that it cannot be too little, because we are incited to no action by Hatred of evil, to which we might not be still more by Love of the good to which (the evil) is opposed- at least when the good and the evil are sufficiently known.—For I grant that Hatred of evil manifested only by pain is necessary with respect to the body, but here I am only speaking of that which originates from clearer knowledge, and I am only referring it to the soul. I also say that it is never without Sadness, because evil, being only a privation, cannot be conceived without some real object which it is in, and there is nothing real that does not have some goodness in it; so the Hatred that estranges us from some evil estranges us by that very means from the good it is joined to, and the privation of this good, being represented to our soul as a defect belonging to it, excites Sadness in it.⁴⁸

Desire can be considered as a good passion as long as it is moderate. So it stands as a bridge between “joy and love” and “sadness and hatred”. Descartes also mentions the importance of reason and experience in order to differentiate good and evil. He compares human beings with animals, which lack reason and experience. He concludes that human beings have the advantage of reason, and therefore they do not live for only satisfying their bodily needs. He states:

But, though this use of the passions is the most natural one they can have, and though animals that lack reason all direct their lives entirely by bodily movements like those which usually follow them in us, to which they incite our souls to consent, it is nevertheless not always good, inasmuch as there are many things harmful to the body that cause no Sadness at the beginning, or even

⁴⁸ Descartes, René (1989). *The Passions of the Soul*. Article 140. pp.94-95.

give Joy, and others that are useful to it though they are distressing at first... [B]easts are often deceived by bait, and in order to avoid small evils rush into larger ones. This is why we should make use of experience and reason to distinguish the good from the evil and to discern their true worth, in order not to take one for the other and not to tend toward anything immoderately.⁴⁹

To sum up, Descartes not only gives the definitions of principal passions and explains how they exist, but also he focuses on the usage of them by giving clear statements. All these five passions should be based on true knowledge and they should direct our soul to the right actions. Besides, they should be moderate in order to act virtuously and achieve good consequences.

For Descartes, the number of passions is not definite. However, the primitive or principal ones are so important since all others are their composites or species. All of the passions originate in the body but they have a relation to the soul because of the union between the mind and the body. They guide our soul how to act.

Next we will deal with some particular passions. In fact, Descartes does not mean that the particular passions are less important than the six principal passions. They also lead us to use our will and then act virtuously.

⁴⁹ Descartes, René (1989). *The Passions of the Soul*, Article 138. p.93.

CHAPTER 4

SOME PARTICULAR PASSIONS

After having defined the principal passions, Descartes gives brief definitions of particular ones. He characterizes them either combinations or species of six principle passions. What he calls as “species” of principle passions are indeed different sorts or types of them. On the other hand, “composite” passions are those that occur when two or more different principal passions unite.

For instance, esteem, scorn, remorse, self-satisfaction, repentance, gratitude, anger, regret and lightheartedness are species of certain principle Passions. Yet, hope, mockery, envy, pity, vainglory and shame are the combinations of them. First of all, Descartes mentions esteem and scorn, which are species of wonder. He defines them as follows:

And Esteem, insofar as it is a Passion, is an inclination the soul has to represent to itself the worth of the thing esteemed—an inclination caused by a particular movements of the spirits, guided into the brain in such a way that they strengthen there the impressions which contribute to this subject. Similarly, on the other hand, the Passion of Scorn is an inclination the soul has to consider the lowliness or meanness of what it scorns, caused by the movement of spirits that strengthens the idea of that meanness.⁵⁰

However, Descartes points out that, although esteem and scorn are considered as species of wonder, sometimes they occur due to excitations of love and hatred.

And although Esteem is often excited in us by Love and Scorn by Hatred, that is not universal; it occurs only because one is more or less inclined to consider the greatness or meanness of an object to the extent that one has more or less affection for it.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Descartes, René (1989). *The Passions of the Soul*. Article 149. p.102.

⁵¹ Descartes, René (1989). *The Passions of the Soul*, Article 150. p.103.

Descartes observes that esteem and scorn are easier to recognize when they occur in us rather than feeling them towards any external objects. In fact, the effect of having esteem and scorn for ourselves is so strong that even the movement of animal spirits is affected. That is to say, our attitudes and bodily movements alter simultaneously.

Descartes explains:

Now these two Passions may generally have reference to all sorts of objects, but they are especially noticeable when we refer them to ourselves- that is, when it is our own merit that we esteem or scorn. And the movement of the spirits which causes them is so obvious then that it even alters the countenance, the gestures, the walk, and in general all the actions of those who contrive a better or a worse opinion of themselves than the usual.⁵²

Descartes also expresses the importance of esteem oneself for the acquaintance of wisdom and generosity. Here, he emphasizes the right use of free will, which is the cause of esteem ourselves. Secondly, remorse is defined as a species of sadness. That is because, when we feel sadness, which is a result of feeling doubt about what we have already done, is either accurate or not. In *The Passions of the Soul*, Descartes defines remorse:

Remorse of conscience is a species of Sadness which springs from our doubt that something we are doing or have done is good. And it necessarily presupposes doubt. For if we were entirely sure that what we were doing was bad, we would abstain from doing it, inasmuch as the will is inclined only to things which have some appearance of goodness. And if we were sure that what we had already done was bad, we would have repentance over it, and not just Remorse.⁵³

Self-satisfaction can be considered as a species of joy and repentance as a species of sadness, and they are opposite to each other. In the article 190 of

⁵² Descartes, René (1989). *The Passions of the Soul*, Article 151. p.103.

⁵³ Descartes, René (1989). *The Passions of the Soul*, Article 177. pp.116-117.

