The Philosophical Writings of DESCARTES

translated by
JOHN COTTINGHAM
ROBERT STOOTHOFF
DUGALD MURDOCH

VOLUME I

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

AT IXB
1

Author's letter to the translator of the book which may here serve as a preface[1]

Sir,[2]

The version of my *Principles* which you have taken the trouble to make is so polished and so thorough as to make me hope that the work will be more widely read in French than in Latin, and better understood. My only concern is that the title may put off those many people who have not had an education based on letters or who have a low opinion of philosophy because the philosophy they have been taught has not satisfied them. This makes me think that it would be a good idea to add a preface explaining the subject of the book, my purpose in writing it, and the benefit which may be derived from it. But although it would seem to be up to me to produce this preface because I ought to know these things better than anyone else, all I can persuade myself to do here is to summarize the principal points which I think such a preface should deal with. I leave it to your discretion to pass on to the public as many of them as you consider to be pertinent. 2

First of all, I would have wished to explain what philosophy is, beginning with the most commonplace points. For example, the word 'philosophy' means the study of wisdom, and by 'wisdom' is meant not only prudence in our everyday affairs but also a perfect knowledge of all things that mankind is capable of knowing, both for the conduct of life and for the preservation of health and the discovery of all manner of skills. In order for this kind of knowledge to be perfect it must be deduced from first causes; thus, in order to set about acquiring it – and it is this activity to which the term 'to philosophize' strictly refers – we must start with the search for first causes or principles. These principles must satisfy two conditions. First, they must be so clear and so evident that the human mind cannot doubt their truth when it attentively concentrates on them; and, secondly, the knowledge of other things must depend on them, in the sense that the principles must be capable of being

1 This preface first appeared in the 1647 French edition. The original Latin text of 1644 contains no preface apart from the short dedicatory letter to Elizabeth translated below, pp. 190–2.

2 The addressee is the Abbé Picot; see Translator's preface, above p. 177.

Three (p. 186)

known without knowledge of these other matters, but not *vice versa*. Next, in deducing from these principles the knowledge of things which depend on them, we must try to ensure that everything in the entire chain of deductions which we draw is very manifest. In truth it is only God who
3 is perfectly wise, that is to say, who possesses complete knowledge of the truth of all things; but men can be said to possess more or less wisdom depending on how much knowledge they possess of the most important truths. I think that everything I have just said would be accepted by all people of learning.

Next, I would have looked at the benefits of this philosophy and shown that it encompasses everything which the human mind is capable of knowing. Thus we should consider that it is this philosophy alone which distinguishes us from the most savage and barbarous peoples, and that a nation's civilization and refinement depends on the superiority of the philosophy which is practised there. Hence the greatest good that a state can enjoy is to possess true philosophers. As for the individual, it is not only beneficial to live with those who apply themselves to this study; it is incomparably better to undertake it oneself. For by the same token it is undoubtedly much better to use one's own eyes to get about, and also to enjoy the beauty of colours and light, than to close one's eyes and be led around by someone else. Yet even the latter is much better than keeping one's eyes closed and having no guide but oneself. Living without philosophizing is exactly like having one's eyes closed without ever trying to open them; and the pleasure of seeing everything which our sight reveals is in no way comparable to the satisfaction accorded by knowledge of the things which philosophy enables us to discover. Lastly, the study of philosophy is more necessary for the regulation of our morals and our conduct in this life than is the use of our eyes to guide our
4 steps. The brute beasts, who have only their bodies to preserve, are continually occupied in looking for food to nourish them; but human beings, whose most important part is the mind, should devote their main efforts to the search for wisdom, which is the true food of the mind. And I am sure that there are many people who would not fail to make the search if they had some hope of success and knew how much they were capable of. No soul, however base, is so strongly attached to the objects of the senses that it does not sometimes turn aside and desire some other, greater good, even though it may often not know what this good consists in. Those who are most favoured by fortune and possess health, honour and riches in abundance are no more exempt from this desire than anyone else. On the contrary, I am convinced that it is just such people who long most ardently for another good – a higher good than all those that they already possess. Now this supreme good, considered by natural

reason without the light of faith, is nothing other than the knowledge of the truth through its first causes, that is to say wisdom, of which philosophy is the study. Since all these points are absolutely true, they would easily carry conviction if they were properly argued.

What prevents these points being accepted is the widespread experience that those who profess to be philosophers are often less wise and less reasonable than those who have never applied themselves to philosophy. And so at this point I would have explained briefly what all the knowledge which we now possess consists in and the levels of wisdom that have so far been attained. The first level contains only notions which are so clear in themselves that they can be acquired without meditation. The second comprises everything we are acquainted with through sensory experience. The third comprises what we learn by conversing with other people. And one may add a fourth category, namely what is learned by reading books – not all books, but those which have been written by people who are capable of instructing us well; for in such cases we hold a kind of conversation with the authors. I think that all the wisdom which is generally possessed is acquired in these four ways. I am not including divine revelation in the list, because it does not lead us on by degrees but raises us at a stroke to infallible faith. Now in all ages there have been great men who have tried to find a fifth way of reaching wisdom – a way which is incomparably more elevated and more sure than the other four. This consists in the search for the first causes and the true principles which enable us to deduce the reasons for everything we are capable of knowing; and it is above all those who have laboured to this end who have been called philosophers. I am not sure, however, that there has been anyone up till now who has succeeded in this project. The first and most important of those whose writings have come down to us are Plato and Aristotle. The only difference between these two is that the former, following the footsteps of his master Socrates, ingenuously confessed that he had never yet been able to discover anything certain.
6 He was content instead to write what seemed to him to be probable, and accordingly he used his imagination to devise various principles by means of which he tried to account for other things. Aristotle, by contrast, was less candid. Although he had been Plato's disciple for twenty years, and possessed no principles apart from those of Plato, he completely changed the method of stating them and put them forward as true and certain, though it seems most unlikely that he in fact considered them to be so. Now these two men had a great deal of intelligence and much wisdom of the kind that is acquired in the four ways mentioned above, and this gave them such great authority that those who came after them were content to follow their opinions rather than look for something better. The main

dispute among their disciples was about whether everything should be called into doubt or whether there were some things which were certain – a dispute which led both sides into extravagant errors. Some of those who were in favour of doubt extended it even to the actions of life, so that they neglected to employ common prudence in their behaviour; while those who took the side of certainty supposed that it had to depend on the senses and trusted them entirely, to the point where Epicurus, it is said, was rash enough to affirm, against all the arguments of the astronomers, that the sun is no larger than it appears. A fault which may be observed in the majority of disputes is that since the truth lies
7 midway between two positions which are being maintained, the disputants on each side move further and further away from it as their desire to contradict the opposing view increases. But the error of those who leaned too far towards the side of doubt was not followed for very long, while the opposing error has to some extent been corrected by the recognition that the senses deceive us in many cases. Nevertheless, I am not sure that anyone has yet expunged the second error completely by explaining the following point: on the one hand, certainty does not lie in the senses but solely in the understanding, when it possesses evident perceptions; on the other hand, so long as we possess only the kind of knowledge that is acquired by the first four degrees of wisdom we should not doubt the probable truths which concern the conduct of life, while at the same time we should not consider them to be so certain that we are incapable of changing our views when we are obliged to do so by some evident reason. Because of failure to recognize this truth, or to make use of it in the case of those few who have recognized it, the majority of those aspiring to be philosophers in the last few centuries have blindly followed Aristotle. Indeed they have often corrupted the sense of his writings and attributed to him various opinions which he would not recognize to be his, were he now to return to this world. Those who have not followed Aristotle (and this group includes many of the best minds) have nevertheless been saturated with his opinions in their youth (since these are the only opinions taught in the Schools) and this has so dominated their outlook that they have been unable to arrive at knowledge of true principles. Although I respect all these thinkers and would not wish to make myself disliked by criticizing them, I can give a proof of what I say
8 which I do not think any of them will reject, namely that they have all put forward as principles things of which they did not possess perfect knowledge. For example, there is not one of them, so far as I know, who has not supposed there to be weight in terrestrial bodies. Yet although experience shows us very clearly that the bodies we call 'heavy' descend towards the centre of the earth, we do not for all that have any

