

Love in Descartes' Metaphysics and Moral Philosophy

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Abstract

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I argue for an account of René Descartes' theory of love that is deeply rooted in his metaphysics and heavily influences his moral philosophy. Descartes maintains that the soul “join[s] itself in volition” to those it loves (AT XI: 387; Voss: 62).¹ The main aim of my dissertation is to explain what it means to join oneself in volition to objects of love, to analyze Descartes' reasons for why one ought to join oneself in volition to others, and to argue that joining oneself in volition to others can prevent hatred.

One joins oneself in volition to others, I argue, when one imagines oneself as forming a whole with others. In *The Passions of the Soul*, Descartes presents an expansive view of volition, which includes volitions to imagine something one has never seen, to consider something immaterial, and to think of a non-existent object, such as a chimera. The volition to join with an object of love is a volition along these lines – we imagine ourselves as forming a whole with others when we join ourselves in volition to them. This understanding of the role of volition in Cartesian love differs from Lilli Alanen's view that the role of volition is to affirm that objects of love that appear good for oneself are actually good for oneself.²

¹ I first refer to *Oeuvres de Descartes*, edited by Adam and Paul Tannery, and then refer to *The Passions of the Soul*, translated by Stephen H. Voss (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1989).

² Alanen, Lilli. 2019. “Self and Will in Descartes's Account of Love.” In *Mind, Body, and Morality: New Perspectives on Descartes and Spinoza*, edited by Martina Reuter and Frans Svensson, 239-58. Routledge.

Descartes maintains that we should see ourselves as forming a whole with others. I argue that we should see ourselves as forming a whole with others because we actually do form a whole with others. Patrick Frierson argues that we should see ourselves as forming a whole with others, on Descartes' view, not because we actually do form a whole with others, but because seeing ourselves in this way increases our joy.³ I draw on passages from the *Principles of Philosophy*, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, and correspondence with Pierre Chanut in order to argue that the universe forms a whole in the sense that it is intentionally created by God to function well. Generally, Descartes holds that moral philosophy should be based on true beliefs about metaphysics. His moral claim that we should see ourselves as forming a whole with others is, I argue, based on his metaphysical claim that we do form a whole with others.

Descartes warns against separating ourselves from others. Hatred is an emotion that “incites the soul to will to be separated from the objects that are presented to it as harmful” (AT XI: 387; Voss: 62). I argue that we should never hate others, on Descartes' view, because hatred separates us from goods within others, causes sadness, and makes us malicious. Hasana Sharp argues that Descartes holds hatred is necessary to protect the body, yet I argue there are other means of protecting the body that do not require hatred.⁴ In contrast to hatred, there are several beneficial consequences of love. I argue that we are able to love every person, on Descartes' view, because every person has good qualities. Every person has free will, and every person is able to possess other good qualities as well, such as virtue and intelligence.

³ Frierson, Patrick. 2002. “Learning to Love: From Egoism to Generosity in Descartes.” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 40 (3): 313-338.

⁴ Sharp, Hasana. 2011. “Hate’s Body: Danger and the Flesh in Descartes’ *Passions of the Soul*.” *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 28 (4): 355-372.

Descartes holds that we are able to excite intellectual emotions, which are emotions that are caused by the soul. We are able to will ourselves to experience intellectual love toward others by considering a good quality within them, and we are able to will ourselves to experience intellectual joy by considering a good quality that belongs to ourselves. I argue that intellectual love can serve as a remedy for the passion of hatred, and intellectual joy can serve as a remedy for the passion of sadness. Descartes holds that intellectual emotions can occur alongside passions, and when they do, they affect the soul more strongly than passions. We can will ourselves to consider a good quality within others in order to excite intellectual love toward them, and we can will ourselves to consider a good quality within ourselves in order to excite intellectual joy. When intellectual love or intellectual joy occurs alongside the passion of hatred or sadness, intellectual love or intellectual joy will affect us more strongly than hatred or sadness. We are always able to find a good quality within ourselves or others because, on Descartes' view, all objects and circumstances are good in some way.

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Introduction

In May of 1643, Princess Elisabeth famously makes the following request of Descartes: “So I ask you please to tell me how the soul of a human being (it being only a thinking substance) can determine the bodily spirits, in order to bring about voluntary actions” (AT III: 661; Shapiro: 62).⁵ He admits that he “said almost nothing” about how the soul “can act on and be acted upon by [the body]” in his published writings, which included the *Meditations* and *Discourse on Method* at the time. He responds to Elisabeth’s request with a description of “primitive notions” and an analogy to heaviness that she along with most contemporary commentators find unsatisfying (AT III: 666; Shapiro: 65).

In September of 1645, Elisabeth makes another request of Descartes: “I would also like to see you define the passions, in order to know them better” (AT IV: 289; Shapiro: 110). This request is preceded by months of conversations about the role of passions in the good life and our ability to control harmful passions. In May of 1645, Descartes learns Elisabeth is experiencing an illness, which he believes is caused by sadness brought about by difficult circumstances affecting her family. This leads him to offer several suggestions for remedying sadness, as well as to develop his thoughts on the passions more generally. He evidently took

⁵ Throughout this dissertation, parenthetical citations first refer to *Oeuvres de Descartes*, edited by Adam and Paul Tannery and are marked by ‘AT’ followed by the volume number and page number. For *The Passions of the Soul*, I refer to Stephen Voss’s translation (Hackett Publishing Company, 1989). For the correspondence between Descartes and Elisabeth, I refer to Lisa Shapiro’s translation (The University of Chicago Press, 2007). All other citations are to *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vols. 1 and 2, edited by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch, or *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. 3, edited by Cottingham, Stoothoff, Murdoch, and Anthony Kenny.

Elisabeth's request seriously since, in October of 1645, he writes, "it is necessary that I examine these passions more particularly to be able to define them" (AT IV: 310; Shapiro: 118).⁶

Descartes addresses many of the same topics he discussed with Elisabeth in *The Passions of the Soul*, which he published in 1649. He explains his view of the interaction between mind and body, defines the passions, and discusses the role of passions in a good life. Part I of *The Passions* contains a detailed account of the way the pineal gland – the "seat of the soul" – causes movements in the body (AT III: 19; CSMK III: 143). Parts II and III contain definitions of "primitive" passions, which are passions that are unmixed with other passions, as well as "particular" passions, which are mixtures of primitive passions (AT XI: 443; Voss: 102). Throughout *The Passions of the Soul*, especially at the end of each Part, Descartes describes methods for controlling the passions, including using reason, following virtue, and avoiding making judgements based on the passions.

In Part II of *The Passions of the Soul*, Descartes defines six "primitive passions," of which all other passions are species (AT XI: 380; Voss: 56). These primitive passions are wonder, love, hatred, joy, sadness, and desire. He describes love as "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" (AT XI: 387; Voss: 62). Two years prior to the publication of *The Passions of the Soul*, Descartes responded to a letter from Pierre Chanut, who asked Descartes, "What is love?", "Does the natural light by itself teach us to love God?", and "Which is worse if immoderate and abused, love or hatred?" (AT IV: 601; CSMK III: 306). The account of love in

⁶ See also: "I have thought over the past days of the number and order of all the passions, in order to be able to examine their nature in more detail." (AT IV: 332; Shapiro: 125). Additionally, in the Preface to *The Passions*, Descartes writes, "I composed it [what I've written about the Passions] only to be read by a Princess whose mind is so far above the ordinary that she effortlessly understands what seems to be most difficult to our scholars" (AT XI: 324; Voss: 16).

The Passions of the Soul and Descartes' response to Chanut's questions constitute the majority of his comments on love.

Although Descartes' comments about love are contained in only a few texts, his view of love draws on several important aspects of his philosophical system, including his account of mind-body interaction, volition, the structure of the universe, and perfection. The concept of joining oneself in volition to others is especially important to Descartes' theory of love and draws on several of these central parts of his philosophy. He clarifies that the phrase "in volition" refers to "the consent by which we consider ourselves from the present as joined with what we love, in such a way that we imagine a whole of which we think ourselves to be only one part and the thing loved another" (AT XI: 387; Voss: 62). Already, we see that Descartes' theory of love draws on his account of the will, raises questions about how we are related to others, and asks us to consider what it means for objects to form a whole in his philosophy. One of the overarching aims of my dissertation is to show that Descartes' concept of joining oneself in volition to others, or imagining oneself as forming a whole with others, plays an important role in his moral philosophy and is deeply rooted in his metaphysics.

In his correspondence with Elisabeth, Descartes enjoins us to see ourselves as forming a whole with the universe and earth, as well as our smaller communities, such as our country, state, and family (AT IV: 293; Shapiro: 112). In *The Passions of the Soul*, Descartes writes that joining in volition with good objects perfects us (AT XI: 432; Voss: 94) and increases our benevolence toward others (AT XI: 388; Voss: 63). In his correspondence with Chanut, Descartes extols people who see themselves as part of a whole they form with their friends, country, or Prince (AT IV: 612; CSMK III: 311). Considering oneself as forming a whole with others can lead one

to sacrifice one's life for others, which Descartes describes as one of "the most heroic actions men do" (AT IV: 294; Shapiro: 112).

In contrast, Descartes warns against the dangers of separating oneself from others. Hatred is an emotion that "incites the soul to will to be separated from the objects that are presented to it as harmful" (AT XI: 387; Voss: 62). By this, Descartes means that "we consider ourselves alone as a whole, entirely separated from the thing for which we have the aversion" (AT XI: 387; Voss: 62). In his correspondence with Chanut, Descartes states that hatred leads to maliciousness and sadness (AT IV: 614; CSMK III: 312). Writing to Elisabeth, he states that hatred leaves one friendless, faithless, and without virtue (AT IV: 293; Shapiro: 112). Fortunately, by joining ourselves in volition to others, we are able to prevent ourselves from hating others. As the term "volition" suggests (and as I will argue), we have a significant amount of control over whether we join ourselves in volition to others or separate ourselves from them. Hence, we have control over whether we gain the benefits of joining in volition to others or undergo the harms of separating ourselves from others.

Descartes holds two metaphysical views that are especially important to his theory of love. The first is that the universe is composed of many parts that God created to function well together. Descartes endorses this view in the *Principles of Philosophy*, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, and his correspondence with Pierre Chanut. His moral claim that we should consider ourselves as forming a whole with others is (I will argue) based on his metaphysical claim that we do form a whole with others. Moreover, Descartes maintains that when we see ourselves as forming a whole with others, we have benevolence for them and esteem them more highly than we would otherwise. Thus, when we accurately see our place in the universe – that is, when we

see ourselves as part of a whole that we form with the rest of the universe – we will have benevolence for other parts of the universe and esteem them more highly.

The second metaphysical view that heavily informs Descartes' theory of love is that all existing objects have some goodness within them. In *The Passions of the Soul* and correspondence with Elisabeth, he states that since evil is a privation of the good, and since existing objects are not mere privations, existing objects must be good in some way (AT XI: 433; Voss: 95, AT IV: 308; Shapiro: 117). The idea that all existing objects must be good in some way is important to the concept of joining oneself in volition to others because Descartes maintains that joining oneself in volition to good objects increases one's perfection. We are always able to find good within an object, and since we have control over our volitions, we can will ourselves to join with objects we find good. Humans have one particularly good quality: free will. Descartes describes free will as a "supreme perfection in man" (AT VIII A: 18; CSM I: 205) and writes that free will "makes us in a way equal to God" (AT V: 85; CSMK III: 326). All humans are appropriate objects of love (I will argue) because they have this perfection. The fact that all existing objects have goodness within them also explains why Descartes is so wary of hatred: Hatred is an emotion that separates us from goods within others.