The Passions of the Soul, Descartes states that self-satisfaction arises from the thought or feeling the contentment of any action, which we decide acting willingly.

The Satisfaction which those who constantly follow virtue always have is a disposition in their soul which is called tranquility and repose of conscience. But that which one acquires afresh when one has just done some action one thinks good is a Passion, namely a species of Joy, which I believe to be the sweetest of all, because its cause depends only on ourselves.⁵⁴

However, actions that are done without thinking resolutely lead to sadness, in turn, causes repentance.

Repentance is directly opposed to Self-satisfaction; it is a species of Sadness which comes from believing oneself to have done some bad action; it is very bitter, because its cause comes from us alone...But it often happens that weak minds repent of things they have done without knowing for sure that (those things) are bad; they are convinced of this only because they are apprehensive that is so, and if they had done the opposite they would repent in the same way. This is an imperfection in them deserving of Pity. And the remedies for this defect are the same ones that serve to get rid of Irresolution.⁵⁵

Likewise, Descartes, talks about gratitude as a species of love because it depends on the feeling of thankfulness for an action or attitude, which is mutual and intentional. He asserts:

Gratitude is also a species of Love excited in us by some action on the part of the one for whom we have it, by which we believe he has done some good or at least had that intention. So it contains everything Approval does, and this in addition: it is founded on an action that affects us, which we have the Desire to reciprocate. This

⁵⁴ Descartes, René (1989). *The Passions of the Soul*. Article 190. p.121.

⁵⁵ Descartes, René (1989). *The Passions of the Soul*. Article 191. p.122.

is why it has much more strength, especially in souls that are even a little noble and Generous.⁵⁶

Although Descartes gives ingratitude as the opposite of gratitude, he points out that ingratitude is not a passion. This is because; only in the occurrence of ingratitude no movement of animal spirits is seen. In article 194, he explains:

As for Ingratitude, it is not a Passion, for nature has put within us no movement of the spirits which excites it. It is only a vice directly opposed to gratitude, to the extent that this latter is always virtuous and one of the principal bonds of human society.⁵⁷

Similarly, since there is no physical change such as the movement of animal spirits, Descartes does not call impudence a passion either. Thus, like ingratitude, impudence is a vice. Anger is another species of hatred, which occurs as a result of hatred towards harmful actions of others. Descartes gives the following definition: “Anger is also a species of hatred or aversion which we have for those who have done some evil or tried to do harm, not just to anyone indifferently but to us in particular.”⁵⁸ There are two types of anger: a blushing one and a paling one.

When we compare two types of anger, the paling one is more dangerous than the other. Since blushing type of anger is a sudden and a rapid form of anger, it burns out quickly. On the other hand, as strong and great hatred forms and strengthens the roots of paling anger, it has deep effects.

⁵⁶ Descartes, René (1989). *The Passions of the Soul*. Article 193. p.123.

⁵⁷ Descartes, René (1989). *The Passions of the Soul*. Article 194. pp.123-124.

⁵⁸ Descartes, René (1989). *The Passions of the Soul*. Article 199. pp.125-126.

Descartes says the following:

So we see some who turn pale or tremble when they become angry, and we see others who flush or even cry. And we commonly judge that the anger of those who turn pale is more to be feared than the Anger of those who flush...two species of Anger may be distinguished: one which is very sudden and very obvious externally, but yet has little effect and can easily be calmed, and another which is not immediately so conspicuous, but gnaws at the heart more and has more dangerous effects.⁵⁹

Descartes proposes generosity as the best remedy for the excess of anger. Next, he gives regret as a species of sadness and lightheartedness as a species of joy. Although memories of the past are significant in the occurrence of both, they differ. For, in regret there is remembrance of good whereas in lightheartedness we remember the evil. That is, if remembrance of the pleasure, which caused enjoyment, occurs we regret.

Regret is also a species of Sadness, which has a particular bitterness in that it is always joined to some Despair, and to the memory of the pleasure Enjoyment has given us.⁶⁰

On the other hand, when we remember the evil that has already given us suffering and sorrow, which we relieved finally, we feel lightheartedness. Descartes states the following:

[W]hat I name Lightheartedness is a species of Joy with this particular feature: its sweetness is increased by the remembrance of evils we have suffered of which we feel relieved- just as we would feel unburdened of some

⁵⁹ Descartes, René (1989). *The Passions of the Soul*. Articles 200-201. pp.126-128.

⁶⁰ Descartes, René (1989). *The Passions of the Soul*. Article 209. p.132.

heavy load we had carried on our shoulders for a long time.⁶¹

On the other hand, there are some particular passions, which exist as combinations or compositions of principal ones. For example, mockery is a mixture of joy and hatred. It arises when we recognize a misfortune, which is itself a symbol of hatred. Besides, if we perceive someone's misfortune whom we believe to deserve and a feeling of joy appears in us, there arises mockery. In article 178 of *The Passions of the Soul*, Descartes explains the process of mockery as follows:

Derision or Mockery is a species of Joy mingled with Hatred which arises from perceiving some small misfortune in a person we think to be deserving of it. We have Hatred for this misfortune, and Joy in seeing it in someone who deserves it.⁶²

Descartes exemplifies the ways that mockery arises. He points out that some physical defects of others might be thought as a reason for their inclination to mockery.

And we see that those who have very obvious defects—for example, those who are lame, one-eyed, or hunchbacked, or those who have received some public affront—are particularly inclined to mockery. For, desiring to see everyone else in as much disgrace as they are in, they are very much pleased by the misfortunes that happen to them, and deem them deserving thereof.⁶³

⁶¹ Descartes, René (1989). *The Passions of the Soul*. Article 210. p.132.