knowledge of the nature of what is called 'gravity', that is to say, the cause or principle which makes bodies descend in this way,[1] and we must derive such knowledge from some other source. The same can be said of the void and of atoms and of heat and cold, dryness and humidity, salt, sulphur, mercury and all other similar things which some people have proposed as their first principles. Now none of the conclusions deduced from a principle which is not evident can themselves be evident, even though they may be deduced from the principle in an evident manner. It follows that none of the arguments based on such principles have been able to provide their proponents with certain knowledge of anything, and accordingly such arguments have not been able to bring them one step further in their search for wisdom. If they have discovered anything true, it has been solely by means of one of the four methods set out above. Nevertheless, I do not wish to detract in any way from the reputation which any of these philosophers may claim. I am simply obliged to point out, for the consolation of those who have never studied, the following similarity with what happens when we travel: so long as we turn our back on the place we wish to get to, then the longer and faster we walk the further we get from our destination, so that even if we are 9 subsequently set on the right road we cannot reach our goal as quickly as we would have done had we never walked in the wrong direction. The same thing happens if we have bad principles. The more we develop them and the more carefully we work at deducing various consequences from them in our belief that we are philosophizing well, the further we move from knowledge of the truth and from wisdom. The conclusion that must be drawn from this is that among those who have studied whatever has been called philosophy up till now, those who have learnt the least are the most capable of learning true philosophy.

After fully explaining these matters, I would have wanted next to put down the reasons which serve to prove that the true principles, enabling one to reach the highest degree of wisdom which constitutes the supreme good of human life, are the principles which I have set down in this book. Just two reasons are enough to prove the point: the first is that the principles are very clear, and the second is that they enable all other things to be deduced from them. These are the only two conditions that such principles must meet. Now I can easily prove that the principles are very clear. This is shown by the way in which I discovered them, namely by rejecting everything in which I could discover the least occasion for doubt; for it is certain that principles which it was impossible to reject in this way, when one attentively considered them, are the clearest and most evident that the human mind can know. Thus I considered that someone

1 See footnote 1, p. 234 below.

who wishes to doubt everything cannot, for all that, doubt that he exists
10 while he is doubting; and that what reasons in this way, being unable to doubt itself while doubting everything else, is not what we call our body but what we call our soul or our thought. Accordingly I took the being or existence of this thought as my first principle, and from it I deduced very clearly the following principles. There is a God who is the author of everything there is in the world; further, since he is the source of all truth, he certainly did not create in us an understanding of the kind which would be capable of making a mistake in its judgements concerning the things of which it possesses a very clear and very distinct perception. These are all the principles that I make use of with regard to immaterial or metaphysical things, and from them I deduce very clearly the principles of corporeal or physical things, namely that there are bodies which are extended in length, breadth and depth, and which have various shapes and move in various ways. Here, in total, are all the principles which I use to deduce the truth of other things. The other reason which proves the clarity of these principles is that they have been known for all time and indeed accepted as true and indubitable by everyone, with the sole exception of the existence of God, which some people have called into doubt because they have attributed too much to sensory perceptions, and God cannot be seen or touched. Yet although all the truths which I include among my principles have been known for all time by everyone, there has, so far as I know, been no one up till now who has recognized them as the principles of philosophy, that is to say, as
11 the principles which enable us to deduce the knowledge of all the other things to be found in the world. This is why it remains for me here to prove that they do indeed qualify as principles of this sort; and I think that the best way of doing this is to get people to see by experience that this is so, that is to say, to invite my readers to read this book. Admittedly, I have not dealt with all things, for this would be impossible. But I think I have explained all the things I have had occasion to deal with in such a way that those who read the book attentively will be convinced that in order to arrive at the highest knowledge of which the human mind is capable there is no need to look for any principles other than those I have provided. This will be especially clear if, after reading what I have written and also perusing the writings of others, the reader takes the trouble to consider the number and the diversity of the topics explained in my book, and sees by comparison how few plausible arguments others have been able to produce in attempting to explain these same topics by means of principles which differ from mine. To enable my readers to undertake this survey with greater ease, I could have told them that those who have absorbed my opinions find it much easier to understand and

recognize the true value of other people's writings than those who have not absorbed my views. This is the exact opposite of what I said above about those who have started with traditional philosophy, namely that the more they have studied it the less fitted they generally are to acquire a sound grasp of true philosophy.

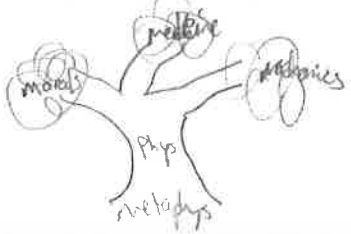
I would also have added a word of advice about the way to read this book. I should like the reader first of all to go quickly through the whole book like a novel, without straining his attention too much or stopping at 12 the difficulties which may be encountered. The aim should be merely to ascertain in a general way which matters I have dealt with. After this, if he finds that these matters deserve to be examined and he has the curiosity to ascertain their causes, he may read the book a second time in order to observe how my arguments follow. But if he is not always able to see this fully, or if he does not understand all the arguments, he should not give up at once. He should merely mark with a pen the places where he finds the difficulties and continue to read on to the end without a break. If he then takes up the book for the third time, I venture to think he will now find the solutions to most of the difficulties he marked before; and if any still remain, he will discover their solution on a final re-reading.

An examination of the nature of many different minds has led me to observe that there are almost none that are so dull and slow as to be incapable of forming sound opinions or indeed of grasping all the most advanced sciences, provided they receive proper guidance. And this may also be proved by reason. For since the principles in question are clear, and nothing is permitted to be deduced from them except by very evident reasoning, everyone has enough intelligence to understand the things which depend on them. If we leave aside the problems caused by preconceived opinions, from which no one is entirely free (although those who have studied bad science the most are the greatest victims), then it 13 almost always happens that people of moderate intelligence neglect to study because they do not think they are capable of it, while the others, who are keenest, press on too quickly, with the result that they often accept principles which are not evident, and draw uncertain inferences from them. This is why I should like to assure those who are over-diffident about their powers that there is nothing in my writings which they are not capable of completely understanding provided they take the trouble to examine them. I would, however, also like to warn the others that even the most excellent minds will need a great deal of time and attention in order to look at all the things which I set myself to include.