Commentators have become increasingly interested in Descartes' theory of the passions and moral philosophy. However, there has been little in-depth analysis of his account of love, and even less discussion on his view that we join ourselves in volition to those we love. Scholars who have examined Descartes' view of love include Patrick Frierson (2002), who analyzes the role of egoism and altruism in Cartesian love, Alberto Frigo (2016), who focuses on the Scholastic background of love, Cecilia Wee (2001), who examines the relation between Descartes' view of love and the environment, and Lilli Alanen (2019), who discusses the role of

the will in love.⁷ My main aim in this dissertation is to explain what it means to join ourselves in volition to those we love, to uncover Descartes' reasons for why we ought to do so, and to argue that we are able to remedy hatred by joining ourselves in volition to others. By doing so, I strive to further our understanding of Descartes' view of love, as well as his theory of the passions and moral philosophy more broadly.

One joins oneself in volition to another when one imagines oneself as forming a whole with the other. In *The Passions of the Soul*, Descartes presents an expansive view of volition, which includes volitions to imagine something one has never seen, to consider something that is immaterial, and to think of a non-existent object, such as a chimera (AT XI: 343-4; Voss: 42). The volition to join with another person or object is, I argue, a volition along these lines. In the same way that we can have the volition to imagine the Northern Lights, our soul, or a chimera, we can imagine a whole we form with those we love. This understanding of the role of volition in love differs from the view, recently put forward by Lilli Alanen (2019), that the role of volition in love is to affirm that objects of love, which appear good for oneself, are actually good for oneself. In Chapter 1, I introduce the account of volition Descartes presents in *The Passions of the Soul*, and in Chapter 2, I argue that the volition to join oneself in volition to others is the volition to imagine oneself as forming a whole with others. In Chapter 1, I also explain Descartes' account of mind-body interaction in *The Passions of the Soul*, his view of the use of the passions, and his methods for controlling the passions. In Chapter 2, I examine Descartes' definition of love, explain the difference between the three types of the passion of love

⁷ There are also a few books on Descartes' theory of the passions and moral philosophy that include chapters on Descartes' view of love. See, for example, Brown (2006) and Marshall (1998). Other scholars who discuss Descartes' theory of love include Beavers (1989), Boros (2003), Kambouchner (2013), and Williston (1997).

(affection, friendship, and devotion), introduce the concept of intellectual love, and outline Descartes' view of the relation between love and morality.

We should see ourselves as forming a whole with others, I argue, because we actually do form a whole with others. I argue that we form a whole with the rest of the universe because the universe is a whole created by God to function well. Commentators, particularly Patrick Frierson (2002), have argued that we do not actually form a whole with others, on Descartes' view, but we should see ourselves as forming a whole with others because doing so increases our joy.⁸ I analyze passages from the *Principles of Philosophy*, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, and correspondence with Pierre Chanut in order to argue that we form a whole with other parts of the universe. Further, I draw on Descartes' view that moral philosophy should be based on metaphysics to argue that the moral claim that we should see ourselves as forming a whole with others is based on the metaphysical claim that we do form a whole with others. This argument composes Chapter 3.

There are several benefits to considering oneself as forming a whole with others. When we love objects that are truly good, we increase in perfection, experience joy, and become more benevolent. I argue that all humans are truly good objects of love because all humans possess good qualities, on Descartes' view, such as free will, intelligence, and virtue. We should never hate other humans, according to Descartes, because doing so separates us from good qualities within them, causes sadness in us, and makes us malicious. While some may argue that hate is necessary to protect the body, I argue there are other means of protecting the body that do not require hatred, such as pain and judgments about the harmfulness of objects. I develop this argument in Chapter 4.

⁸ While I primarily focus on Frierson's view, Sharp (2011), Frigo (2016), and James (2008) also discuss the relation between forming a whole with others and joy.

We can will ourselves to consider good qualities within others in order to excite intellectual love toward them, a form of love that is caused by the soul. Intellectual emotions can occur alongside passions and affect us more strongly than the passions they occur alongside, on Descartes' view. Thus, when we hate someone or are tempted to hate someone, we can will ourselves to consider good qualities within them in order to excite intellectual love, and this intellectual love will affect us more strongly than hatred. Since there are good qualities within every person, we are able to excite (appropriate) intellectual love toward any person. We are also able to will ourselves to experience intellectual joy. We experience intellectual joy when we consider a good quality that belongs to us. When we will ourselves to experience intellectual joy alongside sadness, we experience intellectual joy more strongly than sadness. Descartes maintains that there are always good aspects of our circumstances, since all of our circumstances are sent to us by God. Thus, we are always able to excite intellectual joy to remedy sadness. This argument composes Chapter 5.

Chapter 1: Central Themes in Descartes' Theory of the Passions

The main aim of this chapter is to provide background on the central ideas within *The Passions of the Soul*. I begin in Section A by explaining the account of mind-body interaction Descartes presents in *The Passions of the Soul*. In Section B, I examine his distinction between active and passive thoughts, where active thoughts include our volitions and passive thoughts include perceptions of external objects, bodily states, and emotions. In Section C, I discuss Descartes' account of the usefulness of passions. In this section, I explain that he holds passions are useful because they prolong thoughts and prepare the body for beneficial actions. I also outline the view that passions are useful, on Descartes' theory, because they provide us with information about how objects affect our wellbeing. In Section D, I explain remedies for the passions that Descartes provides throughout *The Passions of the Soul*, including using reason to overcome passions, preventing oneself from forming judgments based on passions, and developing the virtue of generosity.

A. Mind-Body Interaction in *The Passions of the Soul*

The pineal gland and animal spirits are central to Descartes' explanation for how the soul is able to bring about actions in the body. Actions in the body, or in his words "movements of [the body's] members," are caused by contraction and extension of muscles (AT XI: 332; Voss: 22). Contraction and extension of muscles "depend on nerves, which are like little filaments or little tubes which all come from the brain and which contain, just as it does, a certain very fine air or wind, called the animal spirits" (AT XI: 332; Voss: 22). Nerves are important for Descartes' explanation primarily because they are vessels for animal spirits. Animal spirits are

“nothing but bodies...which are very small and which move very rapidly” (AT XI: 335; Voss: 24). They flow “into muscles, by means of which they move the body in all the different ways in which it can be moved” (AT XI: 335; Voss: 24).

The pineal gland sits above a pool of animal spirits so that movements in the pineal gland move the animal spirits. In Descartes’ words, the pineal gland is “so suspended above the duct by which the spirits of [the brain’s] anterior cavities are in communication with those of the posterior that its slightest movements can greatly alter the course of these spirits” (AT XI: 352; Voss: 36). The soul can physically move the pineal gland.⁹ Descartes writes, “the whole action of the soul consists in this: merely by willing something, it makes the little gland to which it is closely joined move in the way required to produce the effect corresponding to this volition” (AT XI: 360; Voss: 41). The soul is able to bring about certain effects in the body via the pineal gland because the pineal gland can heavily influence the movement of animal spirits. He states,

the machine of the body is so composed that, merely because this gland is moved diversely by the soul...it drives the spirits that surround it toward the brain’s pores, which guide [the spirits] through the nerves into the muscles, by means of which it makes them move the members (AT XI: 355; Voss: 38).

In a simple example, Descartes writes that “when we will to walk or move our body in some other manner, this volition makes the gland drive the spirits toward the muscles conducive to this effect” (AT XI: 361; Voss: 42). Thus, on his view, the soul is able to will actions in the body because the soul is able to move the pineal gland, which then moves the animal spirits throughout the body in order to bring about the willed actions.

Not only does the soul have the ability to alter the body, the body has the ability to alter the soul. It does so by the same means the soul moves the body. Specifically, the movement of

⁹ This is one of the main issues with Descartes’ explanation for how the soul can move the body. It is unclear how an immaterial soul is able to cause physical movements in the pineal gland, just as it is unclear how the immaterial soul is able to cause physical movements in the body more generally.

animal spirits causes movements in the pineal gland, which then produces thoughts in the soul. Descartes writes that “the slightest changes taking place in the course of the spirits can greatly alter the movements of this gland” (AT XI: 352; Voss: 36).¹⁰ When we perceive an object, animal spirits produce an image of the object on the gland, which then causes the soul to perceive the object.¹¹ Animal spirits and the pineal gland are necessary for the image of the object to be received by the soul but are not necessary for forming an image (or, more precisely, images) in the brain. He provides an example:

if we see some animal coming toward us, the light reflected from its body casts two images of it, one in each of our eyes, and by the mediation of the optic nerves these two images form two other [images] of it on the inner surface of the brain, facing its hollows (AT XI: 355; Voss: 38).

In order for the images that occur in the brain to form a perception in the soul, the animal spirits and pineal gland are needed. He continues, “Then, by the mediation of the spirits with which [the brain’s] cavities are filled, these images radiate from there toward the little gland which these spirits surround” (AT XI: 355; Voss: 38). The two images in the brain form only one image on the gland, which is then perceived by the soul. In Descartes words, “the two images in the brain compose only a single [image] of it on the gland, which, acting immediately on the soul, makes it see the animal’s shape” (AT XI: 356; Voss: 38).

The account of how the body alters the soul is important because it fills out Descartes’ explanation for how the soul and body interact, and it provides the foundation for how perceptions of objects that arouse passions are able to produce physical reactions in the body. Elisabeth’s question about how an immaterial mind and material body are able to interact not only raises questions about how the mind can influence in the body, but also about how the body

¹⁰ See also AT XI: 355; Voss: 38.

¹¹ See *Optics*, Discourse 5, AT VI: 114-128; CSM I: 166-7 for a more complete physical account of perception.

can influence the mind (for example, how being in pain can diminish one's ability to think). Descartes' account of perception in *The Passions* goes some way toward providing an answer. When the body is in a particular state, the movement of animal spirits causes movements in the pineal gland, which then produces thoughts in the soul. For example, when one is in pain, the animal spirits move the pineal gland, which then produces thoughts in the soul. I also discuss Descartes' account of how the soul receives perceptions because it is central to how perceptions of objects that can harm or benefit us cause physical reactions in the body. As we will see in Sections B and C, these kinds of perceptions and the reactions they produce are important for Descartes' theory of the passions.

B. Active and Passive Perceptions

In Part I of *The Passions of the Soul*, Descartes draws a distinction that structures the rest of the text – the distinction between active and passive thoughts.¹² He writes,

[our thoughts] are principally of two genera – the first, namely, are the actions of the 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 that makes them such as they are, and because it always receives them from things that are represented by them (AT XI: 342; Voss: 28).

Thus, actions of the soul “come directly” from the soul and “seem to depend only on it,” while the soul “receives” the passions. This definition of passions is much broader than the definition of “passions of the soul.” Passions of the soul are the main topic of *The Passions* and are what we typically think of as emotions. Throughout this chapter, I will use the term “passions” to refer to “passions of the soul” and the term “passive perceptions” to refer to passions in the broad

¹² Jayasekera (2010) argues that this conception of active and passive thoughts influences Descartes throughout his works. See also Waldow (2017). Descartes does present a similar division of thoughts in the *Principles* (AT VIII A: 17; CSM I: 204).

sense. Before we turn to passions of the soul specifically, I will outline the account of volition in *The Passions of the Soul*, as well as the different types of passive perceptions.

1. Volition in *The Passions of the Soul*

In *The Passions*, Descartes writes that volitions are of two kinds: those “which have their terminus in the soul itself” and those “which have their terminus in our body” (AT XI: 343; Voss: 28). Volitions that have their end in the body include the volition to take a walk “or move our body in some other manner” (AT XI: 361; Voss: 42). Volitions that have their end in the soul include the volition “to apply our thought to some object that is not material” (AT XI: 343; Voss: 28), “to imagine something which does not exist” (AT XI: 344; Voss: 29), “to imagine something we have never seen” (AT XI: 361; Voss: 42), “to remember something” (AT XI: 360; Voss: 41), and to “fix our attention to consider a single object for some time” (AT XI: 361; Voss: 42). In each of these examples, the soul is willing itself to have particular thoughts, rather than receiving thoughts from the external world or the body. Near the end of Part I of *The Passions*, Descartes writes that we are able to will ourselves to have thoughts that are typically joined with passions we want to experience in order to bring about those passions. For example, we are able to will ourselves to consider that “there is always more security in defense than in flight” in order to excite the passion of boldness (AT XI: 363; Voss: 43).