⁶² Descartes, René (1989). *The Passions of the Soul*. Article 178. p.117.

⁶³ Descartes, René (1989). *The Passions of the Soul*. Article 179. p.117.

Envy is another composite passion, which appears when sadness and hatred come together. The passion of sadness mingles with hatred if we perceive some good in some other person whom we believe not deserving it:

What is commonly named Envy is a vice consisting in a perversity of nature which makes certain people get upset at the good they see happening to other men. But I use the word here to signify a Passion which is not always unvirtuous. Envy, therefore, insofar as it is a Passion, is a species of Sadness mingled with Hatred which comes from seeing good happen to those one thinks to be unworthy of it.⁶⁴

The opposite of envy is pity because it happens when sadness combine with love. Unlike envy, in pity we perceive some evil in other men whom we think they do not deserve it. Thus, for Descartes pity involves a feeling of empathy as we consider ourselves in others' places. Descartes says the following:

Pity is a species of Sadness, mingled with Love or good will toward those we see suffer some misfortune of which we deem undeserving. So it is opposed to Envy in respect of its object, and to Mockery because it considers it in a different way.⁶⁵

He observes that the composition of joy and love results in vainglory whereas combination of sadness and love leads to shame. In vainglory, our opinions about the praise of others for us are crucial. Although self-satisfaction is also based on our inner gratifications, vainglory differs from self-satisfaction in the sense that sometimes we may not be deserved the praise of others. As a result, vainglory is in itself an exaggerated type of passion.

⁶⁴ Descartes, René (1989). *The Passions of the Soul*. Article 182. p.118.

⁶⁵ Descartes, René (1989). *The Passions of the Soul*. Article 185. p.119.

What I call by the name of Vainglory here is a species of Joy founded on Love of ourselves, arising from our opinion that others praise us or our hope that they will. So it differs from inner satisfaction, which arises from our opinion that we have done some good action.⁶⁶

For shame, Descartes says that our self-love causes sadness when we are blamed. As a result, we are ashamed of doing an unapproved behavior. Furthermore, hope is another passion that arises when joy and desire come together. Likewise, Descartes states that “Hope is a disposition of the soul to be convinced that what it desires will come to pass, caused by a particular movement of the spirits, namely by that of Joy and Desire mingled together.”⁶⁷

The opposite of hope is apprehension, and it is a combination of sadness and desire. In both, hope and apprehension, desire is the shared feature since both passions involve expectations about the future. However, they differ because in hope there are positive feelings of enjoyment while in apprehension our feelings cause anxiety. As desire is common in both, apprehension and hope can be experienced simultaneously. Descartes argues that if these passions become stronger, they are named differently. For instance, if hope becomes stronger, it is called confidence. Whereas, if apprehension, that is the opposite of hope becomes greater, the passion is named despair.

For when Hope is so strong that it drives Apprehension out completely, it changes its nature and is named Confidence or Assurance...Likewise, when Apprehension is so extreme that it entirely displaces Hope, it turns into Despair; and this Despair, representing the thing as impossible, completely extinguishes Desire, which inclines itself only to things that are possible.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Descartes, René (1989). *The Passions of the Soul*. Article 204. pp.129-130.

⁶⁷ Descartes, René (1989). *The Passions of the Soul*. Article 165. p.110.

⁶⁸ Descartes, René (1989). *The Passions of the Soul*. Article 166. pp.111.

It can be concluded from these explanations and definitions of Descartes that particular passions occur either as types of six principal passions or as compositions of them. However, for some particular passions Descartes talks about further subcategories. For example, though apprehension is a particular passion, jealousy and irresolution are species of it. Jealousy is generally considered to be an exaggerated feeling of desire for possession of good. Hence, it is established on distrust and suspicion. However, at this point, Descartes observes that sometimes jealousy may turn into an honorable or a just way of avoiding some evil for our well-being. In articles 168 and 169 of *The Passions of the Soul*, Descartes clarifies the passion of jealousy by giving some samples:

[F]or example, a captain guarding a fortress of great importance has a right to be jealous of it— that is, to be suspicious of every means by which it might be taken by surprise; and an honorable woman is not blamed for being jealous of her honor— that is, not only abstaining from doing evil but also avoiding even the slightest causes for slander...And a man who is jealous of his wife is scorned, because this is a sign that he does not love her as he should, and has a bad opinion of himself or her. I say he does not love her as he should, for, if he had a true Love for her, he would have no inclination to distrust her.⁶⁹

Similarly, irresolution arises from apprehension. The significance of Irresolution lies in its timing. Since coming to a decision before doing something is important, using time efficiently is also important. However, if it turns a time consuming period, it becomes extreme as it delays our decision. In Descartes' words:

Irresolution is also a species of Apprehension, which, keeping the soul balanced as it were among many actions it is able to do, causes it to execute none of them, and thus to have time for choosing before deciding. In this, truly, it has some beneficial use. But when it lasts

⁶⁹ Descartes, René (1989). *The Passions of the Soul*. Articles 168-169. pp.111-112.

longer than necessary and causes the time needed for acting to be spent deliberating, it is extremely bad.⁷⁰

On the other hand, courage is a species of desire as it arises from strong desire to acquire some good. Again, it can be subcategorized as boldness and emulation, which are species of courage. Descartes defines courage as follows:

Courage, when it is a Passion and not a disposition or natural inclination, is a certain fervor or agitation which disposes the soul to be exceedingly inclined to the execution of the things it wills to do, whatever their nature may be.⁷¹

Descartes names the species of courage as boldness and emulation. Boldness is the great feeling of courage, which sometimes might be harmful or dangerous. Even one might jeopardize his life as a result of this strong feeling of courage. At this point, Descartes gives a historical example of such boldness by narrating the story of the Roman consul Decius Mus:

Thus, when the Decii threw themselves into the midst of the enemy and flew to certain death, the object of their Boldness was the difficulty they had only Despair, as they were certain to die. But their end was to enliven their soldiers by their example and cause them to win the victory, of which they had Hope; perhaps their end was also to have glory after their death, of which they were sure.⁷²

Here, Descartes emphasizes that sometimes the feeling of great courage, namely boldness, leads us to sacrifice our lives because of the feelings despair and hope together.