Following on from this, in order to get people to see the purpose I had in publishing my work, I would wish to explain here the order which I think we should follow when we aim to instruct ourselves. First of all, a

man who still possesses only the ordinary and imperfect knowledge that can be acquired in the four ways explained above should try before anything else to devise for himself a code of morals which is sufficient to regulate the actions of his life. For this is something which permits no delay, since we should endeavour above all else to live well. After that, he should study logic. I do not mean the logic of the Schools, for this is strictly speaking nothing but a dialectic which teaches ways of expounding to others what one already knows or even of holding forth without judgement about things one does not know. Such logic corrupts good sense rather than increasing it. I mean instead the kind of logic which
14 teaches us to direct our reason with a view to discovering the truths of which we are ignorant. Since this depends to a great extent on practice, it is good for the student to work for a long time at practising the rules on very easy and simple questions like those of mathematics. Then, when he has acquired some skill in finding the truth on these questions, he should begin to tackle true philosophy in earnest. The first part of philosophy is metaphysics, which contains the principles of knowledge, including the explanation of the principal attributes of God, the non-material nature of our souls and all the clear and distinct notions which are in us. The second part is physics, where, after discovering the true principles of material things, we examine the general composition of the entire universe and then, in particular, the nature of this earth and all the bodies which are most commonly found upon it, such as air, water, fire, magnetic ore and other minerals. Next we need to examine individually the nature of plants, of animals and, above all, of man, so that we may be capable later on of discovering the other sciences which are beneficial to man. Thus the 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.

Now just as it is not the roots or the trunk of a tree from which one gathers the fruit, but only the ends of the branches, so the principal benefit of philosophy depends on those parts of it which can only be learnt last of all. I am ignorant of almost all of these; but the earnest desire I have always had to render service to the public led me, twelve years ago, to publish a number of essays on subjects where it seemed to me that I had learnt something. The first part of these essays was a *Discourse on the Method of rightly conducting one's reason and seeking the truth in the sciences*, where I summarized the principal rules of logic and of an imperfect moral code which we may follow provisionally while we do



not yet know a better one. The remaining parts were three treatises: the *Optics*, the *Meteorology* and the *Geometry*. In the *Optics* my purpose was to show that one could make sufficient progress in philosophy to enable one to achieve knowledge of the arts which are beneficial for life; for the designing of telescopes, which I explained there, is one of the most difficult projects ever attempted.[1] In the *Meteorology* I wanted people to recognize the difference that exists between the philosophy I practise and that which is taught in the Schools, where the same subject-matter is normally dealt with.[2] Finally, in the *Geometry*, I aimed to demonstrate that I had discovered several things which had hitherto been unknown, and thus to promote the belief that many more things may yet be discovered, in order to stimulate everyone to undertake the search for 16 truth. Later on, foreseeing the difficulty which many would have in grasping the foundations of metaphysics, I tried to explain the principal points in a book of *Meditations*. Although this work is not very large, the size of the volume was increased, and the contents greatly clarified, by the addition of the objections that several very learned persons sent me on the subject, and by the replies I made to them. And finally, when I thought that these earlier works had sufficiently prepared the minds of my readers to accept the *Principles of Philosophy*, I published these too. I divided the book into four parts. The first contains the principles of knowledge, i.e. what may be called 'first philosophy' or 'metaphysics'; so in order to gain a sound understanding of this part it is appropriate to read first of all the Meditations which I wrote on the same subject. The other three parts contain all that is most general in physics, namely an explanation of the first laws or principles of nature and the manner of composition of the heavens, the fixed stars, the planets, the comets and, in general, the entire universe. Next comes a particular account of the nature of this earth and of air, water, fire and magnetic ore, which are the bodies that are most commonly found upon it, and also an account of all the qualities which we observe in these bodies, such as light, heat, weight and so on. In this way I consider myself to have embarked on an explanation of the whole of philosophy in an orderly way, without having omitted any of the

1 Discourses 8 and 9 of the *Optics* provide detailed discussion of the optimum shape and configuration of telescopic lenses.

2 'I regard the minute parts of terrestrial bodies as being all composed of one single kind of matter, and believe that each of them could be divided repeatedly in infinitely many ways, and that there is no more difference between them than there is between stones of various different shapes cut from the same rock ... But to keep the peace with the [scholastic] philosophers, I have no wish to deny any further items which they may imagine in bodies over and above what I have described, such as their "substantial forms", their "real qualities", and so on. It simply seems to me that my arguments will be all the more acceptable in so far as I can make them depend on fewer things.' *Meteorology*, Discourse 1 (AT VI 239).

things which ought to precede the topics I wrote about last. But in order to bring the plan to its conclusion I should have to go on to explain in the same manner the nature of all the particular bodies which exist on the earth, namely minerals, plants, animals and, most importantly, man. And then to conclude, I should have to give an exact account of medicine, morals and mechanics. This is what I should have to do in order to give to mankind a body of philosophy that is quite complete; and I do not yet feel so old, or so diffident about my powers, or so far away from knowledge of these remaining topics, that I would not now boldly try to bring the plan to its conclusion, provided I had the resources to make all the observations[1] I should need in order to back up and justify my arguments. But this, I can see, would require great expense – too great for an individual like myself unless he were assisted by the public. And since I do not see that I can expect such assistance, I think that in future I should be content to study for my own private instruction and that future generations will forgive me if from now on I give up working on their behalf.

Meanwhile, to show how I think I have already served posterity, I will here point out the fruits which I am sure can be derived from my principles. The first is the satisfaction which will be felt in using them to discover many truths which have been unknown up till now. For although the truth often does not touch our imagination as much as falsehood and pretence, because it seems less striking and more plain, nevertheless the satisfaction it produces is always more durable and more solid. The second benefit is that the study of these principles will accustom people little by little to form better judgements about all the things they come across, and hence will make them wiser. The effect so produced will be the opposite of that produced by ordinary philosophy. For it is easy to observe in those we call 'pedants' that philosophy makes them less capable of reasoning than they would be if they had never learnt it. The third benefit is that the truths contained in these principles, because they are very clear and very certain, will eliminate all ground for dispute, and so will dispose people's minds to gentleness and harmony. This is the opposite result to that produced by the debates in the Schools, which – slowly and without their noticing it – make the participants more argumentative and opinionated, and hence are perhaps the major cause of the heresies and disagreements which now plague the world. The last and greatest fruit of these principles is that they will enable those who develop them to discover many truths which I have not explained at all. Thus, moving little by little from one truth to the next, they may in time acquire a perfect knowledge of all philosophy, and reach the highest

1 Fr. *expériences*; Cf. *Discourse*, part 6, pp. 143ff, and footnote p. 143 above.

level of wisdom. One sees in all the arts that although they are at first rough and imperfect, nevertheless, because they contain some element of truth, the effect of which is revealed by experience, they are gradually perfected by practice. So it is in philosophy: when one has true principles and follows them, one cannot fail to come upon other truths from time to time. Indeed the best way of proving the falsity of Aristotle's principles is to point out that they have not enabled any progress to be made in all the many centuries in which they have been followed.