In *The Passions of the Soul*, Descartes focuses on different features of the will than he does in the *Fourth Meditation*. In the *Fourth Meditation*, Descartes lays out a view of the will in which the intellect presents ideas to the mind and the will chooses to affirm or deny these ideas. In *The Passions*, Descartes focuses on the idea that the will can bring about and focus attention on particular thoughts. This is not to say that Descartes denies the will can bring about or focus attention on thoughts in the *Meditations* or that he denies the will can affirm or deny ideas in *The*

Passions of the Soul. In fact, in the *Meditations*, the meditator wills himself to apply his thought to immaterial objects and to imagine things that do not exist, such as the evil demon. Descartes classifies both “apply[ing] our thought to some object that is not material” and “imagin[ing] something which does not exist” as volitions in *The Passions of the Soul* (AT XI: 343-4; Voss: 28-9). Moreover, in *The Passions*, Descartes outlines a view in which the soul is presented with perceptions of various objects, some of which appear good and others bad. It then forms judgments about these objects using the will. He writes that the “strongest souls” are those who continually follow “firm and decisive judgments concerning the knowledge of good and evil” rather than “continually [allow themselves] to be carried away by present passions” (AT XI: 367; Voss: 46).¹³ Analogously, in the *Meditations*, he presents a view in which the soul receives perceptions of various objects that appear to have particular qualities. The soul can then judge whether the objects actually have these qualities. For example, the sun may appear to the senses as small, but we can judge whether the sun actually is small. In both cases, the soul receives various perceptions and is able to make judgments about them using the will.

2. Types of passive perceptions

Descartes argues that there are passive perceptions “we refer to objects outside us,” “we refer to our body,” and “we refer to our soul” (AT XI: 346-7; Voss: 31-2). His use of the term “refer” is mysterious, but Stephen Voss’s understanding provides some clarity. Voss (1989) writes, “I propose this hypothesis about Descartes’s conception of referring: we ‘refer’ our perception to an object just in case we spontaneously judge that the action causing our perception is within that object” (30, fn. 22). Perceptions we refer to objects outside us include seeing the light of a torch or hearing the sound of a bell (AT XI: 346; Voss: 31). Perceptions we refer to our

¹³ This will be discussed in more detail in Section D and in Chapter 5.

body include “hunger, thirst, and our other natural appetites, to which may be added pain, heat, and the other affections that we feel as in our members” (AT XI: 346-7; Voss: 32). Following Voss’s definition, seeing a light or hearing a bell are perceptions we refer to objects outside us because we spontaneously judge that our perceptions are caused by the light or bell. Feeling hunger or thirst are perceptions we refer to our body because we spontaneously judge that our hunger or thirst is caused by the body.

Perceptions that we refer to our soul are passions of the soul, or what we typically think of as emotions. In article 25, Descartes transitions from discussing passive perceptions generally to discussing passions of the soul specifically. He writes that the term “passions” “is usually restricted to mean those [perceptions] only which have reference to the soul itself. And it is only these last which I have undertaken to explain here under the name of passions of the soul” (AT XI: 348; Voss: 32). He writes that perceptions that are referred to the soul are those “whose effects are felt as in the soul itself” and include “sensations of joy, anger, and others like them” (AT XI: 347; Voss: 32). He goes on to define passions of the soul as “perceptions or sensations or excitations of the soul which are referred to it in particular and which are caused, maintained, and strengthened by some movement of the spirits” (AT XI: 349; Voss: 34).

Passions are, of course, passive perceptions and are therefore received rather than generated by the soul. They are passive perceptions that strongly affect the soul. As Descartes says, passions may be named perceptions or sensations, but

they may still better be named excitations of the soul, not only because this name may be attributed to all the changes that take place within it, that is, to all the different thoughts that come to it, but in particular because, among all the sorts of thoughts it can have, there are no others which agitate it and shake it so strongly as these passions do (AT XI: 350; Voss: 34).

The passions are referred to the soul, which as we saw earlier, means that we spontaneously judge they are caused by the soul. This immediately raises confusion: Why are passions considered passive perceptions if the soul causes them? Why are they not considered volitions? We refer passions to the soul, on Descartes' view, because the animal spirits produce (or more precisely, cause, maintain, and strengthen) passions in the soul. He continues with the example of someone who perceives an animal. If they perceive the animal as frightful, animal spirits "excite a particular movement in [the pineal] gland which is instituted by nature to make the soul feel [fear]" and the continued movement of these spirits is "suitable to maintain and strengthen the passion of fear" (AT XI: 357; Voss: 39). Indeed, Descartes writes that all of the passions are "caused principally by the spirits contained in the brain's cavities" (AT XI: 357; Voss: 39). Animal spirits not only cause but also strengthen and maintain passions because passions "are almost all accompanied by some excitation taking place in the heart, and consequently also throughout the blood and the spirits, so that until this excitation has ceased they remain present to our thought" (AT XI: 363; Voss: 44). Thus, we refer passions to the soul not because the soul actively generates them but because animal spirits produce and sustain them in the soul.

Passions are typically caused by perceptions of objects that can affect our wellbeing. At the beginning of Part II of *The Passions of the Soul*, Descartes writes that passions can be caused by a volition in the soul, the "temperament of the body," or "impressions haphazardly encountered in the brain, as happens when one feels sad or joyful without being able to say why" (AT XI: 371-2; Voss: 51). However, passions are typically caused by external objects that are important to us in some way. He writes that the passions' "most common and principal causes" are "objects which move the senses" (AT XI: 372; Voss: 51). Further, objects that move the senses cause passions "in proportion to the different ways they can harm or profit us or,

generally, be important to us” (AT XI: 372; Voss: 51). Here, Descartes is saying that we will experience a stronger passion when we perceive an object to be very harmful or beneficial, and a weaker passion when we perceive an object to be slightly harmful or beneficial. He goes on to distinguish between passions based on how we perceive their objects, specifically how we perceive them as important to us. He writes, “in order to enumerate [the passions], one needs only to investigate, in order, in how many different ways that are important to us our senses can be moved by their objects” (AT XI: 372; Voss: 52). Love and hatred fit into this framework well, as we experience love “when a thing is represented to us as good from our point of view,” and hatred “when it is represented to us as bad or harmful” (AT XI: 374; Voss: 53).¹⁴

At this point, one may have noticed a tension in my explanation of Descartes’ theory of the passions. Earlier, we saw that passions are caused by the movement of animal spirits, but here we see that they are caused by perceptions of external objects. The tension is resolved when we recognize the proximate cause of passions is the movement of animal spirits. What causes the movement of animal spirits are perceptions of objects as important to us in some way. Voss (1989) lays out the causal sequence as: “action of external object, representation, bodily change, then passion” (51, fn. 2). Descartes makes it clear that the movement of animal spirits is the proximate cause of passions, as he writes “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” (AT XI: 371; Voss: 50). His definition of passions as excitations that are “caused, maintained, and strengthened” by animal spirits, as well as his physiological account of

¹⁴ Some passions fit into this framework less well. Wonder, for example, is caused by the perception of an object we judge to be new or different (AT XI: 373; Voss: 52). Esteem and scorn, which are species of wonder, are caused by a perception of a new or different object that we perceive to be either great or small (AT XI: 373; Voss: 52). Several scholars have closely examined the role of wonder in Descartes’ theory of the passions. See, for example, Schmitter (2002) and Brown (2006), especially Chapter 6.

perception, also supports the idea that animal spirits are the proximate cause of passions. As we have seen, Descartes maintains that when we see an object, animal spirits cause the image to form on the pineal gland and the movement of animal spirits on the pineal gland excites a passion. Thus, the cause of the passion is the movement of animal spirits on the pineal gland, but this movement of animal spirits is caused by a perception of an object that appears important.

C. The Use of the Passions

1. Passions prolong beneficial thoughts and prepare the body to take useful actions.

Throughout *The Passions of the Soul*, Descartes discusses the use of the passions. He writes,

the use of all the passions consists in this alone: they dispose the soul to will the things nature tells us are useful and to persist in this volition, just as the same agitation of spirits that usually causes them disposes the body to the movements conducive to the execution of those things (AT XI: 372; Voss: 51-2).

The “principal effect” of the passions, he writes, is to “incite and dispose [the] soul to will the things for which they prepare their body” (AT XI: 359; Voss: 40-1). In the previous section, we saw that the soul is able to bring about actions in the body by moving the pineal gland, and the body is able to bring about thoughts in the soul by moving the pineal gland. Passions are useful because they cause thoughts about objects that can affect our wellbeing to endure in the soul and cause animal spirits to flow throughout the body to prepare it for useful actions. In Descartes’ description of the use of passions, he emphasizes that passions “incite” and “dispose” the soul to will actions that are useful to the body. The passions influence the will by prolonging thoughts about objects that can affect our wellbeing and by preparing the body for beneficial actions.

In article 74, Descartes provides a slightly different characterization of the use of passions than those above, writing, “the utility of all the passions consists only in their strengthening thoughts which it is good that [the soul] preserve and which could otherwise easily

be effaced from it, and causing them to endure in the soul” (AT XI: 383; Voss: 59). The movement of animal spirits that occurs when one experiences a passion can strengthen and prolong thoughts. This is clear from Descartes’ physiological explanation of struggles between volition and passions, as well as his description of specific passions. He writes that the pineal gland is “capable of being driven” by the soul and by the animal spirits (AT XI: 365; Voss: 45). Often these “two impulses are in opposition and the stronger one prevents the other from taking effect” (AT XI: 365; Voss: 45). The reason the soul cannot always move the pineal gland is that animal spirits can pull the pineal gland in an opposing direction. Let us recall here that the pineal gland is the means by which the body causes thoughts in the soul. The animal spirits cause the soul to have particular thoughts when they pull the pineal gland in one direction, and when they keep pulling the pineal gland in that direction, they prolong these thoughts. Although there are often reasons, as we will see in the following section, to oppose the direction the passions move the pineal gland, the passions are useful when they prolong thoughts that are important for the preservation of the body.¹⁵

Descartes explains the way animal spirits prolong thoughts in specific passions, namely love, hatred, and wonder. In love, animal spirits “whose parts are larger and more agitated than usual...[strengthen] the impression which the first thought of the lovable object has formed [in the brain]” and “compel the soul to dwell upon that thought” (AT XI: 404; Voss: 74). In hatred, “the spirits going to the brain...have very unequal parts and very extraordinary movements, whereby they strengthen the ideas of Hatred that are imprinted there already” (AT XI: 405; Voss: 75). In wonder, “the motion of spirits disposed by” an impression of a “rare and extraordinary” object “advance with great force upon the place in the brain where [the impression] is, to

¹⁵ Several scholars have closely examined the influence of the pineal gland on our thoughts. See, for example, Brassfield (2012) and Greenberg (2007).

strengthen and preserve it there” (AT XI: 380-1; Voss: 56-7). I list these examples here to show how animal spirits prolong thoughts in the soul, on Descartes’ view.