⁷⁰ Descartes, René (1989). *The Passions of the Soul*. Article 170. pp.112-113.

⁷¹ Descartes, René (1989). *The Passions of the Soul*. Article 171. p.113.

⁷² Descartes, René (1989). *The Passions of the Soul*. Article 173. p.114.

Emulation is another facet of courage that arises from feeling the probability of success by observing the achievements of others. The lack of courage produces cowardice and fear. That is because, if one does not feel courage against harmful or dangerous things, he can hardly resist the evil. Descartes adds that sometimes cowardice puts a distance between the probable pain and us, since it leads us to avoid feeling that pain. Nevertheless, such an advantage of cowardice does not change the truth about its being harmful and evil. For, the feeling of cowardice keeps us away from performing right and useful actions. Descartes says the following:

It only seems to me that Cowardice has some use when it frees us from the pains we might be incited by probable reasons to take, if other, more certain reasons that have made us judge them useless had not excited this Passion. For besides freeing the soul from these pains, it is useful to the body then too: hindering the spirits' motion, it keeps us from dissipating our powers. But ordinarily it is very harmful, because it diverts the will from useful actions.⁷³

To sum up, Descartes states that not only six principle passions carry significance over our attitudes and actions but particular ones to affect us. These particular passions have no difference from the principal ones in their occurrence, because all occur in the pineal gland with the movement of the animal spirits.

Their being called particular passions does not show that these are less important or valuable than the six principal passions. Like principal ones, particular passions originate in the body and they lead us to use our will and then act properly. From the viewpoint of ethics, the excesses of particular passions like principal ones must be mastered to achieve happiness or contentment, which is the ultimate power that governs our life.

⁷³ Descartes, René (1989). *The Passions of the Soul*. Article 175. p.116.

Next chapter covers Descartes' ethical view. He gives us a prescription for the ultimate goal of life and emphasizes the role of will and reason. Furthermore, he offers us a method to gain useful and beneficial habits for the excess of the passions.

Table of Some Particular Passions⁷⁴

Particular Passions	Opposite	Species of	Composite of
Esteem	Scorn	Wonder	—
Scorn	Esteem	Wonder	—
Hope	Apprehension	—	Desire& Joy
Confidence	Despair	Hope	—
Despair	Confidence	Apprehension	—
Jealousy	—	Apprehension	—
Irresolution	—	Apprehension	—
Courage	Cowardice	—	Desire& Joy
Boldness	Fear (Terror)	Courage	—
Emulation	—	Courage	—
Remorse	—	Sadness	—
Mockery	Pity	—	Joy& Hatred
Envy	Pity	—	Sadness& Hatred
Pity	Envy&Mockery	—	Sadness& Love
Selfsatisfaction	Repentance	Joy	—
Repentance	Selfsatisfaction	Sadness	—
Gratitude	Ingratitude&Anger	Love	—
Anger	Gratitude	Hatred	—
Vainglory	Shame	—	Love& Joy
Shame	Vainglory	—	Love& Sadness
Indignation	Approval	Hatred	—
Approval	Indignation	Love	—
Disaste	—	—	Sadness& Joy
Regret	—	—	Sadness& Despair
Ligheartedness	—	Joy	—

⁷⁴ Descartes, René (1989). *The Passions of the Soul*. Articles 149-210. pp.102-132.

CHAPTER 5

PASSIONS AND ETHICS

In Descartes' ethical view, the ultimate goal of life is to achieve happiness in the light of reason. As noted above, he likens philosophy to a tree, of which ethics is a branch. While morality has a special place in Descartes' philosophical view, he does not share his belief and does not want to have controversy with his contemporaries due to particular reasons. In one of his letters to Chanut, Descartes states his reasons:

It is true that normally I refuse to write down my thoughts concerning morality. I have two reasons for this. One is that there is no other subject in which malicious people can so readily find pretexts for vilifying me; and the other is that I believe only sovereigns, or those authorized by them, have right to concern themselves with regulating the morals of other people.⁷⁵

Although in this letter even though Descartes states his reasons about not expressing his ethical views, his book, *The Passions of the Soul* and his letters to Elizabeth of Bohemia reveal his point of view in ethics. Topics like mastery of passions, the ultimate goal of life, virtues and generosity as the cardinal one are the most important concepts of Cartesian ethics and they can be observed clearly in this book and these letters.