I am well aware that there are some people who are so hasty and use so little circumspection in what they do that even with very solid foundations they cannot construct anything certain. Since such people are normally quicker than anyone else at producing books, they may in a short time wreck everything I have done. For although I have carefully tried to banish doubt and uncertainty from my style of philosophizing, they may introduce these elements into it if their writings are accepted as mine, or as containing my opinions. I recently had some experience of this from one of those who were reckoned to be particularly anxious to follow me; indeed, I had written of him somewhere that I was 'so confident of his intelligence' that I did not think he held any views that I would not 'gladly have acknowledged as my own'.[1] Last year he published a book entitled *The Foundations of Physics* in which, as far as physics and medicine are concerned, it appears that everything he wrote was taken from my writings – both from those I have published and also from a still imperfect work on the nature of animals which fell into his hands. But because he copied down the material inaccurately and changed the order and denied certain truths of metaphysics on which the whole of physics must be based, I am obliged to disavow his work entirely. And I must also beg my readers never to attribute to me any opinion they do not find explicitly stated in my writings. Furthermore, they should not accept any opinion as true – whether in my writings or elsewhere – unless they see it to be very clearly deduced from true principles.

I am also very well aware that many centuries may pass before all the truths that can be deduced from these principles are actually so deduced. For the majority of truths remaining to be discovered depend on various particular observations[2] which we never happen on by chance but which must be sought out with care and expense by very intelligent people. It

1 These enthusiastic comments appeared in Descartes' open letter to Voetius (*Epistola ad G. Voetium*) published in 1643 (AT VIII B 163). The reference is to Henricus Regius (1598–1679), Professor of Medicine at Utrecht, whose *Fundamenta physices* appeared in 1646. For details of Descartes' relationship with Regius see Translator's preface to *Comments on a Certain Broadsheet*, below p. 293.

2 Fr. *expériences*; see footnote above p. 143.

will not easily come about that the same people who have the capacity to make good use of these observations will have the means to make them. What is more, the majority of the best minds have formed such a bad opinion of the whole of philosophy, because of the faults they have noticed in the philosophy that has been current up till now, that they certainly will not apply themselves to look for a better one. But perhaps the difference which they see between these principles of mine and all those of other philosophers, as well as the long chain of truths that can be deduced from them, will finally make them realize how important it is to continue in the search for these truths, and to what a high level of wisdom, and to what perfection and felicity of life, these truths can bring us. If they realize this, I venture to believe that there will not be one of them who does not try to apply himself to such a beneficial study, or at least favours and willingly assists with all his resources those who devote themselves to it with success. My earnest wish is that our descendants may see the happy outcome of this project.

[Dedicatory Letter to Elizabeth]

AT VIIIA 1

To Her Serene Highness the Princess Elizabeth
eldest daughter of Frederick, King of Bohemia,
Count Palatine and Elector of the Holy Roman Empire

Your Serene Highness,

The greatest reward which I have received from the writings I have previously published is that you have deigned to read them; for as a result they have provided the occasion for my being admitted into the circle of your acquaintance. And my subsequent experience of your great talents leads me to think that it would be a service to mankind to set them down as an example to posterity. It would ill become me to use flattery or to put forward any assertion which has not been thoroughly scrutinized, especially in a work in which I shall be trying to lay down the foundations of the truth. And I know that your generous and modest nature will welcome the simple and unadorned judgement of a philosopher more than the polished compliments of those with smoother
2 tongues. I shall therefore write only what I know to be true either from reason or by experience, and in this introduction I propose to philosophize just as I do throughout the rest of the book.

There is a great difference between apparent virtues and true ones; and even in the case of true virtues, there is a great difference between those which are derived from an exact knowledge of things and those which are accompanied by some measure of ignorance. What I understand by

'apparent virtues' are certain vices which are not very common and are the opposites of other better known ones; because they are farther removed from such vices than the virtues which occupy an intermediate position, they are usually more admired. Thus it is more common to find people who timidly flee from danger than to find people who rashly throw themselves into it; and so rashness is contrasted with the vice of timidity, as if it were a virtue, and is commonly valued more highly than true courage. Similarly, someone who is over-generous is often more highly praised than one who gives liberally; and again, no one acquires a great reputation for piety more easily than the superstitious or hypocritical person.

As for the true virtues, many of them arise not solely from the knowledge of what is right but from some error. Thus goodness is often the result of simplicity, piety the result of fear, and courage the result of desperation. Because such virtues differ from each other, they go by different names. But the pure and genuine virtues, which proceed solely from knowledge of what is right, all have one and the same nature and are included under the single term 'wisdom'. For whoever possesses the firm and powerful resolve always to use his reasoning powers correctly as far as he can, and to carry out whatever he knows to be best, is truly wise, so far as his nature permits. And simply because of this, he will 3 possess justice, courage, temperance, and all the other virtues; but they will be interlinked in such a way that no one virtue stands out among the others. Such virtues are far superior to those which owe their distinguishing marks to some admixture of vice, but because they are less well known to the majority they do not normally receive such lavish praise.

Now there are two prerequisites for the kind of wisdom just described, namely the perception of the intellect and the disposition of the will. But whereas what depends on the will is within the capacity of everyone, there are some people who possess far sharper intellectual vision than others. Those who are by nature somewhat backward intellectually should make a firm and faithful resolution to do their utmost to acquire knowledge of what is right, and always to pursue what they judge to be right; this should suffice to enable them, despite their ignorance on many points, to achieve wisdom according to their lights and thus to find great favour with God. Nevertheless they will be left far behind by those who possess not merely a very firm resolve to act rightly but also the sharpest intelligence combined with the utmost zeal for acquiring knowledge of the truth.

That such zeal is abundantly present in Your Highness is clear from the fact that neither the diversions of the Court nor the customary education that so often condemns young ladies to ignorance has been able to

prevent you from studying all the worthwhile arts and sciences. And the outstanding and incomparable sharpness of your intelligence is obvious from the penetrating examination you have made of all the secrets of these sciences, and from the fact that you have acquired an exact knowledge of them in so short a time. I have even greater evidence of your powers – and this is special to myself – in the fact that you are the
4 only person I have so far found who has completely understood all my previously published works. Many other people, even those of the utmost acumen and learning, find them very obscure; and it generally happens with almost everyone else that if they are accomplished in Metaphysics they hate Geometry, while if they have mastered Geometry they do not grasp what I have written on First Philosophy. Your intellect is, to my knowledge, unique in finding everything equally clear; and this is why my use of the term 'incomparable' is quite deserved. And when I consider that such a varied and complete knowledge of all things is to be found not in some aged pedant who has spent many years in contemplation but in a young princess whose beauty and youth call to mind one of the Graces rather than gray-eyed Minerva or any of the Muses, then I cannot but be lost in admiration.

Finally, I see that all the necessary conditions for perfect and sublime wisdom, both on the side of knowledge and on the side of the will, shine forth in your character. For, together with your royal dignity, you show an extraordinary kindness and gentleness which, though continually buffeted by the blows of fortune, has never become embittered or broken. I am so overwhelmed by this that I consider that this statement of my philosophy should be offered and dedicated to the wisdom which I so admire in you – for philosophy is nothing else but the study of wisdom. And indeed my desire to be known as a philosopher is no greater than my desire to be known as

Your Serene Highness's most devoted servant,
Descartes

The Passions of the Soul

IV. 190

Translator's preface

Descartes' last philosophical work was written in French, printed in Holland, and published in Amsterdam and Paris in 1649 under the title *Les Passions de l'Ame*.[1] The book's publication in Paris seems to have been arranged by a 'friend' whose anonymous letters, with Descartes' replies, forms its preface.