Not only do passions cause thoughts that are useful for the preservation of the body to endure in the soul, they also cause animal spirits to flow throughout the body to prepare it for beneficial actions. He writes that “the same agitation of spirits that usually causes [the passions] disposes the body to the movements conducive to the execution of those things” (AT XI: 372; Voss: 52).¹⁶ For example, the movement of animal spirits that occurs when we perceive a dangerous animal causes the passion of fear and prepares the body to separate itself from the animal. In his example of someone who perceives a frightful animal, Descartes writes, “the spirits reflected from the image thus formed on the gland turn to flow in part into the nerves serving to turn the back and move the legs for running away” (AT XI: 356; Voss: 39). He reiterates the same example throughout *The Passions of the Soul*, writing, “often the same cause which excites some passion in the soul also excites certain movements in the body...as we experience when what excites fear also makes the spirits enter the muscles that move the legs to flee” (AT XI: 366; Voss: 46).¹⁷ He says the passion of boldness can prepare the body to do battle, and the passion of anger can make “the hand rise in order to strike,” (though he recognizes there are often compelling reasons to prevent a strike) (AT XI: 364; Voss: 44). Although Descartes does not expound on these examples, we can speculate that boldness causes the animal spirits to flow to the arms and legs to prepare for battle, and anger causes the animal spirits to flow to the arms to prepare for a fight.

2. Commentators disagree about whether passions provide information about their objects.

¹⁶ Marshall (1998) summarizes this point well, writing, “Typically, the same motions of the gland that cause the passions also cause the muscles and limbs to move in ways that preserve the integrity, strength, and health of the body” (102).

¹⁷ See also AT XI: 358; Voss: 40.

Traditionally, commentators have argued the passions are also useful to us, on Descartes' view, because they provide information about the ways that objects can affect our wellbeing. The primary reason scholars think passions provide us with information on Descartes' view is that he often speaks of passions as "representing" their objects. Scholars assume that passions provide information about objects since passions represent them in various ways. Descartes writes that passions "almost always make both the goods and the evils they represent appear much greater and more important than they are" (AT XI: 431; Voss: 93).¹⁸ The passion of abhorrence is "instituted by Nature to represent to the soul a sudden and unexpected death," and delight "is particularly instituted by Nature to represent the enjoyment of what delights as the greatest of all the goods that belong to man" (AT XI: 394-5; Voss: 67). The passion of love "represents to us what we love as a good that belongs to us" (AT XI: 432; Voss: 94), and despair represents something as impossible (AT XI: 457; Voss: 111). Thus, commentators, such as John Marshall (1998), argue "our passions represent objects or bodily states qua interesting, harmful, or beneficial to us" (102). Amy Schmitter (2008) writes that a passion "conveys a great deal of information about its object; indeed, it can represent its object as having complex properties" (436). Similarly, Lilli Alanen (2003) states, "in feeling fear, I represent its object as threatening or dangerous" (187).

However, some commentators have recently argued that informing us about ways objects affect our wellbeing is not one of the purposes of passions. Several scholars have argued that we should consider what Descartes means by "represent" [*représenter*] to figure out whether the passions provide information. Sean Greenberg (2007) examines the meaning of *représenter*, writing that this term can mean "present to the mind," as well as "present the image of an object"

¹⁸ See also: "all our passions represent to us the goods they incite us to seek as much greater than they actually are" (AT IV: 295; Shapiro: 113).

(718). He writes that passions represent in the sense that they “hold thoughts in place” or “[make] thoughts salient” (726). Shoshanna Brassfield (2012) similarly argues that passions are representational in the sense that they focus our attention on, strengthen, and prolong other thoughts (465). Passions, on Greenberg’s and Brassfield’s view, are non-representational in the sense that they do not provide information, but they do have an important relationship to representational states. They are not, in Greenberg’s words, “mere feelings,” since they strengthen and prolong representational thoughts (715). Although Marie Jayasekera (2020) maintains that Cartesian passions are representational in some sense, she notes that Descartes uses the verbs “*avertir*” and “*signifier*” in *The Passions* to explain how pain informs us of objects that are harmful to us. In the *Meditations*, he uses the terms “*indicare*” and “*significare*” to explain how sensations inform us about objects that are harmful or beneficial. Jayasekera argues that it is important that Descartes does *not* use such verbs in explaining how passions represent their objects. It suggests, she argues, that passions do not inform us in the same way that sensations do (76).

Both Greenberg (2007) and Brassfield (2012) argue that passions are motivational rather than informative. By this, Greenberg means that passions “focus the attention of the mind...in order to motivate agents to will...and hence to act” (715). Brassfield means that passions “reinforce certain thoughts and prevent the formation of others,” so that they have an “exaggerated effect...on our will” (465). Greenberg maintains that sensations provide us with information about ways objects can affect our wellbeing, and passions focus our mind on these thoughts and influence the will to act based on them. On his view, passions are useful because they “promote the continued well-being of the embodied human mind through their interaction with the will” (716). Brassfield maintains that passions prolong and strengthen thoughts, but that

we should not act based on these thoughts. She emphasizes that Descartes often states that passions mislead us about how objects can affect our wellbeing. For example, he writes that the passions “almost always make both the goods and the evils they represent appear much greater and more important than they are” (AT XI: 431; Voss: 93).¹⁹ On her view, passions should not be used to guide our actions. Rather, we should form dispassionate judgments about the effects of objects on our wellbeing and act based on these judgments.

3. Three features of the use of passions that are relevant to my view of Cartesian love

It is not my aim in this dissertation to provide an account of Descartes’ view of the usefulness of passions. Throughout this dissertation, however, there are three key points in which I stake out a position in this debate. First, I am under the impression that passions contain representational content. My primary reason for thinking this is that Descartes repeatedly describes the passions as “thoughts.” Most notably, he characterizes passions as thoughts after defining them as “perceptions or sensations or excitations of the soul” (AT XI: 349; Voss: 34).

He writes,

[Passions] may be named perceptions when this word is used generally to mean all the thoughts that are not actions of the soul... [...] But they may still better be named excitations of the soul not only because this name may be attributed... to all the different thoughts that come to it, but in particular because, among all the sorts of thoughts it can have, there are no others which agitate it and shake it so strongly as these passions do (AT XI: 349-50; Voss: 34).

I do not know what the passions would be thoughts *of* if they were not thoughts of objects that appear important to one’s wellbeing. Descartes closely associates thoughts with ideas, writing that the term “idea” means “the form of any given thought, immediate perception of what makes me aware of the thought” (AT VII: 160; CSM II: 113).²⁰ He also holds that ideas are “as it were

¹⁹ See also AT XI: 487; Voss: 134, AT IV: 285; Shapiro: 108, and AT IV: 295; Shapiro: 113.

²⁰ He uses the terms interchangeably here: “Just that the ideas, or thoughts, of such things appeared before my mind” (AT VII: 35; CSM II: 24). See also (AT VII: 366; CSM II: 253).

images of things” (AT VII: 37; CSM II: 25) or “as if of things” (AT VII: 44; CSM II: 30). Since passions are similar to ideas, and since ideas contain images of things, I think it is reasonable to assume that passions also contain images of things. Specifically, passions contain images of things that appear important to one’s wellbeing. These thoughts, as we have seen, are caused, maintained, and strengthened by animal spirits. This point is relevant to my dissertation because in the next chapter, I argue that love is the thought of an object that appears suitable to oneself that is caused, maintained, and strengthened by animal spirits.

Second, I agree with Greenberg’s view that sensations are able to inform us about objects that can affect our wellbeing. Passions, on my view, also provide information about objects that can affect our wellbeing, since they contain thoughts about objects that appear important to us. However, in Chapter 4, I will argue that there are circumstances in which we should use sensations, rather than passions, to receive information about objects that can affect our wellbeing. The idea that sensations provide us with information about how objects can affect us arises throughout Descartes’ works. In the *Meditations*, he writes that “the proper purpose of the sensory perceptions given me by nature is simply to inform the mind of what is beneficial or harmful for the composite of which the mind is a part” (AT VII: 83; CSM II: 57).²¹ In the *Principles*, he states, “[sensory perceptions] normally tell us of the benefit or harm that external bodies may do to this combination [of the human body and mind]” (AT VIII: 41; CSM I: 224). In *The Passions of the Soul*, Descartes writes that the soul “is immediately informed of things that harm the body only by the sensation it has of pain” and “is immediately informed of things useful to the body only by some sort of titillation” (AT XI: 430; Voss: 92).²² Thus, on Descartes’ view, we can be informed about objects that can harm or benefit us by our sensations alone.

²¹ See also AT VII: 81; CSM II: 56.

²² See also AT XI: 399; Voss: 71.

Finally, while I am not committed to Brassfield's view that passions should *never* guide our actions, I do agree that dispassionate judgments are often better guides for our actions than passions, on Descartes' view. She correctly points out that Descartes holds that passions often mislead us about the value of their objects. He writes that we typically perceive "the reasons for favoring the object of [a] Passion...as much stronger than they are, and those for opposing it much weaker" (AT XI: 487; Voss: 134). In his correspondence with Elisabeth, he writes that "all our passions represent to us the goods they incite us to seek as much greater than they actually are" (AT IV: 295; Shapiro: 113).²³ Since the passions often mislead us, we should use reason to form judgments about the true value of objects. He writes,

the true use of our reason in the conduct of life consists only in examining and considering without passion the value of all perfections, those of the body as much as those of the mind, that can be acquired by our conduct (AT IV: 286-7; Shapiro: 109).

In *The Passions*, he states that "we should make use of experience and reason to distinguish the good from the evil and to try to discern their true worth" (AT XI: 431; Voss: 93). The "weakest souls," he writes, "continually allow [themselves] to be carried away by present passions," while the "strongest souls" can "conquer the passions" with "firm and decisive judgments concerning the knowledge of good and evil" (AT XI: 366-7; Voss: 46). Thus, Descartes repeatedly warns that passions mislead us and urges us to use reason to evaluate the goodness or badness of objects. This point will be most relevant in Chapter 4, in which I argue that we should use judgments concerning the harmfulness of objects in order to protect our body.

D. Remedies for the Passions

Although one of the functions of the passions is to preserve the body, as we have seen, the passions often fail to perform this function. Descartes writes that "there are many things

²³ See also AT IV: 285; Shapiro: 108 and AT XI: 431; Voss: 93.

harmful to the body that cause no Sadness at the beginning, or even give Joy, and others that are useful to it though they are distressing at first” (AT XI: 431; Voss: 93). He also states, “the passions almost always make both the goods and the evils they represent appear much greater and more important than they are, so that they incite us to seek the former and flee the latter with more ardor and more anxiety than is suitable” (AT XI: 431; Voss: 93). In his correspondence with Elisabeth, he says, “There are none [passions] which do not represent to us the good to which they tend more vividly than is merited and which do not make us imagine pleasure much greater before we possess them than we find them afterward, once we have them” (AT IV: 285; Shapiro: 108).