Although Descartes criticizes the ancients about the nature and the characteristics of passions, he agrees with them about the importance of "happiness" in achieving a good life. Although Descartes hesitates to discuss his ethical point of view, he points out the crucial role of "happiness" or "supreme contentment" in his letters to Princess Elizabeth. He explains how we can achieve contentment and also gives remedy for refraining from harmful

⁷⁵ Descartes, René (1991). *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. Vol.III, p.326. (Letters to Chanut). (November 20,1647).

effects of passions. In one of his letters to Elizabeth, Descartes gives an account of his own experience:

I found by the experience of my own case that the remedy I have just suggested cured an illness almost exactly similar, and perhaps even more dangerous. I was born of a mother who died, after my birth, from a disease of the lungs, caused by distress. From her, I inherited a dry cough and a pale colour which stayed with me until I was more than twenty, so that all the doctors who saw me up to that time gave it as their verdict that I would die young. But I have always had an inclination to look at things from the most favorable angle and to make my principal happiness depend upon myself alone...⁷⁶

He defends that the only prescription for physical illnesses and psychological distress depends on us in the sense that it is better for human beings to look things from a positive point of view. This is essential to cure our distress and illness and hence necessary for achieving happiness. Descartes continues:

Next we must consider what makes a life happy, that is, what are the things which can give us this supreme contentment. Such things, I observe, can be divided into two classes: those which depend on us, like virtue and wisdom and those who do not, like honours, riches and health. For it is certain that a person of good birth who is not ill, and who lacks nothing, can enjoy more perfect contentment than another who is poor, unhealthy and deformed, provided the two are equally wise and virtuous.⁷⁷

Here, Descartes focuses on the source of happiness, and says that it is twofold: it arises from our powers like virtue and wisdom, and it is outside of our power if happiness is thought to be identical with external things like honours, riches and health. These worldly advantages or possessions are not

⁷⁶ Descartes, René (1991). *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. Vol.III, pp.250-251. (Letters to Elizabeth). (May or June 1645).

⁷⁷ Descartes, René (1991). *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. Vol.III, p.257. (Letters to Elizabeth). (August 4, 1645).

important, for, the inner satisfaction is much more significant. That is, human beings have a certain capacity for satisfaction. Here, the source of inner satisfaction is not the riches or honours but it is the feeling of possessing virtue.

Descartes emphasizes the roles of reason and will in the path for virtuous actions, and says that they eventually result in happiness in life. However, it is important to note that the will does not have direct control on passions because of their physical nature. Descartes explains the role of the will in *The Passions of the Soul*:

There is one particular reason why the soul cannot readily alter or check its passions, which led me to put in their definition above that they are not only caused but also maintained and strengthened by some particular movements of the spirits ...The most the will can do while this excitation is in its full strength is not to consent to its effects and to restrain many of the movements to which it disposes the body. For example, if anger makes the hand rise in order to strike, the will can ordinarily restrain it; if fear incites the legs to flee, the will can stop them; and so on with the rest.⁷⁸

For Descartes the will has control while we are judging to act. John Cottingham notes that passions “are not purely mental events but irreducibly “psycho-physical.”⁷⁹ The passions comprise conscious awareness in addition to their physiological phenomenology. The process is not purely physiological. By the help of the will and reason, passions have a psycho-physical nature. According to Descartes, the will has a pivotal role in training us and giving us good and useful habits. While coming to a decision about good or evil, reason and will should go hand in hand. In order to unite them, we have to form a basis of reason to use our will correctly in distinguishing good and evil. One can say that it is reason that directs our will towards what is beneficial or not for our well-being. In the First, Third and Fourth Meditations, Descartes recognizes the knowledge of God’s existence as the foundation of all knowledge. He describes God as infinite, eternal, perfect and immutable and

⁷⁸ Descartes, René (1989). *The Passions of the Soul*. Article 46. p.44.

⁷⁹ Cottingham, J. (1988). *The Rationalists*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p.173.

omnipotent. Therefore, God is not a deceiver and errors originate from our false judgments. The nature of judgment depends on two faculties: the faculty used in perceiving ideas and faculty of will used in affirming or denying these ideas. Descartes defines will in the Fourth Meditation:

[T]he will simply consists in our ability to do or not to do something (that is, to affirm or deny, to pursue or avoid); or rather, it consists simply in the fact that when the intellect puts something forward for affirmation or denial or for pursuit or avoidance, our inclinations are such that we do not feel we are determined by any external force.⁸⁰

In one of his letters to Queen Christina of Sweden he writes the following:

Now 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 subjects; and so its correct use is the greatest of all the goods we possess; indeed there is nothing that is more our own or that matters more to us. From all this it follows that nothing but free will can produce our greatest happiness.⁸¹

Descartes claims that for human beings in order to reach a God-like level of perfection, possessing a will does not carry more significance than using it in a correct way. Again in the Fourth Meditation he emphasizes the same point:

It is only the will, or freedom of choice, which I experience within me to be so great that the idea of any greater faculty is beyond my grasp; so much so that it is above all in virtue of the will that I understand myself to bear in some way the image and likeness of God. For although God's will is incomparably greater than mine, both in virtue of knowledge and power that accompany it and make it more firm and efficacious, and also in virtue of its object, in that it ranges over a greater

⁸⁰ Descartes, René (1984). *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. Vol.II, p.40. (*The Meditations*).

⁸¹ Descartes, René (1991). *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. Vol.III, p.326. (Letters to Queen Christina). (November 20,1647).

number of items, nevertheless it does not seem any greater than mine when considered as will in the essential and strict sense.⁸²

For Descartes, although our intellect is limited, our will is as infinite as God's. Since our ideas from intellect are not always clear and distinct, the correct use of our free will depends on abstaining from ideas, which are not clear and distinct. Actually the judgments and actions of good and evil depend on the exercise of will even if they are not clear and distinct.⁸³

Descartes also maintains that the most important characteristic of the will is freedom. In the Fourth Meditation, he says that we should be free while we are choosing and deciding the good. If we are faced with cases, which are not clear and distinct, we should abstain from making a judgment. This is the right action to avoid error.