Descartes composed the work largely at the urging of Princess Elizabeth of Bohemia (1618–80), and its origin can be traced in their correspondence. Elizabeth first mentions the passions when, wondering how the soul can be governed by the body given that they have nothing in common, she asks Descartes to explain 'the manner of [the soul's] actions and passions in the body' (20 June 1643). Descartes' reply – that the body causes the soul to have feelings and passions, and the soul causes the body to move, through an inexplicable 'union' between the soul and body – did not satisfy the princess. Nor was she satisfied when Descartes sought to answer her question with vague moralizing and practical advice for the control of the passions. Eventually she insisted that he give 'a definition of the passions, in order to make them well known' (13 September 1645). Descartes obliged by producing a little 'treatise on the passions' which he gave to Elizabeth in 1646. In the following year he entered into correspondence with Queen Christina of Sweden (1626–89), to whom he also sent a copy of the 'little treatise', which reportedly she read while hunting. This treatise, possibly a draft of the first two parts of the published work, seems also to have been seen by Clerselier, to whom Descartes says, in a letter of 23 April 1649, that he has been 'indolent in revising it and in adding the things you thought lacking, which will increase its length by a third'.

Invited to Sweden by Queen Christina, Descartes arrived in Stockholm in October 1649, a month before publication of *The Passions of the Soul*. Suffering from the rigours of the Swedish winter and the tedium of his courtly duties (which included giving lessons to the Queen at five o'clock in the morning), he contracted pneumonia and died in Stockholm on 11 February 1650.

R.S.

1 The translation below follows the text in volume XI of Adam and Tannery; see General Introduction, p. x above.

PART ONE

The Passions in General

and incidentally the whole nature of man

327

1. What is a passion with regard to one subject is always an action in some other regard

The defects of the sciences we have from the ancients are nowhere more apparent than in their writings on the passions. This topic, about which knowledge has always been keenly sought, does not seem to be one of the more difficult to investigate since everyone feels passions in himself and so has no need to look elsewhere for observations to establish their nature. And yet the teachings of the ancients about the passions are so
328 meagre and for the most part so implausible that I cannot hope to approach the truth except by departing from the paths they have followed. That is why I shall be obliged to write just as if I were considering a topic that no one had dealt with before me. In the first place, I note that whatever takes place or occurs is generally called by philosophers a 'passion' with regard to the subject to which it happens and an 'action' with regard to that which makes it happen. Thus, although an agent and patient are often quite different, an action and passion must always be a single thing which has these two names on account of the two different subjects to which it may be related.

2. To understand the passions of the soul we must distinguish its functions from those of the body

Next I note that we are not aware of any subject which acts more directly upon our soul than the body to which it is joined. Consequently we should recognize that what is a passion in the soul is usually an action in the body. Hence there is no better way of coming to know about our passions than by examining the difference between the soul and the body, in order to learn to which of the two we should attribute each of the functions present in us.

3. The rule we must follow in order to do this 329

We shall not find this very difficult if we bear in mind that anything we experience as being in us, and which we see can also exist in wholly inanimate bodies, must be attributed only to our body. On the other hand, anything in us which we cannot conceive in any way as capable of belonging to a body must be attributed to our soul.

4. The heat and the movement of the limbs proceed from the body, and thoughts from the soul

Thus, because we have no conception of the body as thinking in any way at all, we have reason to believe that every kind of thought present in us belongs to the soul. And since we do not doubt that there are inanimate bodies which can move in as many different ways as our bodies, if not more, and which have as much heat or more (as experience shows in the case of a flame, which has in itself much more heat and movement than any of our limbs), we must believe that all the heat and all the movements present in us, in so far as they do not depend on thought, belong solely to the body.

5. It is an error to believe that the soul gives movement and heat to the body 330

In this way we shall avoid a very serious error which many have fallen into, and which I regard as the primary cause of our failure up to now to give a satisfactory explanation of the passions and of everything else belonging to the soul. The error consists in supposing that since dead bodies are devoid of heat and movement, it is the absence of the soul which causes this cessation of movement and heat. Thus it has been believed, without justification, that our natural heat and all the movements of our bodies depend on the soul; whereas we ought to hold, on the contrary, that the soul takes its leave when we die only because this heat ceases and the organs which bring about bodily movement decay.

6. The difference between a living body and a dead body

So as to avoid this error, let us note that death never occurs through the absence of the soul, but only because one of the principal parts of the body decays. And let us recognize that the difference between the body of a living man and that of a dead man is just like the difference 331
between, on the one hand, a watch or other automaton (that is, a self-moving machine) when it is wound up and contains in itself the corporeal principle of the movements for which it is designed, together with everything else required for its operation; and, on the other hand, the

The body is like a watch.

easy to see that the only reason why this change is felt as occurring in the heart is that there is a small nerve which descends to it from the brain – just as pain is felt as in the foot by means of the nerves in the foot, and the stars are perceived as in the sky by means of their light and the optic nerves. Thus it is no more necessary that our soul should exercise its functions directly in the heart in order to feel its passions there, than that it should be in the sky in order to see the stars there. 354

34. *How the soul and the body act on each other*

Let us therefore take it that the soul has its principal seat in the small gland located in the middle of the brain. From there it radiates through the rest of the body by means of the animal spirits, the nerves, and even the blood, which can take on the impressions of the spirits and carry them through the arteries to all the limbs. Let us recall what we said previously about the mechanism of our body. The nerve-fibres are so distributed in all the parts of the body that when the objects of the senses produce various different movements in these parts, the fibres are occasioned to open the pores of the brain in various different ways. This, in turn, causes the animal spirits contained in these cavities to enter the muscles in various different ways. In this manner the spirits can move the limbs in all the different ways they are capable of being moved. And all the other causes that can move the spirits in different ways are sufficient to direct them into different muscles. To this we may now add that the small gland which is the principal seat of the soul is suspended within the cavities containing these spirits, so that it can be moved by them in as many different ways as there are perceptible differences in the objects. 355

But it can also be moved in various different ways by the soul, whose nature is such that it receives as many different impressions – that is, it has as many different perceptions as there occur different movements in this gland. And conversely, the mechanism of our body is so constructed that simply by this gland's being moved in any way by the soul or by any other cause, it drives the surrounding spirits towards the pores of the brain, which direct them through the nerves to the muscles; and in this way the gland makes the spirits move the limbs.

how mind / body affect each other

35. *Example of the way in which the impressions of objects are united in the gland in the middle of the brain*

Thus, for example, if we see some animal approaching us, the light reflected from its body forms two images, one in each of our eyes; and these images form two others, by means of the optic nerves, on the internal surface of the brain facing its cavities. Then, by means of the spirits that fill these cavities, the images radiate towards the little gland which the spirits surround: the movement forming each point of one of

the images tends towards the same point on the gland as the movement forming the corresponding point of the other image, which represents the same part of the animal. In this way, the two images in the brain form only one image on the gland, which acts directly upon the soul and makes it see the shape of the animal.