Fortunately, Descartes provides several methods for controlling the passions. He holds that we can “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” (AT XI: 431; Voss: 93). He states that when we feel carried away by a passion, we ought to pay attention to reasons opposed to the action that the passion inclines us toward. For example, when someone experiences fear in battle, they ought to remember that “the peril is not great, that there is always more security in defense than in flight, that one will have glory and joy from having conquered, whereas one can expect only regret and shame from having fled” (AT XI: 363; Voss: 43). When one experiences anger or the desire for vengeance, one must “recall that it is imprudence to lose oneself when one can save oneself without dishonor, and that if the contest is very unequal, it is better to make an honorable retreat or beg for mercy than to expose oneself senselessly to certain death” (AT XI: 487-8; Voss: 134). Descartes holds that paying attention to reasons opposing the passion will not directly excite a new passion but will do so indirectly. In his words, “Our passions cannot likewise be directly excited or displaced by

the action of our will, but they can be indirectly by the representation of things which are usually joined with the passions we will to have and opposed to the ones we will to reject” (AT XI: 362; Voss: 43). The reason why the passions cannot be fully displaced by one’s will is that the passions involve a physical excitation that is not within control of the will. Descartes writes that we are more equipped to indirectly displace our passions, when we have “firm and decisive judgments concerning the knowledge of good and evil” and when we are “accustomed to reflecting on [our] actions” (AT XI: 367; Voss: 46 and AT XI: 487; Voss: 134). Hence, one way of correcting exaggerations from the passions is to consistently attend to reasons opposed to the passions.²⁴

However, Descartes recognizes that it is often difficult to fully displace our passions through our judgments. He writes that “there are few people who are sufficiently prepared” to “separate within [them] the movements of the blood and spirits from the thoughts to which they are usually joined” (AT XI: 486; Voss: 133). Thus, Descartes provides a “general remedy” for the passions, which states (in part) that we should be aware of the misleading nature of the passions (AT XI: 485; Voss: 132). He writes that when “those who are strongly inclined by their constitution to the excitations of Joy, Pity, Fear, or Anger” experience a passion, they should “take warning, and recall that everything presented to the imagination tends to deceive the soul” (AT XI: 487; Voss: 134). Further, he writes that if one’s passion “admits of some delay,” one “must abstain from making any immediate judgment about [the object of one’s passion], and distract oneself by other thoughts until time and rest have completely calmed the excitation in the

²⁴ Lisa Shapiro (2003) has ably argued that Descartes does not think that judgments are the only way to correct one’s passions. She holds that we are able to train ourselves to immediately experience certain passions when perceiving certain objects. This picture differs from the view that we perceive certain objects, experience certain passions, use our judgments to correct the passions, and then displace the passion. On her view, we can train ourselves to perceive certain objects and experience certain passions.

blood” (AT XI: 487; Voss: 134). In cases where we must immediately take action in the midst of a passion, we must “take into consideration and... follow the reasons opposed to those the Passion represents, even though they appear less strong” (AT XI: 487; Voss: 134). If we have a difficult time paying attention to reasons opposed to our passion, we should devote our attention to stopping ourselves from taking actions based on our passions. Descartes writes that “the most the will can do” when we experience a strong passion 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” (AT XI: 364; Voss: 44). To summarize, Descartes holds that we should avoid making judgments that are only based on information from the passions, and that we should stop ourselves from taking actions that are solely motivated by the passions.

Descartes maintains that following virtue and being generous are remedies for the passions. He explicitly states that the “exercise of virtue is a supreme remedy for the Passions,” and generosity is a “general remedy for all the disorders of the passions” (AT XI: 441; Voss: 101 and AT XI: 454; Voss: 109). Following virtue is a remedy for the passions because it provides one with a sense of contentment that allows one to handle distressing passions. Descartes writes,

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 virtue 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 (AT XI: 442; Voss: 101).

The sense of satisfaction that occurs in the virtuous person is due to their “inner excitations.”²⁵ In the previous article, Descartes writes that “our good and our ill depend principally on inner

²⁵ This is discussed in much more detail in Chapter 5.

excitations, which are excited in the soul only by the soul itself” (AT XI: 440; Voss: 100). He states,

inasmuch as these inner excitations affect us more intimately and consequently have much more power over us [than passions], it is certain that, provided our soul has what it takes to be content in its interior, none of the disturbances that come from elsewhere have any power to harm it (AT XI: 441; Voss: 101).

He clarifies that our soul has what it takes to be content in its interior when it “follow[s] virtue diligently” (AT XI: 442; Voss: 101). Thus, Descartes holds that virtuous people are more equipped to experience positive inner excitations, and therefore develop a sense of satisfaction that allows them to handle harmful passions.

The concept of generosity is central to Descartes’ moral theory. He describes generosity as “the key to all the other virtues” (AT XI: 454; Voss: 109). He defines generosity [*générosité*] in the following way:

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 (AT XI: 445-6; Voss: 104).

Given that there is a strong relationship between generosity and virtue, generosity might serve as a remedy for the passions for the same reason that virtue serves as a remedy for the passions.

That is, generosity might provide a sense of satisfaction that prevents one from being affected by harmful passions. This supposition is supported by the text. Descartes writes that “those whose minds are strong and generous do not alter their temper over strokes of prosperity or adversity which befall them” and that those who are generous experience a sense of wonder, joy, and love at their own free will (AT XI: 450-1; Voss: 107). While Descartes writes that those who are generous “are entirely masters of their Passions,” they are particularly masters of desires,

jealousy, and envy “because there is nothing whose acquisition does not depend on them which they think is worth enough to deserve being greatly wished for” (AT XI: 448; Voss: 105). Those who are generous are also masters of

Hatred of men, because they esteem them all; and Fear, because their confidence in their virtue reassures them; and finally Anger, because, esteeming only very little all things that depend on others, they never give their enemies such an advantage as to acknowledge being injured by them (AT XI: 448; Voss: 105).

Hence, generosity provides us with a sense of contentment and changes our experience of particular passions, such as hatred, fear, and anger.²⁶

E. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explained the main themes of *The Passions of the Soul*. Descartes begins *The Passions* with an account of how the mind is able to move the body and the body is able to influence the mind. From here, he argues the mind is able to have active thoughts, which depend on the soul alone, and passive thoughts, which include all thoughts that are received into the soul, such as perceptions of external objects or states of one’s body. Passions of the soul are perceptions that affect us more strongly than other passive thoughts and are typically caused by perceptions of objects that can affect our wellbeing. The passions prolong thoughts of objects that can affect our wellbeing and prepare the body to act on these thoughts, which contributes to the protection the body. However, there are many occasions in which we need to remedy passions. Throughout *The Passions of the Soul*, Descartes provides methods for gaining control of one’s passions, such as using reason to overcome the passions, avoiding actions based solely on the passions, and becoming a generous person.

²⁶ The relation between generosity and love will be discussed in more detail in Chapters 4 and 5.

Chapter II: Background on Descartes' Account of Love

Now that we have outlined the main themes in *The Passions of the Soul*, we can turn to the passion of love. Descartes primarily discusses love in *The Passions of the Soul* and in a letter to Pierre Chanut dated February 1, 1647. In Section A, I examine Descartes' definition of love. I show that the passion of love is the thought of a seemingly good object that is caused, maintained, and strengthened by animal spirits. It is typically caused by perceptions of objects that appear suitable for oneself and usually causes the soul to will to imagine itself as forming a whole with the object of love. In Section B, I examine Descartes' method for distinguishing between kinds of passionate love, including love for friends and romantic partners. In Section C, I discuss Descartes' account of intellectual love, which is a form of love that is caused by an action of the soul. In Section D, I examine his comments on the relation between morality and love.

A. Definition of Love

In article 79 of *The Passions of the Soul*, Descartes defines love as “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 suitable to it” (AT XI: 387; Voss: 62). As we saw in the previous chapter, Descartes defines passions as “perceptions or sensations or excitations of the soul which are referred to it in particular and which are caused, maintained, and strengthened by some movement of the spirits” (AT XI: 349; Voss: 34). Passions are typically caused by perceptions of objects that appear important to our wellbeing and typically prepare the body to take actions that are beneficial to it.

Following this definition, love is the thought of an apparent good that is caused, maintained, and strengthened by the animal spirits. It is typically caused by perceiving an object that appears suitable for oneself. Although some scholars assume that joining in volition with an apparent good is an essential part of love, I will argue that joining in volition with an apparent good is an action that typically follows but is not essential to love.

1. Love consists in the thought of a seemingly suitable object that is caused, maintained, and strengthened by spirits.

There is strong textual evidence for the view that love is the thought of an apparent good that is caused, maintained, and strengthened by the animal spirits. Not only does Descartes' definition of passions in general support the view that love, as a passion, is a thought caused, maintained, and strengthened by the spirits, but also his physiological account of love in *The Passions of the Soul* and correspondence with Chanut supports this view. In article 102, he explains the "movement of the blood and the spirits in Love" (AT XI: 403; Voss: 74). He writes that the impression of an object of love guides the animal spirits toward the stomach, which causes digestive juice that was being turned to blood to flow quickly toward the heart. Because the blood has moved so quickly, it has not been rarefied and is therefore coarser and more abundant than usual. The coarse and abundant blood "excites a stronger heat" in the heart, and

send[s] toward the brain spirits whose parts are larger and more agitated than usual, and these spirits, strengthening the impression which the first thought of the lovable object has formed there, compel the soul to dwell upon that thought. And this is what the passion of Love consists in (AT XI: 404; Voss: 74).

Here, Descartes is clear that love is the thought of an object that is caused, maintained, and strengthened by the animal spirits.²⁷ In his letter on love to Chanut, he describes the passion of love as "nothing but a confused thought, aroused in the soul by some motion of the nerves" (AT

²⁷ See also AT XI: 417; Voss: 82.

IV: 602-3; CSMK III: 306). It seems that Descartes refined his physiological account of the passions between composing this letter and publishing *The Passions of the Soul*. The point I would like to draw from this passage is that Descartes holds that the passion of love is a thought that is caused by processes in the body.

Descartes argues that we have the bodily movement that occurs in love alongside the thought of an object of love because when we first experienced love, we had this bodily movement. He writes that “there is such a connection between our soul and our body that when we have once joined some bodily action with some thought, one of the two is never present to us afterwards without the other also being present” (AT XI: 407; Voss: 76). Hence, we experience a particular movement of animal spirits, alimentary juices, and blood when we have the thought that something is beneficial to us because this movement and thought were originally paired together.²⁸ Descartes writes,

Our soul’s first passions, when it was originally joined to our body, must have been due to the blood, or other juice entering the heart, sometimes being a more suitable nourishment than the usual for maintaining the heat in it which is the principle of life. That caused the soul to join this nourishment to itself in volition, that is, to love it (AT XI: 407; Voss: 76-7).

He makes this point in a letter to Chanut as well, stating,

Before birth, love was caused only by suitable nourishment which, entering in abundance into the liver, heart and lungs, produced an increase of heat: this is the reason why similar heat still always accompanies love, even though it comes from other very different causes (AT IV: 606; CSMK III: 308).

Hence, alimentary juices and blood move throughout the body when we think of an object of love because we originally found the nourishment from these alimentary juices and blood suitable for us. Several scholars have pointed out that on Descartes’ view, we feel love before

²⁸ See Shapiro (2003) for a closer examination of how the pairing between bodily states and thoughts occurs, especially pages 233-5.

and immediately after we are born. Patrick Frierson (2002) writes that “fetuses and infants first love what is beneficial to them” (316). Denis Kambouchner (2013) writes that love “is the first of the literally vital passions of the composite human body” (25). Thus, on Descartes’ view, we experience a movement of animal spirits when we perceive that something is beneficial for us because we first experienced this movement alongside this perception.

2. Love is typically caused by objects that appear suitable for oneself.

In Chapter 1, we saw that passions are typically caused by perceptions of objects that appear important to our wellbeing. However, passions can also be caused by an “action of the soul,” “the temperament of the body,” or “impressions haphazardly encountered in the brain” (AT XI: 371; Voss: 51). As we will see in Section C, Descartes presents an account of intellectual love that is caused by an action of the soul, namely, the volition to consider a good quality within an object. In his correspondence with Chanut, Descartes indicates that we can experience a general feeling of love without directing it toward a particular object. He writes, “sometimes it happens that the feeling of love occurs in us without our will being impelled to love anything, because we do not come across any object we think worthy of it” (AT IV: 603; CSMK III: 307). However, love is typically caused by perceptions of objects as suitable for us. In article 56, Descartes says, “when a thing is represented to us as good from our point of view, that is, as being suitable to us, this makes us have Love for it” (AT XI: 374; Voss: 53). In his definition of love in article 79, he states that the soul loves “objects that appear to be suitable to it” (AT XI: 387; Voss: 62). In the correspondence with Chanut, he writes that love occurs “when our soul perceives some present or absent good, which it judges to be fitting for itself” (AT IV: 601; CSMK III: 306).