For Descartes, reason shows the right way to our will in choosing good and evil. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty gives a specific example that when we see a lion, fear occurs by means of movements of animal spirits. We judge the best by using our will in the light of reason.⁸⁴ In one of his letters to Elizabeth of Bohemia and also in *Discourse on the Method*, Descartes puts forward three rules of morality all of which include the essential role of reason.

The first is that [one] should always try to employ his mind as well as he can to discover what he should or should not do in all the circumstances of life...The second is that [one] should have a firm and constant resolution to carry out whatever reason recommends without being diverted by his passions or appetites....

⁸² Descartes, René (1984). *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. Vol.II, p.40. (*The Meditations*).

⁸³ "The cause of error is thus quite straightforward: in cases where we do not clearly perceive something, we should suspend judgment; but often we rashly give free rein to our will, jumping in and giving our assent. In such circumstances, Descartes insists, there is nothing that casts doubt on the benevolence of God. I cannot complain that my intellect is limited, since it is in the nature of a finite being to be limited in some respects..." Cottingham, J (1988). *The Rationalists*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. pp.158-159.

⁸⁴ Rorty, A. O. (1986). *Essays on Descartes' Meditations*. London: University of California Press. p. 521.

The third is that [one] should bear in mind that while he thus guides himself as far as he can, by reason, all the good things which he does not possess are one and all entirely outside his power. In this way he will become accustomed not to desire them.⁸⁵

Descartes says that we have to use our mind in everything that we decide to do or not to do. Reason recommends us ability to decide firmly and clearly. Besides, it teaches us not to desire things, which are outside our power. Actually, reason is the cornerstone in the way of happiness and guides us to decide the best and act virtuously. Passions sometimes cause distress and conflict in us due to our strong desire to have possession of certain goods. If we regulate our passions by correct use of reason we never feel regret and remorse. Descartes says the following:

It is also not necessary that our reason should be free from error; it is sufficient if our conscience testifies that we have never lacked resolution and virtues to carry out whatever we have judged the best course. So virtue by itself is sufficient to make us content in this life. But virtue unenlightened by intellect can be false; that is to say, the will and resolution to do well can carry us to evil courses, if we think them good; and in such a case the contentment which virtue brings is not solid. Moreover, such virtue is commonly set in opposition to pleasure, appetite and passion, and is accordingly very difficult to practise. The right use of reason, on the other hand, by giving a true knowledge of the good, prevents virtue from being false; by accommodating it to licit pleasures, it makes virtue easy to practise; and by making us recognize the condition of our nature, it sets bounds to our desires.⁸⁶

If happiness is thought to be a chain, will, reason, resolution and virtue form rings of it. Descartes emphasizes the close relationship between reason and virtue by stating that for real happiness the guidance of reason is crucial.

⁸⁵ Descartes, René (1991). *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. Vol.III, pp.257-258. (Letters to Elizabeth). (August 4,1645).

⁸⁶ Descartes, René (1991). *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. Vol.III, p.258. (Letters to Elizabeth). (August 4, 1645).

From his point of view, the source of passions is purely physiological and they have a passive nature, so that our will and reason may direct us to good in choosing the beneficial or in acting virtuously. Although passions were ailments or disorders for the ancients, Descartes does not accept their prescriptions and argues that passions are good in their nature. However, sometimes they may be excessive or we may not have a firm resolution due to the conflict of different passions. In these cases, Descartes recommends a remedy for harmful effects of passions: setting up useful habits and training ourselves by directing our attention for useful thoughts. Such remedies bring us to perform virtuous actions. Descartes distinguishes two kinds of excess:

There are, indeed, two kinds of excess. There is one which changes the nature of a thing, and turns it from good to bad, and prevents it from remaining subject to reason; and there is another which only increases its quantity, and turns it from good to better. Thus excess of courage is recklessness only when the courage passes the limits of reason; but while remaining within those limits, it can have another kind of excess, which consists in the absence of irresolution and fear.⁸⁷

It is important to control the first kind of excess. We can guide and train ourselves in the light of reason. For Descartes, also training and guiding ourselves must result in habituation. He explains this point by drawing similarities between animals and human beings.

Descartes says the following:

When a dog sees a partridge it is naturally inclined to run toward it, and when it hears a gun fired the noise naturally incites it to run away. But nevertheless setters are commonly trained so that the sight of a partridge makes them stop, and the noise they hear afterwards, when (the bird) is fired on, makes them run up to it. Now these things are useful to know in order to give everyone the courage to study the regulation of his passions. For since with a little skill one can change the movements of

⁸⁷ Descartes, René (1991). *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. Vol.III, pp.276-277. (Letters to Elizabeth). (November 3,1645).

the brain in animals bereft of reason, it is plain that one
can do it even better in men...⁸⁸

According to Descartes, even if animals that lack of reason can be trained properly, it is much more easy for us to have useful habits by the help of reason. Reason guides us to see what is beneficial for us and helps us to be accustomed to choosing good and acting well. John Cottingham uses the psychological term “conditioned response” to explain this passage. He says that “in adapting the example of animal training to the human sphere, Descartes retains the central idea of the conditioned response as the key to how the innately predetermined mechanisms of the body can be modified to our advantage. The idea that the good life requires training and habituation...”⁸⁹

In addition to acquiring or setting up useful habits, Descartes says that some virtues are important in mastering passions. Virtues secure the right way for contentment of mind. Descartes says that “the scholastics are right when they say that virtues are habits; for in fact our failings are rarely due to lack of theoretical knowledge of what we should do, but to lack of practical knowledge— that is, lack of a firm habit of belief.”⁹⁰ He gives special emphasis on virtue by saying that it lies at the heart of firm resolution of which reason recommends us. In other words, virtue is involved in having firm resolution, acquiring good habits and also performing right actions.