36. *Example of the way in which the passions are aroused in the soul*

If, in addition, this shape is very strange and terrifying – that is, if it has a close relation to things which have previously been harmful to the body – this arouses the passion of anxiety in the soul, and then that of courage or perhaps fear and terror, depending upon the particular temperament of the body or the strength of the soul, and upon whether we have protected ourselves previously by defence or by flight against the harmful things to which the present impression is related. Thus in certain persons these factors dispose their brain in such a way that some of the spirits reflected from the image formed on the gland proceed from there to the nerves which serve to turn the back and move the legs in order to flee. The rest of the spirits go to nerves which expand or constrict the orifices of the heart, or else to nerves which agitate other parts of the body from which blood is sent to the heart, so that the blood is rarefied in a different manner from usual and spirits are sent to the brain which are adapted for maintaining and strengthening the passion of fear – that is, for holding open or re-opening the pores of the brain which direct the spirits into these same nerves. For merely by entering into these pores they produce in the gland a particular movement which is ordained by nature to make the soul feel this passion. And since these pores are related mainly to the little nerves which serve to contract or expand the orifices of the heart, this makes the soul feel the passion chiefly as if it were in the heart.

37. *How all the passions appear to be caused by some movement of the spirits*

Something similar happens with all the other passions. That is, they are caused chiefly by the spirits contained in the cavities of the brain making their way to nerves which serve to expand or constrict the orifices of the heart, or to drive blood towards the heart in a distinctive way from other parts of the body, or to maintain the passion in some other way. This makes it clear why I included in my definition of the passions that they are caused by some particular movement of the spirits.

38. *Example of movements of the body which accompany the passions and do not depend on the soul*

Moreover, just as the course which the spirits take to the nerves of the heart suffices to induce a movement in the gland through which fear

enters the soul, so too the mere fact that some spirits at the same time proceed to the nerves which serve to move the legs in flight causes another movement in the gland through which the soul feels and perceives this action. In this way, then, the body may be moved to take flight by the mere disposition of the organs, without any contribution from the soul.

39. *How one and the same cause may excite different passions in different people*

The same impression which the presence of a terrifying object forms on the gland, and which causes fear in some people, may excite courage and boldness in others. The reason for this is that brains are not all constituted in the same way. Thus the very same movement of the gland which in some excites fear, in others causes the spirits to enter the pores of the brain which direct them partly into nerves which serve to move the hands in self-defence and partly into those which agitate the blood and drive it towards the heart in the manner required to produce spirits appropriate for continuing this defence and for maintaining the will to do so.

40. *The principal effect of the passions*

For it must be observed that the principal effect of all the human passions is that they move and dispose the soul to want the things for which they prepare the body. Thus the feeling of fear moves the soul to want to flee, that of courage to want to fight, and similarly with the others.

41. *The power of the soul with respect to the body*

But the will is by its nature so free that it can never be constrained. Of the two kinds of thought I have distinguished in the soul – the first its actions, i.e. its volitions, and the second its passions, taking this word in its most general sense to include every kind of perception – the former are absolutely within its power and can be changed only indirectly by the body, whereas the latter are absolutely dependent on the actions which produce them, and can be changed by the soul only indirectly, except when it is itself their cause. And the activity of the soul consists entirely in the fact that simply by willing something it brings it about that the little gland to which it is closely joined moves in the manner required to produce the effect corresponding to this volition.

42. *How we find in our memory the things we want to remember*

Thus, when the soul wants to remember something, this volition makes the gland lean first to one side and then to another, thus driving the

spirits towards different regions of the brain until they come upon the one containing traces left by the object we want to remember. These traces consist simply in the fact that the pores of the brain through which the spirits previously made their way owing to the presence of this object have thereby become more apt than the others to be opened in the same way when the spirits again flow towards them. And so the spirits enter into these pores more easily when they come upon them, thereby producing in the gland that special movement which represents the same object to the soul, and makes it recognize the object as the one it wanted to remember.

361 43. *How the soul can imagine, be attentive, and move the body*

When we want to imagine something we have never seen, this volition has the power to make the gland move in the way required for driving the spirits towards the pores of the brain whose opening enables the thing to be represented. Again, when we want to fix our attention for some time on some particular object, this volition keeps the gland leaning in one particular direction during that time. And finally, when we want to walk or move our body in some other way, this volition makes the gland drive the spirits to the muscles which serve to bring about this effect.

44. *Each volition is naturally joined to some movement of the gland, but through effort or habit we may join it to others*

Yet our volition to produce some particular movement or other effect does not always result in our producing it; for that depends on the various ways in which nature or habit has joined certain movements of the gland to certain thoughts. For example, if we want to adjust our eyes
362 to look at a far-distant object, this volition causes the pupils to grow larger; and if we want to adjust them to look at a very near object, this volition makes the pupils contract. But if we think only of enlarging the pupils, we may indeed have such a volition, but we do not thereby enlarge them. For the movement of the gland, whereby the spirits are driven to the optic nerve in the way required for enlarging or contracting the pupils, has been joined by nature with the volition to look at distant or nearby objects, rather than with the volition to enlarge or contract the pupils. Again, when we speak, we think only of the meaning of what we want to say, and this makes us move our tongue and lips much more readily and effectively than if we thought of moving them in all the ways required for uttering the same words. For the habits acquired in learning to speak have made us join the action of the soul (which, by means of the gland, can move the tongue and lips) with the meaning of

the words which follow upon these movements, rather than with the movements themselves.

45. *The power of the soul with respect to its passions*

Our passions, too, cannot be directly aroused or suppressed by the action of our will, but only indirectly through the representation of things which are usually joined with the passions we wish to have and opposed to the passions we wish to reject. For example, in order to arouse boldness and suppress fear in ourselves, it is not sufficient to have the volition to do so. We must apply ourselves to consider the reasons, objects, or precedents which persuade us that the danger is not great; that there is always more security in defence than in flight; that we shall gain glory and joy if we conquer, whereas we can expect nothing but regret and shame if we flee; and so on.

46. *What prevents the soul from having full control over its passions*

There is one special reason why the soul cannot readily change or suspend its passions, which is what led me to say in my definition that the passions are not only caused but also maintained and strengthened by some particular movement of the spirits. The reason is that they are nearly all accompanied by some disturbance which takes place in the heart and consequently also throughout the blood and the animal spirits. Until this disturbance ceases they remain present to our mind in the same way as the objects of the senses are present to it while they are acting upon our sense organs. The soul can prevent itself from hearing a slight noise or feeling a slight pain by attending very closely to some other 364
thing, but it cannot in the same way prevent itself from hearing thunder or feeling a fire that burns the hand. Likewise it can easily overcome the lesser passions, but not the stronger and more violent ones, except after the disturbance of the blood and spirits has died down. The most the will can do while this disturbance is at its full strength is not to yield to its effects and to inhibit many of the movements to which it disposes the body. For example, if anger causes the hand to rise to strike a blow, the will can usually restrain it; if fear moves the legs in flight, the will can stop them; and similarly in other cases.