The objects that cause love appear suitable to us but are not necessarily suitable. As we saw in Chapter 1 Section D, passions often misrepresent objects as good or bad for us and almost always exaggerate their goodness or badness. In articles 139 to 143, Descartes focuses on the role of love in the soul. He writes that insofar as love belongs to the soul, love “originate[s] from knowledge” (AT XI: 432; Voss: 93). He then states, “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” (AT XI: 432; Voss: 93-4). He goes on to say that “it may be doubted whether or not Love and Joy are good when they are thus ill founded” (AT XI: 434; Voss: 96). Here, we see the possibility that love may be based on false ideas about which objects are actually good or the extent to which objects are good. Delight, which is a type of desire that is based on love, is particularly prone to mistake or exaggerate the goodness of objects. Descartes writes that delight is “usually more vigorous than the other species of Love,” yet it “ordinarily [has] less truth” (AT XI: 392; Voss: 65). Delight, he writes, is one of the passions which “deceive[s] the most and which one must guard oneself against the most carefully” (AT XI: 392; Voss: 65).

In his correspondence with Chanut, Descartes gives a physiological explanation for why love is prone to falsely present objects as good. Chanut asks Descartes about “the reasons which often impel us to love one person rather than another before we know their worth” (AT V: 57; CSMK III: 322). Descartes responds,

It consists in the arrangement of the parts of our brain which is produced by objects of the senses or by some other cause. The objects which strike our senses move parts of our brain by means of the nerves, and there make as it were folds, which undo themselves when the object ceases to operate; but afterwards the place where they were made has a tendency to be folded again in the same manner by another object resembling even incompletely the original object (AT V: 57; CSMK III: 322).

Here, Descartes writes that we love objects without knowing their worth because these objects produce movements in the brain that are similar to movements in the brain that have previously been produced by objects of love. The movements in the brain have become associated with feelings of love. So, even if we do not know the value of some object we perceive, if this object appears similar to objects we previously loved, we will feel love for this object as well. Descartes illustrates this idea with an interesting example. He writes,

when I was a child I loved a little girl of my own age who had a slight squint. The impression made by sight in my brain when I looked at her cross-eyes became so closely connected to the simultaneous impression which aroused in me the passion of love that for a long time afterwards when I saw persons with a squint I felt a special inclination to love them simply because they had that defect. At that time I did not know that was the reason for my love; and indeed as soon as I reflected on it and recognized that it was a defect, I was no longer affected by it. So, when we are inclined to love someone without knowing the reason, we may believe that this is because he has some similarity to something in an earlier object of our love, though we may not be able to identify it (AT V: 57; CSMK III: 322-3).

In this passage, Descartes provides a physiological explanation for why we love particular people or things without knowing their true value: Previous objects of love have made folds in our brain that make us more willing to love objects that appear similar to them in the future.

3. The passion of love usually causes the soul to imagine itself as forming a whole with the object of love.

We will now turn to Descartes' claim that love "incites [the soul] to join itself in volition [*l'incite à se joindre de volonté*] to the objects that appear suitable to it" (AT XI: 387; Voss: 62).

In the following article, Descartes clarifies,

by the phrase "in volition" I do not intend here to speak of desire, which is a passion by itself and has reference to the future, but of the consent [*consentement*] by which we consider ourselves from the present as joined with what we love, in such a way that we imagine a whole of which we think ourselves to be only one part and the thing loved another (AT XI: 387; Voss: 62).

Thus, joining in volition to something is the consideration of oneself and that thing as joined, or as forming a whole. The volition to join with an object of love is, to use Descartes' terminology, a volition that has its terminus in the soul (AT XI: 343; Voss: 28). As I will go on to point out, joining in volition to someone or something usually leads to benevolent actions toward them. However, strictly speaking, the volition to join with an object of love is not the benevolent actions that follow from it, but the volition to imagine oneself as forming a whole with the object of love.

In order to further our understanding of the volition to imagine oneself as forming a whole with another, it will be helpful to return to Descartes' view of volition in *The Passions of the Soul*. As we saw in the previous chapter, Descartes presents a category of volitions that "have their terminus in the soul" (AT XI: 343; Voss: 28). Among the volitions that have their terminus in the soul are volitions to "imagine something which does not exist" and volitions "to attend to something which is solely intelligible" (AT XI: 344; Voss: 29). I suggest we think of the volition to imagine ourselves as forming a whole with the object of love as similar to these types of volitions. When the soul joins itself in volition to the object of love, it wills itself to imagine the object of love and itself as forming a whole.

We can further our understanding of imagining oneself as forming a whole with an object by considering examples of imagination that Descartes provides throughout his works.²⁹ In the *Sixth Meditation*, Descartes describes the act of imagining different shapes. He writes that when he imagines a triangle, he "see[s] the three lines with my mind's eye as if they were present before me" (AT VII: 72; CSM II: 50). He imagines a pentagon "by applying my mind's eye to its five sides and the area contained within them" (AT VII: 72; CSM II: 51). When he is questioning

²⁹ There is much to discuss on the topic of Descartes' view of imagination. For more detail, see Graham (2013) and Sepper (1996).

his essence in the *Second Meditation*, Descartes writes, “I am not even some thin vapour which permeates the limbs – a wind, fire, air, breath, or whatever I depict in my imagination” (AT VII: 27; CSM II: 18). I list these examples here to shed light on what it means to imagine, on Descartes’ view. In these examples, there is an image in the “mind’s eye” that is brought about by a “peculiar effort of mind” (AT VII: 73; CSM II: 51). The volition to imagine oneself as forming a whole with an object of love is surely more complex than the volition to imagine a shape or part of the body but similarly involves an action of the mind to form an image in the mind.

My view of the role of volition in Descartes’ account of love differs from Lilli Alanen’s view in “Self and Will in Descartes’s Account of Love” (2019). Alanen argues that the central role of the will in the passion of love is to affirm the perception of an object as good for oneself. She draws on the idea that judgment, on Descartes’ theory, consists in the interaction between the intellect, which contains perceptions, and the will, which affirms or denies these perceptions. In the case of love, the intellect perceives an object as suitable for itself, and the will is inclined to assent to the perception of the object as suitable. In Alanen’s words, “the passion of love inclines our soul, i.e., the will (the motive power of mind or soul) to judge that the object (represented as) causing it *is* good” (247). Elaborating on this idea, she writes,

the passion of love that depends on the state of the body and its motions is always caused by a prior stimulation of its sensory organs by some object or other, which through the ensuing mechanism of association of brain motions and ideas inclines the will to consent to the belief that it is good and worth pursuing (247).

When we experience love, on Alanen’s view, the bodily movements that accompany love influence the will to form the judgment that the object of love is truly good, an idea which is presented to the intellect by the senses.

I disagree with Alanen's interpretation of "joining oneself in volition" because it strays too far from Descartes' own clarification of the phrase. As we have seen, after he defines love, Descartes writes that the phrase "in volition" refers to "the consent by which we consider ourselves from the present as joined with what we love, in such a way that we imagine a whole of which we think ourselves to be only one part and the thing loved another" (AT XI: 387; Voss: 62). Descartes does not mention judgment that the object of love is truly good; he mentions imagination. His account of volition in Part I of *The Passions of the Soul* does not focus on the will's role in forming judgments, as it does in the *Fourth Meditation*. While the role of the will in forming judgments is important, another important role of the will is willing oneself to have particular thoughts. The role of volition in the passion of love, I am arguing, is to will oneself to have the thought of a whole composed of oneself and the object of one's love.

There is a tendency for commentators to assume that joining in volition to the object of one's love is a necessary part of love. For example, Denis Kambouchner (2013) writes, "To love an object – in other words, 'to be joined with what we love in volition' – is (according to Art. 80) to consider or to represent ourselves as forming a whole with it" (25). Alanen (2019) states, "love as an affective phenomenon, has an intellectual element as its essence – the consent or commitment to unite oneself to the object appearing or deemed as good" (252).³⁰ However, as we have seen, the essence of love is the thought of an apparent good that is caused, maintained, and strengthened by animal spirits. The volition to join with the object of one's love is a volition that typically follows from the passion of love. Descartes makes this clear in his correspondence with Chanut, writing,

in love a mysterious heat is felt around the heart, and a great abundance of blood in the lungs, which makes us open our arms as if to embrace something, and this inclines the

³⁰ Additionally, André Gombay (2007) writes, "for Descartes, to love is *to be committed* – this is what 'assent' comes to in the end" (90).

soul to join to itself willingly to the object presented to it. But the thought by which the soul feels the heat is different from the thought which joins it to the object (AT IV: 603; CSMK III: 307).

Thus, the “confused thought” in which love consists is distinct from the thought which joins the soul in volition to the object of love (AT IV: 602; CSMK III: 306).

Another reason for thinking that joining in volition is an effect of love, rather than part of the nature of love, is that joining in volition is a volition and the passion of love is a passion. It is unclear how love could be a passion if a volition were part of its nature. As we saw in Chapter 1, Descartes distinguishes between active thoughts, or volitions, and passive thoughts, which include perceptions of external objects, perceptions of the body, and passions. Rather than thinking the volition to join with another is part of the passion of love, it is more reasonable to think that the passion of love is a passive thought that inclines the soul to have the volition to join with the object of love. On this view, the volition to join with an object of love is an action that typically follows from the passion of love but is not part of the essence of love. That is to say, one could still experience the passion of love without joining oneself in volition to the object of love. When one experiences love, however, one’s soul will be inclined to join itself in volition with the object of love. This is clear from Descartes’ definition of love as a passion “which *incites* [the soul] to join itself in volition” (AT XI: 387; Voss: 62; emphasis added). The soul could, though, choose not to act on this inclination; that is, it could choose not to imagine itself as forming a whole with the object of love.

As I mentioned above, Descartes maintains that the consideration of oneself as joined with the object of one’s love leads to benevolent actions. After he defines love, Descartes writes, “as soon as we have joined ourselves in volition to some object, whatever its nature may be, we have benevolence for it; that is, we also join to it in volition the things we believe to be suitable

to it” (AT XI: 388; Voss: 63). He associates considering oneself as forming a whole with another and having benevolence for another in his correspondence with Chanut, writing, “It is the nature of love to make one consider oneself and the object loved as a single whole of which one is but a part; and to transfer the care one previously took of oneself to the preservation of this whole” (AT IV: 611; CSMK III: 311). In *The Passions*, he writes that a “good father” seeks his children’s good “as his own or with even greater solicitude, because, representing to himself that he and they make up a whole of which he is not the best part, he often prefers their interests to his, and is not afraid to lose himself in order to save them” (AT XI: 389; Voss: 63-4). Thus, the consideration of oneself as joined, or as forming a whole, with the object of one’s love leads to benevolent actions toward the object of love.

The consideration of oneself as joined with the object of one’s love can also lead to desire, yet as Descartes emphasizes, joining in volition with the object of one’s love is not identical to desire. He writes, “if we judge it to be a good to possess [some object] or to be associated with it in some other manner than in volition, we desire it – which is likewise one of the most common effects of love” (AT XI: 388; Voss: 63). Descartes makes the point that desire can follow from love in his correspondence with Chanut as well, writing that when we know “it would be a good thing to acquire” the object of one’s love, we experience desire (AT IV: 602; CSMK III: 306). As we saw in Descartes’ explanation of the phrase “in volition,” joining in volition is not desire because desire “has reference to the future,” whereas “we consider ourselves from the present as joined with what we love” (AT XI: 387; Voss: 62). His clarification that joining oneself in volition to something does not refer to desire makes sense considering that, on his view, people often confuse desire and love. In the correspondence, he writes that desire “is so commonly taken for love that people have distinguished two sorts of

love: one called ‘benevolent love’, in which desire is less apparent, and the other called ‘concupiscent love’, which is simply a very strong desire” (AT IV: 606; CSMK III: 308). However, as Descartes clarifies in *The Passions*, benevolence and concupiscence are only common effects of love and not part of its essence (AT XI: 388; Voss: 62-3).