Descartes argues that human beings are not identical. A man differs from others in that all human beings experience passions differently and also our actions are not identical because we have different brains and minds. Although Descartes points out one’s being distinct from others, he adds that human beings cannot live alone and that individuals constitute parts of the whole. Every man belongs to a state, a society and a family, therefore, one

⁸⁸ Descartes, René (1989). *The Passions of the Soul*. Article 50. pp.48-49.

⁸⁹ Cottingham, J. (1998). *Philosophy and the Good Life: Reason and the Passions in Greek, Cartesian and Psychoanalytic Ethics*. New York: Cambridge University Press. p.91.

⁹⁰ Descartes, René (1991). *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. Vol.III, p.267. (Letters to Elizabeth). (September 15,1645).

should not think and behave only in favor of himself but also he should know how to behave for the sake of his country and act as a responsible citizen. In fact, everyone should act well not only for himself but also for “others”.

Descartes explains:

[I]f someone saw everything in relation to himself, he would not hesitate to injure others greatly when he thought he could draw some slight advantage; and he would have no true friendship, no fidelity, no virtue at all. On the other hand, if someone considers himself a part of the community, he delights in doing good to everyone, and does not hesitate even to risk his life in the service of others when occasion demands.⁹¹

Shortly, for Descartes the process consists of having firm resolution about what is useful or not for our well-being and acting virtuously by training ourselves and gaining right habits by the help of reason. According to him, if we follow virtue nothing can disturb our inner satisfaction and contentment of our mind. In article 148 of *The Passions of the Soul*, Descartes says that virtues are remedies for passions:

And, in order that our soul may thus have what it takes to be content, it needs only to follow virtue diligently. For anyone who has lived in such a way that his conscience cannot reproach him for ever having failed to do anything he judged to be best (which is what I call following virtues here) derives a satisfaction with such power to make him happy that the most vigorous assaults of the Passions never have enough power to disturb the tranquility of his soul.⁹²

Descartes considers generosity not only as a passion but also as a crowning virtue and he maintains that it is the key virtue for all others and the

⁹¹ Descartes, René (1991). *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. Vol.III, p.266. (Letters to Elizabeth). (September 15,1645).

⁹² Descartes, René (1989). *The Passions of the Soul*. Article 148. p.101.

remedy for certain passions.⁹³ Wonder is the first and the most significant passion for Descartes, unlike other passions like love, hatred, desire, joy and sadness, wonder does not originate from an object's being good or bad and it does not have an opposite. According to him, wonder is a useful passion since it helps a learning the properties of new objects because by means of wonder we recognize its rarity. Generosity is based on esteem, which is originated from wonder. Descartes defines generosity as legitimate esteem of oneself. He says the following:

[I] believe that true Generosity, which makes a man esteem himself as highly as he can legitimately esteem himself, consists only in this: partly in his understanding that there is nothing which truly belongs to him but this free control of his volitions, and no reason why he ought to be praised or blamed except that he uses it well or badly; and partly in his feeling within himself a firm and constant resolution to use it well, that is, never to lack the volition to undertake and execute all the things he judges to be best- which is to follow virtue perfectly.⁹⁴

A generous person has three characteristics. He has freedom to control his will, he knows that his use of will is the criteria for being praised or blamed, and he has the feeling of firm resolution.

Descartes adds:

Those who have this understanding and this feeling about themselves are easily convinced that every other man can also have them about himself, because there is nothing therein that depends on others. That is why they never scorn anyone. And though they often see that others commit errors that show up their weakness, they are nevertheless more inclined to excuse than to blame them, and to believe that they commit (those errors) through lack of understanding rather than lack of good will. And as they do not think themselves to be greatly inferior to those who have more goods or honors, or even those who have more intelligence, knowledge, or beauty, or in general surpass them in other perfections, neither do they esteem themselves greatly above those they surpass, because all these things seem to them to be

⁹³ Descartes, René (1989). *The Passions of the Soul*. Article 161. p.109.

⁹⁴ Descartes, René (1989). *The Passions of the Soul*. Article 153. p.104.

extremely insignificant in comparison with the good will for which alone they esteem themselves, and which they suppose also to be- or at least to be capable of being- in every other man.⁹⁵

Here, Descartes emphasizes that people who are generous do not scorn anyone because they are aware of the fact that everyone may have the feeling of generosity. Besides, generous people do not blame anyone owing to their lack of will. They believe that everyone has some capacity to have worldly possessions and other perfections such as knowledge and intelligence.

Translation of the term “generosity” from French into English, may cause a confusion. The common meaning of generosity is nobility or aristocracy. However, Descartes uses this term in a different meaning. It is important to note that some Latin writers use the term generosity to mean magnanimity.⁹⁶ Aristotle uses the term great souledness. In *The Passions of the Soul*, Descartes uses generosity not to indicate nobility in genetic sense. He says that “ it is easy to believe that all the souls God puts in our bodies are not equally noble and strong.”⁹⁷ Descartes thinks that defects of birth can be corrected by means of good education, having firm resolution and correct use of our will. In short, Descartes’ use of the term generosity is different from that of the ancients. He clearly means legitimate self-esteem by generosity.

Descartes says that generosity is both passion and virtue, it is a virtue because it consists of firm resolution, right use of will and reason to achieve the best judgments. Besides, it makes acquiring habits and acting legitimately possible. However, generosity is a passion in the sense that it is caused and strengthened by the movement of animal spirits. Descartes clarifies this in article 161:

It must be noted that what are commonly named virtues are dispositions in the soul which dispose it to certain thoughts, so that they are different from those thoughts

⁹⁵ Descartes, René (1989). *The Passions of the Soul*. Article 154. p.104.