47. *The conflicts that are usually supposed to occur between the lower part and the higher part of the soul*

All the conflicts usually supposed to occur between the lower part of the soul, which we call 'sensitive', and the higher or 'rational' part of the soul – or between the natural appetites and the will – consist simply in the

opposition between the movements which the body (by means of its spirits) and the soul (by means of its will) tend to produce at the same time in the gland. For there is within us but one soul, and this soul has within it no diversity of parts: it is at once sensitive and rational too, and all its appetites are volitions. It is an error to identify the different functions of the soul with persons who play different, usually mutually
365 opposed roles – an error which arises simply from our failure to distinguish properly the functions of the soul from those of the body. It is to the body alone that we should attribute everything that can be observed in us to oppose our reason. So there is no conflict here except in so far as the little gland in the middle of the brain can be pushed to one side by the soul and to the other side by the animal spirits (which, as I said above, are nothing but bodies), and these two impulses often happen to be opposed, the stronger cancelling the effect of the weaker. Now we may distinguish two kinds of movement produced in the gland by the spirits. Movements of the first kind represent to the soul the objects which stimulate the senses, or the impressions occurring in the brain; and these have no influence on the will. Movements of the second kind, which do have an influence on the will, cause the passions or the bodily movements which accompany the passions. As to the first, although they often hinder the actions of the soul, or are hindered by them, yet since they are not directly opposed to these actions, we observe no conflict between them. We observe conflict only between movements of the second kind and the volitions which oppose them – for example, between the force with which the spirits push the gland so as to cause the soul to desire something, and the force with which the soul, by its volition to avoid this thing, pushes the gland in a contrary direction. Such a conflict is revealed chiefly through the fact that the will, lacking the power to
366 produce the passions directly (as I have already said), is compelled to make an effort to consider a series of different things, and if one of them happens to have the power to change for a moment the course of the spirits, the next one may happen to lack this power, whereupon the spirits will immediately revert to the same course because no change has occurred in the state of the nerves, heart and blood. This makes the soul feel itself impelled, almost at one and the same time, to desire and not to desire one and the same thing; and that is why it has been thought that the soul has within it two conflicting powers. We may, however, acknowledge a kind of conflict, in so far as the same cause that produces a certain passion in the soul often also produces certain movements in the body, to which the soul makes no contribution and which the soul stops or tries to stop as soon as it perceives them. We experience this when an object that excites fear also causes the spirits to enter the muscles

which serve to move our legs in flight, while the will to be bold stops them from moving.

48. *How we recognize the strength or weakness of souls, and what is wrong with the weakest souls*

It is by success in these conflicts that each person can recognize the strength or weakness of his soul. For undoubtedly the strongest souls 367
belong to those in whom the will by nature can most easily conquer the passions and stop the bodily movements which accompany them. But there are some who can never test the strength of their will because they never equip it to fight with its proper weapons, giving it instead only the weapons which some passions provide for resisting other passions. What I call its 'proper' weapons are firm and determinate judgements bearing upon the knowledge of good and evil, which the soul has resolved to follow in guiding its conduct. The weakest souls of all are those whose will is not determined in this way to follow such judgements, but constantly allows itself to be carried away by present passions. The latter, being often opposed to one another, pull the will first to one side and then to the other, thus making it battle against itself and so putting the soul in the most deplorable state possible. Thus, when fear represents death as an extreme evil which can be avoided only by flight, while ambition on the other hand depicts the dishonour of flight as an evil worse than death, these two passions jostle the will in opposite ways; and since the will obeys first the one and then the other, it is continually opposed to itself, and so it renders the soul enslaved and miserable.

49. *The strength of the soul is inadequate without knowledge of the truth*

It is true that very few people are so weak and irresolute that they choose only what their passion dictates. Most have some determinate judge- 368
ments which they follow in regulating some of their actions. Often these judgements are false and based on passions by which the will has previously allowed itself to be conquered or led astray; but because the will continues to follow them when the passion which caused them is absent, they may be considered its proper weapons, and we may judge souls to be stronger or weaker according to their ability to follow these judgements more or less closely and resist the present passions which are opposed to them. There is, however, a great difference between the resolutions which proceed from some false opinion and those which are based solely on knowledge of the truth. For, anyone who follows the latter is assured of never regretting or repenting, whereas we always regret having followed the former when we discover our error.

50. *There is no soul so weak that it cannot, if well-directed, acquire an absolute power over its passions*

It is useful to note here, as already mentioned above,[1] that although nature seems to have joined every movement of the gland to certain of our thoughts from the beginning of our life, yet we may join them to
369 others through habit. Experience shows this in the case of language. Words produce in the gland movements which are ordained by nature to represent to the soul only the sounds of their syllables when they are spoken or the shape of their letters when they are written, because we have acquired the habit of thinking of this meaning when we hear them spoken or see them written. It is also useful to note that although the movements (both of the gland and of the spirits and the brain) which represent certain objects to the soul are naturally joined to the movements which produce certain passions in it, yet through habit the former can be separated from the latter and joined to others which are very different. Indeed this habit can be acquired by a single action and does not require long practice. Thus, when we unexpectedly come upon something very foul in a dish we are eating with relish, our surprise may so change the disposition of our brain that we cannot afterwards look upon any such food without repulsion, whereas previously we ate it with pleasure. And the same may be observed in animals. For although they lack reason, and perhaps even thought, all the movements of the spirits and of the gland which produce passions in us are nevertheless present in them too, though in them they serve to maintain and strengthen only the
370 movements of the nerves and the muscles which usually accompany the passions and not, as in us, the passions themselves. So when a dog sees a partridge, it is naturally disposed to run towards it; and when it hears a gun fired, the noise naturally impels it to run away. Nevertheless, setters are commonly trained so that the sight of a partridge makes them stop, and the noise they hear afterwards, when someone fires at the bird, makes them run towards it. These things are worth noting in order to encourage each of us to make a point of controlling our passions. For since we are able, with a little effort, to change the movements of the brain in animals devoid of reason, it is evident that we can do so still more effectively in the case of men. Even those who have the weakest souls could acquire absolute mastery over all their passions if we employed sufficient ingenuity in training and guiding them.

1 Art. 44, p. 344 above.

PART THREE

Specific Passions

443

149. *Esteem and contempt*

After having explained the six primitive passions – which are, as it were, the genera of which all the others are species – I shall make brief observations about the special features of each of the others, keeping the same order as in the foregoing enumeration. The first two are esteem and contempt. Usually the terms 'esteem' and 'contempt' signify only our dispassionate opinions concerning a thing's value. But such opinions often give rise to passions having no particular name, and it seems to me that the terms may be applied to these passions. Esteem, regarded as a passion, is the soul's inclination to represent to itself the value of the 444
object of its esteem, this inclination being caused by a special movement of the spirits which are so directed in the brain that they strengthen the impressions having this effect. The passion of contempt, on the other hand, is the soul's inclination to consider the baseness or insignificance of the object of its contempt, and is caused by a movement of the spirits which strengthens the idea of this insignificance.

150. *These two passions are merely species of wonder*

So these two passions are merely species of wonder. For when we do not wonder at the greatness or the insignificance of an object, making no more of it and no less of it than reason deems we ought, then our esteem or contempt for it is dispassionate. And although esteem is often aroused in us by love, and contempt by hatred, this does not hold generally: it results simply from our being more or less inclined to consider the greatness or the insignificance of an object because we have more or less affection for it.