B. Types of Love

Descartes distinguishes between types of love by considering the esteem the person who loves has for herself in comparison to the esteem she has for the object of love. In Descartes’ words, “Distinctions within love may more reasonably be made in terms of our esteem for what we love in comparison with ourselves” (AT XI: 390; Voss: 64). Using this method, we can distinguish three kinds of love – affection, friendship, and devotion. Descartes writes,

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 when we esteem it more, the passion we have may be named Devotion (AT XI: 390; Voss: 64).

Descartes lists flowers, birds, and horses as examples of appropriate objects of affection, while he says that other humans are the only appropriate object of friendship. The “principal object” of devotion is “without doubt the supreme divinity,” yet “we may also have Devotion for our Prince, our country, our city, and even a private man when we esteem him much more than ourselves” (AT 390; Voss: 64).

Our evaluation of a loved object’s worth also determines the extent to which we sacrifice our own wellbeing for the sake of the object. Although most of Descartes’ comments about sacrifice occur in his correspondence, he briefly discusses the relation between sacrifice and love in *The Passions of the Soul*. He writes, “Inasmuch as in all of them [affection, friendship, and devotion] we consider ourselves joined and united to the thing loved, we are always ready to

abandon the lesser part of the whole we compose with it in order to preserve the other” (AT XI: 390; Voss: 64). He goes on to state,

in simple affection we always prefer ourselves to what we love, while on the other hand in Devotion we so prefer the thing loved to ourselves that we are not afraid to die to preserve it. We have often seen examples of this in those who have exposed themselves to certain death in defense of their Prince or their city, and sometimes even on behalf of private people to whom they were devoted (AT XI: 390-1; Voss: 64-5).

Thus, on Descartes’ view, the esteem we have for an object of love in comparison to the esteem we have for ourselves determines whether we are willing to sacrifice ourselves for the object of love. As Gábor Boros (2003) puts it, “According to Descartes, we estimate our own worth, the worth of the other, and then form a ratio. This ratio determines the nature of the passion and our subsequent behavior with respect to self-sacrifice and the sacrifice of the other” (153). In friendship, we esteem ourselves as equal to our friend. Descartes claims that we are willing to sacrifice ourselves for objects we esteem as greater than ourselves but are not willing to sacrifice ourselves for objects we esteem less than ourselves. We can ask, then, whether we sacrifice ourselves for objects that we esteem as equal to ourselves. Although Descartes does not discuss the relation between friendship and sacrifice in *The Passions*, he does discuss this relation in his correspondence. Writing to Chanut (and referencing Virgil’s *Aeneid*), he says,

when two human beings love each other, charity requires that each of the two should value his friend above himself; and so their friendship is not perfect unless each is ready to say in favour of the other: ‘It is I who did the deed, I am here, turn your swords against me’ (AT IV: 612; CSMK III: 311).

Kambouchner (2013) considers whether Descartes holds that we sacrifice ourselves for our friends, writing,

That my friend, who is another self, is equal to me, means exactly that I do not prefer myself to him and that there is between us a particular form of recognition, of identification or of assimilation. Precisely in these conditions, if I see my friend in danger, it will be impossible for me not to try everything I can to save him. Far from being obligated to take into account what I owe to myself independently of what I owe to

him, it is him, as it happens, who will be entirely myself, and if I fail to do what is not even a duty but a natural act, it is me who, in a certain sense, will not survive (38).

Thus, on Kambouchner's view, we are willing to sacrifice ourselves for our friends because we identify ourselves with our friends, and we strive to preserve our own lives when in danger.³¹

Descartes' claims about how esteem of loved objects affects behavior is not solely concerned with self-sacrifice. In the correspondence with Chanut, Descartes states,

It is the nature of love to make one consider oneself and the object loved as a single whole of which one is but a part; and to transfer the care one previously took of oneself to the preservation of this whole. One keeps for oneself only a part of one's care, a part which is great or little in proportion to whether one thinks oneself a larger or smaller part of the whole to which one has given one's affection (AT XI: 611-612; CSMK III: 311).

Here, Descartes makes the more moderate claim that the amount of care we afford to objects of love is dependent on our esteem of the objects of love. Frigo (2016) describes Descartes' point well, stating, "We could say that thinking ourselves 'to be only a part' allows us to understand what *part*, what portion, large or small, of love we must accord to the object we care for" (1104). Hence, on Descartes' view, our willingness to sacrifice our own lives and the care we afford to objects of love depends on the esteem we have for objects of love. Thus, we can see the difference between affection, friendship, and devotion by examining the effects these emotions have on the person who experiences them.

Descartes also distinguishes love of objects that appear good from love of objects that appear beautiful. He gives the name "delight" [*agrément*] to love of objects that appear beautiful. Delight is typically caused by visual perceptions. As Descartes states, "We call beautiful or ugly what is so represented to us by our external senses – above all by that of sight,

³¹ Marshall (1998) addresses the question of why we are willing to sacrifice our friends when we esteem them as equal to ourselves. He argues that love "tends toward self-sacrifice" (138). On his view, even if we esteem our friends as equal to ourselves, we will be inclined to sacrifice ourselves for them because of the self-sacrificial nature of love.

which by itself is more highly regarded than all the others” (AT XI: 391; Voss: 65). Delight, Descartes writes, is “usually more vigorous than the other species of Love...because what comes to the soul represented by the senses affects it more forcibly than what is represented to it by its reason, and that nevertheless they ordinarily have less truth” (AT XI: 392; Voss: 65). Given that other forms of love are also typically caused by representations from the senses, it is unclear why delight is more vigorous than these other forms. Anthony Beavers (1989) makes this point, stating, “*Agréement* exhibits the ability to interfere with reason. Whether such interference is grounded in the distinction between the sense in which its object is perceived, either as internal or external, or whether it is because this passion is so powerful as to override the rational faculty, is unclear” (285). In any case, we know that on Descartes’ view, delight is one of the passions that “one must guard oneself against the most carefully” (AT XI: 392; Voss: 65).

An important feature of delight is that it is the source of sexual desire. As Beavers (1989) points out, Descartes’ term for delight – *agrément* – is a “seventeenth century word which is enshrouded in sexual connotations” (285). Descartes writes that delight is “particularly instituted by Nature to represent the enjoyment of what delights as the greatest of all the goods that belong to man” (AT XI: 395; Voss: 67). This offers some explanation for delight’s misleading nature: delight is established in such a way that it makes the objects of delight appear incredibly good. Descartes then states that the “principal sort of Delight” is “that which comes from the perfections one imagines in a person who one thinks can become another oneself” (AT XI: 395; Voss: 67). Although this wording is very unclear, as Descartes continues, it is clear he is discussing love of a sexual partner. He writes,

with the sexual difference which Nature has placed in men, as in animals which lack reason, she has also placed certain impressions in the brain which make one at a certain age and season consider oneself as defective, and so though one were only half of a whole whose other half has to be a person of the other sex – so that the acquisition of this

half is confusedly represented by Nature as the greatest of all imaginable goods. Although one may see many people of this other sex, that does not make one imagine that one needs more than one half. But when something is noticed in one of them which gives more delight than what is noticed at the same time in the rest, this makes the soul feel for that one alone all the inclination Nature gives [the soul] to seek the good which she represents to it as the greatest that could be possessed. And the inclination or Desire which originates in this way from Delight is called by the name of Love more commonly than the Passion of Love which has been described above. It likewise has effects which are more unusual; this it is which serves as the principal subject matter for writers of Romances and Poets (AT XI: 395-6; Voss: 68-9).

There are a few important insights into Descartes' account of love in this passage. First, Descartes' view of romantic love draws heavily from Plato's *Symposium*. As Frigo (2016) points out, "the Platonic imagery is quite explicitly deployed" in this passage (1104). Near the end of this passage, Descartes distinguishes between the desire that arises from delight and the passion of love he describes earlier in *The Passions*. Given that the desire that arises from delight is distinct from the passion of love, we have good reason to think that the Platonic imagery that characterizes this desire is separate from the passion of love. That is, Descartes' account of love in general is not simply drawing from the idea presented in the *Symposium* of two halves forming a whole. Frigo makes this point as well, stating, "It is fair to infer that the imagining of the whole which is at the core of the passion of love requires careful distinction from the sentiment of being 'only a half of a whole' leading to sexual desire" (1104). Second, we see that romantic or sexual desire is related to, though distinct, from love. Descartes writes that there are many species of desire, but the "most noteworthy and the strongest are the ones arising from Delight and Abhorrence" (AT XI: 394; Voss: 67). As Descartes states in the above passage, passion for a sexual partner is a kind of desire that originates from love of the other person.

C. Intellectual Love

Unsurprisingly, most of the discussion about love in *The Passions of the Soul* is about the passion of love. However, there are a few veiled references to intellectual love in *The Passions*, and intellectual love is discussed at length in Descartes' correspondence with Chanut. In the correspondence, Descartes writes,

I make a distinction between the love which is purely intellectual or rational and the love which is a passion. The first, in my view, consists simply in the fact that when our soul perceives some present or absent good, which it judges to be fitting for itself, it joins itself to it willingly, that is to say, it considers itself and the good in question as forming two parts of a single whole (AT IV: 601; CSMK III: 306).

One of the main differences between the passion of love and intellectual love is that intellectual love is caused by the judgment that something is fitting for oneself. Descartes references this form of love in *The Passions*, stating,

I say these excitations [love and hatred] are caused by the spirits in order to distinguish Love and Hatred, which are passions and depend on the body, both from judgments which also incline the soul to join itself in volition with the things it deems good and to separate itself from those it deems bad, and from excitations which these judgments excite by themselves in the soul (AT XI: 387; Voss: 62).

Here we see that the passion of love is caused by animal spirits and depends on the body, yet intellectual love is caused by judgments. In the correspondence, Descartes writes that intellectual love does not depend on the body. He writes, "All these movements of the will which constitute love, joy, sadness and desire, in so far as they are rational thoughts and not passions, could exist in our soul even if it had no body" (AT XI: 602; CSMK III: 306). Thus, while the passion of love is caused by animal spirits, typically involves the sensory perception of external objects, and usually causes physical effects in the body, intellectual love only affects the soul. This fact has led Kambouchner (2013) to argue that intellectual love is "to be precise, not an emotion (but, at best, the idea of a certain emotion)" (30). To illustrate what it means for the soul to judge that something is fitting and to join itself in volition, Descartes provides an example. He writes, "If

the soul perceived that there are many very fine things to be known about nature, its will would be infallibly impelled to love the knowledge of those things, that is, to consider it as belonging to itself” (AT XI: 601-2; CSMK III: 306). While in this case, the soul loves something non-physical, namely “very fine” knowledge about nature, intellectual love can be directed toward physical objects as well. For example, if one’s soul were to judge that another person is suitable for oneself and thereby join oneself in volition to that person, one would be experiencing intellectual love for that person. This form of love is surely rarer than the passion of love but is possible.³²

Descartes’ reference to intellectual love in *The Passions of the Soul* only discusses a difference in cause between the passion of love and intellectual love, yet his discussion of intellectual love in the correspondence also discusses a difference in the clarity of thoughts that occur in the passion of love and intellectual love. Patrick Frierson (2002) makes this point, stating,

In the letter to Chanut, there are two differences between intellectual and passionate love. One difference is a difference in *content* – intellectual love is a clear recognition of good whereas the passion is a confused representation of bodily states. The other difference is a difference in *cause* – intellectual love is caused by the soul whereas the passion is caused by the body. In the *Passions*, the only difference is causal (320).