⁹⁶ Cottingham, John (1993). *A Descartes Dictionary*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers. p.67.

⁹⁷ Descartes, René (1989). *The Passions of the Soul*. Article 161. p.109.

but can produce them and conversely be produced by them. It must also be noted that these thoughts can be produced by the soul alone, but that often some movement of the spirits happens to strengthen them, and that then they are actions of virtue and at the same time Passions of soul.⁹⁸

Since generous people value the feelings and thoughts of others, they also have a sociological perspective for establishment of healthy communities. Qualities like being polite, emphatic, helpful and courteous which a generous person possesses are not only crucial in being a member of a society but they are also the cardinal elements that make us free agents.

For Descartes, while all passions have their origin in the body, they are related to soul in the sense that they direct our soul to act. Here, the use of our free will is important. Moreover, the use of reason is so crucial that he differentiates human beings from animals who lack of reason. The use of reason is necessary in acquiring useful habits and acting virtuously. He offers generosity as a cardinal passion and also a virtue. It is a virtue because it consists of firm resolution, right use of will and reason and it is also a passion which exist by means of the movement the animal spirits.

⁹⁸ Descartes, René (1989). *The Passions of the Soul*. Article 161. pp.108-109.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

This study analyzes Descartes' theory of passions and his ethical account how passions direct human beings towards virtuous or vicious actions. *The Passions of the Soul* and the letters written to Elizabeth of Bohemia by Descartes are the main sources in order to reveal his ethical perspective. At first glance, his last work *The Passions of the Soul* may seem to be a comprehensive physiological research about passions. However, since Descartes emphasizes the role of will and offers generosity as a remedy for excess of passions, it is also a work on ethics.

If Descartes' view is deeply analyzed it may be seen that there is a gap between theories of the ancients and Descartes. Descartes criticizes ancients like Stoics, St. Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. First, for Descartes, passions are not illnesses or ailments, which have to be avoided. They are good in their nature and they prepare the body for useful actions. Secondly, the classification, which depends on concupiscent and irascible appetites, is so slight since from Descartes' point of view the passions have to be considered as perceptive faculties. Furthermore, Descartes claims that the number of particular passions is not definite as stated by ancients.

It can be said that Descartes' view is original in the sense that he begins to explain the causes of passions by means of physiology rather than by referring directly to theology and ethics. He maintains that passions are caused by animal spirits, which are namely air or wind particles flowing through the nerves towards a specific organ. The seat of the soul is the pineal gland. Although the cause of passions is analyzed from three different points of view, namely that of the body alone, the external objects and the animal spirits, Descartes focuses only on the movement of animal spirits as the real cause of the passions. Besides, sometimes soul might cause its own passions as in an intellectual or rational love. Descartes maintains that intellectual passions and

passions caused by animal spirits should coexist because of the union between mind and body.

For Descartes, there are six principal passions: wonder, love, hatred, desire, joy and sadness. All others are either species or composites of them. He explains the physical mechanism of the six principal passions as well as their use. The physical mechanism of passions is that of the internal and external physical changes such as trembling, turning into pale, languor, crying, changes in the circulation of blood, pulse and beat of the heart. As for the use of the passions, Descartes says that five passions except wonder prepare and motivate the body for actions. All these five passions should be studied carefully and the explanation must be based on true knowledge, so that they may be used to direct our soul to right actions. The passions should not be immoderate in order to act virtuously and achieve good ends for our well-being.

The passions, which are composites or species of six principle ones, are called particular passions by Descartes. Although the number of them is indefinite, Descartes defines some of them such as esteem, scorn, remorse, self-satisfaction, repentance, gratitude, anger, regret, lightheartedness, hope, mockery, envy, pity, vainglory, shame, courage, boldness, emulation and fear (terror).

Again, Descartes points out that all passions are good in their nature since they direct us to choose what is right and beneficial. Descartes emphasizes particularly the correct use of will and reason to reach the ultimate goal of life, which is happiness, or contentment of mind. Sometimes human beings feel hesitation due to a kind of conflict that occurs as a result of passions or else these passions may sometimes be excessive, and therefore must be regulated. If so, we have to make clear judgments in order to direct our will to virtuous ends. Besides, Descartes states that correct use of will puts us into a God-like level in terms of perfectness.

In addition to the correct use of will, reason is important for human beings to gain useful habits. In fact, the difference between animals and human beings is the use of reason. That is to say, it is easier for human beings to acquire useful habits than animals owing to their capacity to use of reason, which animals lack. Elements such as correct use of will and rational habits make human beings virtuous, which is essential for attaining happiness.

In short, the nature of all passions is good but sometimes their effects might be harmful. For this ailment, the prescription offered by Descartes is to use will correctly, decide in the light of reason and to act virtuously. This is essential in order to heal the bad effects of passions and regulating their excess.

For Descartes the key virtue is generosity. It is also defined as a passion in the sense that its occurrence depends on the movements of the animal spirits. Generosity can be described as legitimate self-esteem. A generous person realizes his freedom in his choices and actions and he knows to be resolute while using his free will. Additionally, generosity is called as a virtue since it leads us to become faithful and responsible members of the society.

In this study, the dualist view of Descartes is investigated in terms of physiology and ethics. Descartes' letters to Princess Elizabeth and his last work, *The Passions of the Soul*, reveal his views in these terms. The significance of the union between mind and body is seen clearly in Descartes' account concerning the existence, mechanism of the passions and that concerning the significance of the passions for the soul.

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