151. *We may have esteem or contempt for ourselves*

In general, these two passions may relate to all sorts of objects. But they are chiefly noteworthy when we refer them to ourselves, i.e. when it is 445
our own merit for which we have esteem or contempt. The movement of

the spirits which causes them in this case is so manifest that it changes even the appearance, gestures, gait and, generally, all the actions of those who conceive an unusually better or worse opinion of themselves.

152. *For what reasons we may have esteem for ourselves*

Since one of the principal parts of wisdom is to know in what manner and for what reason anyone ought to have esteem or contempt for himself, I shall try to give my views on this question. I see only one thing in us which could give us good reason for esteeming ourselves, namely, the exercise of our free will and the control we have over our volitions. For we can reasonably be praised or blamed only for actions that depend upon this free will. It renders us in a certain way like God by making us masters of ourselves, provided we do not lose the rights it gives us through timidity.

153. *What generosity consists in*

Thus I believe that true generosity, which causes a person's self-esteem to
446 be as great as it may legitimately be, has only two components. The first consists in his knowing that nothing truly belongs to him but this freedom to dispose his volitions, and that he ought to be praised or blamed for no other reason than his using this freedom well or badly. The second consists in his feeling within himself a firm and constant resolution to use it well – that is, never to lack the will to undertake and carry out whatever he judges to be best. To do that is to pursue virtue in a perfect manner.

154. *Generosity prevents us from having contempt for others*

Those who possess this knowledge and this feeling about themselves readily come to believe that any other person can have the same knowledge and feeling about himself, because this involves nothing which depends on someone else. That is why such people never have contempt for anyone. Although they often see that others do wrong in ways that show up their weakness, they are nevertheless more inclined to excuse than to blame them and to regard such wrong-doing as due rather to lack of knowledge than to lack of a virtuous will. Just as they do not consider themselves much inferior to those who have greater wealth or honour, or even to those who have more intelligence, knowledge or beauty, or generally to those who surpass them in some other perfections, equally they do not have much more esteem for themselves than for those whom they surpass. For all these things seem to them to be very
447 unimportant, by contrast with the virtuous will for which alone they esteem themselves, and which they suppose also to be present, or at least capable of being present, in every other person.

155. *What humility as a virtue consists in*

Thus the most generous people are usually also the most humble. We have humility as a virtue when, as a result of reflecting on the infirmity of our nature and on the wrongs we may previously have done, or are capable of doing (wrongs which are no less serious than those which others may do), we do not prefer ourselves to anyone else and we think that since others have free will just as much as we do, they may use it just as well as we use ours.

156. *The properties of generosity; and how generosity serves as a remedy against all the disorders of the passions*

Those who are generous in this way are naturally led to do great deeds, and at the same time not to undertake anything of which they do not feel themselves capable. And because they esteem nothing more highly than 448
doing good to others and disregarding their own self-interest, they are always perfectly courteous, gracious and obliging to everyone. Moreover they have complete command over their passions. In particular, they have mastery over their desires, and over jealousy and envy, because everything they think sufficiently valuable to be worth pursuing is such that its acquisition depends solely on themselves; over hatred of other people, because they have esteem for everyone; over fear, because of the self-assurance which confidence in their own virtue gives them; and finally over anger, because they have very little esteem for everything that depends on others, and so they never give their enemies any advantage by acknowledging that they are injured by them.

157. *Vanity*

All who conceive a good opinion of themselves for any other reason, whatever it might be, do not possess true generosity, but only a vanity which is always a vice, and is all the more so the less justification such people have for esteeming themselves highly. They have the least justification when they are vain for no reason at all – that is, not because they think they have any merit for which they ought to be valued, but simply because they do not regard merit as important: imagining pride to be nothing but self-glorification, they believe that those who attribute the 449
most merit to themselves actually have the most merit. This vice is so unreasonable and absurd that I would find it difficult to believe there are men who allow themselves to fall into it, if no one was ever praised unjustly. But flattery is so common everywhere that there is no man whose faults are so great that he never finds himself esteemed for things which are not praiseworthy or even for things which are blameworthy.

211. *A general remedy against the passions*

Now that we are acquainted with all the passions, we have much less reason for anxiety about them than we had before. For we see that they are all by nature good, and that we have nothing to avoid but their misuse or their excess, against which the remedies I have explained might be sufficient if each person took enough care to apply them. I have included among these remedies the forethought and diligence through which we can correct our natural faults by striving to separate within ourselves the movements of the blood and spirits from the thoughts to which they are usually joined. But I must admit that there are few people who have sufficiently prepared themselves in this way for all the contingencies of life. Moreover, the objects of the passions produce movements in the blood which follow so rapidly from the mere impressions formed in the brain and the disposition of the organs, without any help at all from the soul, that no amount of human wisdom is capable of counteracting these movements when we are not adequately prepared to do so. Thus many people cannot keep from laughing when they are tickled, even though they get no pleasure from it. For the impression of joy and surprise, which previously made them laugh for the same reason, is awakened in their imagination and causes their lungs to be swollen suddenly and involuntarily by blood sent to them from the heart. So too, those who are strongly inclined by nature to the emotions of joy, pity, fear and anger, cannot prevent themselves from fainting, weeping, or trembling, or from having their blood all in turmoil just as if they had a fever, when their imagination is strongly affected by the object of one of these passions. But there is something we can always do on such occasions, which I think I can put forward here as the most general, and most readily applicable remedy against all excesses of the passions. When we feel our blood agitated in this way, we should take heed, and recollect that everything presented to the imagination tends to mislead the soul and make the reasons for pursuing the object of its passion appear much stronger than they are, and the reasons for not pursuing this object much weaker. When the passion urges us to pursue ends whose attainment involves some delay, we must refrain from making any immediate judgement about them, and distract ourselves by other thoughts until time and repose have completely calmed the disturbance in our blood. Finally, when it impels us to actions which require an immediate decision, the will must devote itself mainly to considering and following reasons which are opposed to those presented by the passion, even if they appear less strong. For example, when we are unexpectedly attacked by an enemy, the situation allows no time for deliberation; and yet, I think, those who are accustomed to reflecting upon their actions can always do

something in this situation. That is, when they feel themselves in the grip of fear they will try to turn their mind from consideration of the danger by thinking about the reasons why there is much more security and honour in resistance than in flight. On the other hand, when they feel that
488 the desire for vengeance and anger is impelling them to run thoughtlessly towards their assailants, they will remember to think that it is unwise to lose one's life when it can be saved without dishonour, and that if a match is very unequal it is better to beat an honourable retreat or ask quarter than stupidly to expose oneself to a certain death.

212. *It is on the passions alone that all the good and evil of this life depends*

For the rest, the soul can have pleasures of its own. But the pleasures common to it and the body depend entirely on the passions, so that persons whom the passions can move most deeply are capable of enjoying the sweetest pleasures of this life. It is true that they may also experience the most bitterness when they do not know how to put these passions to good use and when fortune works against them. But the chief use of wisdom lies in its teaching us to be masters of our passions and to control them with such skill that the evils which they cause are quite bearable, and even become a source of joy.

THE END