Descartes wrote his letter to Chanut in 1647 and published *The Passions* in 1649. Thus, it is possible that Descartes changed his mind about the difference of clarity that occurs in the passion of love and intellectual love. However, it is also possible that Descartes simply did not mention the clarity of thought that occurs in intellectual love in *The Passions*, since this book focuses on the passions. In any case, as Descartes discusses intellectual love in his correspondence, he writes, “there is nothing in all these movements of its [the soul’s] will which would be obscure to

³² This point is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

it, or anything of which it could fail to be perfectly aware, provided it reflected on its own thoughts” (AT IV: 602; CSMK III: 306). Thus, the soul can be aware of the thoughts that constitute intellectual love, such as the thought that something is fitting for oneself and the thought that one forms a whole with the object of love. Descartes contrasts the clarity that occurs in intellectual love with the confusion that occurs in passionate love. He writes that the passion of love is “nothing but a confused thought, aroused in the soul by some motion of the nerves, which makes it disposed to have the other, clearer, thought which constitutes rational love” (AT IV: 602; CSMK III: 306).³³ Descartes writes that the passion of love is a confused thought in the same way that the “sensation of the dryness of the throat...which disposes the soul to desire to drink” is a confused thought (AT IV: 603; CSMK III: 306). As Descartes establishes in the *Sixth Meditation*, sensations are useful for navigating the world but do not provide clear and distinct ideas. The passion of love originates from ideas that are useful for navigating the world, particularly ideas about objects as suitable for oneself, but not from clear and distinct ideas about the suitability of objects. Intellectual love, however, is more likely to arise from clear and distinct ideas about the goodness of objects, as it originates from the soul rather than the body.

Typically, intellectual love causes other intellectual passions, as well as the passion of love. After stating that intellectual love is caused by the judgment that some object is good for oneself, Descartes writes,

if on the one hand the good is present – that is, if the soul possesses it, or is possessed by it, or is joined to it not only by its will but also in fact and reality in the appropriate manner – in that case, the movement of the will which accompanies the knowledge that this is good for it is joy; if on the other hand the good is absent, then the movement of the will which accompanies the knowledge of its lack is sadness; while the movement which accompanies the knowledge that it would be a good thing to acquire it is desire (AT IV: 601; CSMK III: 306).

³³ Descartes uses “rational love” and “intellectual love” interchangeably. He writes, “I make a distinction between the love which is purely intellectual or rational and the love which is a passion” (AT IV: 601; CSMK III: 306).

Hence the movement of the will that accompanies intellectual love causes other movements of the will based on whether the apparent good is joined to the soul “in fact and reality.” The movements of the will paired with the thought that one possesses, does not possess, or would like to possess some good constitutes other intellectual passions. Descartes applies this line of thinking to his example of a soul that judges that there are “very fine things to be known about nature.” He writes, “if [the soul] was aware of having that knowledge, it would have joy; if it observed that it lacked the knowledge, it would have sadness; and if it thought it would be a good thing to acquire it, it would have desire” (AT XI: 602; CSMK III: 306). Descartes discusses intellectual joy and intellectual sadness in *The Passions of the Soul*. He writes that intellectual joy “comes into the soul by the action of the soul alone, and...can be said to be a delightful excitation, excited in [the soul] by itself, wherein consists the enjoyment it has of the good which its understanding represents to it as its own” (AT XI: 397; Voss: 69-70). He states that intellectual sadness is caused by “one’s opinion that one has some evil or defect” and results in a similar distressful feeling that occurs in the passion of sadness (AT XI: 398; Voss: 70). Hence, on Descartes’ view, there are many intellectual passions that are caused by thoughts in the soul, and intellectual love can cause different kinds of intellectual passions.

Intellectual love also typically occurs alongside the passion of love. Speaking of intellectual and passionate love, Descartes writes to Chanut,

Commonly...these two loves occur together; for the two are so linked that when the soul judges an object to be worthy of it, this immediately makes the heart disposed to the motions which excite the passion of love; and when the heart is similarly disposed by other causes, that makes the soul imagine lovable qualities in objects in which, at another time, it would see nothing but faults (AT IV: 603; CSMK III: 307).

Intellectual love typically causes passionate love because the judgment that something is suitable for oneself disposes the body to experience physical effects of love. The passion of love typically

causes intellectual love because when the physical effects of love occur, one is more willing to judge that objects are good for oneself. Thus, in reality, it is difficult to distinguish between intellectual and passionate love. This has led Kambouchner (2013) to argue that “in ‘this life’, the soul *never loves alone*, but rather loves *with the body it is joined to*” (31). His reason for this is that love “is not just the passion of love as confused thought, nor just the *movement of the will* which is the definition of the intellectual love, but the *synthesis of the unity* of these two affections” (31). On Kambouchner’s view, we must experience the confused thought about something good for us alongside our judgment and volition to join with this apparent good.

D. Moral Aspects of Love

In *The Passions of the Soul* and his ‘letter on love’ to Chanut, Descartes writes that joining with objects that are good for oneself increases one’s perfection. In *The Passions*, he states that passionate love directed toward things that are “truly good” is “extremely good because, joining true goods to us, it perfects us to that extent” (AT XI: 432; Voss: 94). He goes on to state that this love “cannot be too great, since the only thing that the most immoderate [love] can do is join us so perfectly to those goods that the Love we have for ourselves makes no distinction between us and them, which I believe can never be bad” (AT XI: 432; Voss: 94). When we love objects that are bad, our perfection decreases. After stating that hatred and sadness “should be rejected by the soul” regardless of whether they are based on true or false beliefs, Descartes states that “it may be doubted whether or not Love and Joy are good when they are thus ill founded” (AT XI: 434; Voss: 96). He writes that if we only consider the effects of love, joy, hatred, and sadness on the soul, love and joy that are based on false beliefs are better than hatred and sadness that are based on false beliefs. In his words, “even though Joy is less solid and Love less advantageous than when they have a better foundation, they remain

preferable to Sadness and Hatred likewise ill founded” (AT XI: 435; Voss: 96). His reason for this is that “in life’s contingencies, in which we cannot avoid the risk of being deceived we always do much better to incline toward the passions that tend to the good than toward those that concern evil, though this be only to avoid it” (AT XI: 435; Voss: 96). John Marshall (1998) discusses this passage, stating that the reason why we should prefer a false joy or love over a false sadness or hatred has to do with the “greater utility” of a false joy or false love (127). Marshall writes, “Descartes seems to be saying that since we cannot always avoid error in our value judgments, we do better on the whole if we are inclined to see the good in things than if we are inclined to see the evil” (127). However, if we compare love based on false beliefs to hatred based on true beliefs, we should prefer hatred over love. Descartes writes that “a false Joy is worth more than a Sadness whose cause is true. But I do not venture to say the same of Love in comparison with Hatred” (AT XI: 435; Voss: 96). His reason for this relies on the same ideas from above: a false love joins us with objects that decrease our perfection.³⁴ He writes,

when Hatred is just, it estranges us only from the subject containing the evil it is good to be separated from; whereas Love that is unjust joins us to things which may harm, or at least which deserve less consideration than we pay them, which disgraces and debases us (AT XI: 435; Voss: 96).

Similarly, in his correspondence with Chanut, Descartes writes,

love for an undeserving object can make us worse than hatred for an object we should love, because there is more danger in being joined to a thing which is bad, and in being as it were transformed into this thing, than there is in being separated willingly from a thing which is good (AT IV: 613; CSMK III: 312).

In this passage, we receive more information about what it means to be joined to something, we are in some sense “transformed into” things to which we join ourselves. Hasana Sharp (2011) analyzes this passage, stating that Descartes is not describing a “literal ontological mutation,” but

³⁴ This point is discussed in much more detail in Chapter 4.

“a metaphorical exaggeration of how love affects us” (364). He is acknowledging that “relationships really do make us who we are” (364). To summarize, on Descartes’ view, joining ourselves to objects that are truly good increases our perfection, whereas joining ourselves with object that are not truly good decreases our perfection.

In his “letter on love” to Chanut, Descartes answers the question: “Is love or hatred worse if immoderate?” His response to this question raises two moral considerations about love. First, immoderate love is able to make us more virtuous than immoderate hatred. To this point, he writes,

Love, however immoderate, always has the good for its object, and so it seems to me that it cannot corrupt our morals as much as hatred, whose only object is evil. We see by experience that the best people, if they are obliged to hate someone, become malicious by degrees; for even if their hatred is just, they so often call to mind the evils they receive from their enemy, and the evils they wish him, that they become gradually accustomed to malice. By contrast, those who abandon themselves to love, even if their love is immoderate and frivolous, often become more decent and virtuous than they would if they turned their mind to other thoughts (AT IV: 614; CSMK III: 312).

While immoderate love has the ability to make us decent and virtuous, it can also motivate us to take rash and harmful actions. Descartes states,

if I am asked which of the two passions [immoderate hatred or immoderate love] carries us to greater excesses, and makes us capable of doing more harm to other people, I think I must say it is love. It has by nature much more power and strength than hatred; and often affection for an unimportant object causes incomparably more evils than the hatred of a more valuable one could ever do (AT IV: 615; CSMK III: 312).

Descartes’ reason for thinking that immoderate love drives us to greater excesses than immoderate hatred is partly based on the physiology of love and hatred. Descartes writes that the movement of animal spirits in love “gives us more power, more strength and more courage,” than the movement of animal spirits in hatred, which makes us “feebler, colder and more timid” (AT IV: 615; CSMK III: 313). Thus, we are in a better position to take influential actions when

we experience love. Descartes also writes that when we immoderately love something, we are willing to harm others in order to acquire the thing we love. Yet, when we immoderately hate something, our hatred only affects the object of hate itself. He states,

the evil arising from hatred extends only to the hated object, whereas immoderate love spares nothing but its object, which is commonly very slight in comparison with all the other things which it is ready to abandon and destroy to serve as seasoning for its immoderate passion (AT IV: 616; CSMK III: 313).

To illustrate this point, Descartes references a poem from the French poet Théophile de Viau, stating,

How fine, ye Gods, the deed of his desire
How fair his victim's fame,
When noble Paris put all Troy to fire
To quench his own heart's flame (AT IV: 617; CSMK III: 313).

Paris “put[s] all Troy to fire” because his love “spares nothing but its object.” Thus, on Descartes’ view, immoderate love has the ability to make us more virtuous yet can also cause us to harm those we perceive as obstacles to acquiring the object of love.

In Section B, we saw that we are willing to sacrifice ourselves for objects of love that we esteem as equal to or greater than ourselves. Descartes often praises the action of sacrificing oneself for others. In his correspondence with Chanut, Descartes writes,

when an individual is joined willingly to his prince or his country, if his love is perfect, he should regard himself as only a tiny part of the whole which he and they constitute. He should be no more afraid to go to certain death for their service than one is afraid to draw a little blood from one's arm to improve the health of the rest of the body (AT IV: 612; CSMK III: 311).

Hence, “perfect” love includes seeing oneself as a small part of a whole and being unafraid to sacrifice oneself for the object of love. In fact, people who experience this perfect love “give their lives cheerfully for the good of their country or for the defence of some great person they are fond of” (AT IV: 612; CSMK III: 311). The source of one's willingness to sacrifice oneself

for another is the idea that one forms a whole with the other. Writing to Chanut, Descartes states that the individual who sacrifices himself for another “regard[s] himself as only a tiny part of the whole which he and they constitute.” Writing to Elisabeth, Descartes says that the consideration of “oneself as a part of the public” is the “source and origin” of sacrificing oneself for others (AT IV: 293-4; Shapiro: 112). Thus, one aspect of love – seeing oneself as forming a whole with another – provides the basis for self-sacrifice. Given that self-sacrifice is repeatedly mentioned by Descartes in discussions about morality, furthering our understanding of what it means to see oneself as forming a whole with friends and communities will shed light on his moral theory.

E. Conclusion

In this chapter, I analyzed Descartes’ definition of love. I argued that love consists in the thought of an apparent good that is caused, maintained, and strengthened by the movement of animal spirits. Love is typically but not always caused by perceptions of objects that appear suitable for oneself. We are inclined to join ourselves in volition to the object of our love, which means we imagine ourselves as forming a whole with the object. Descartes distinguishes between three kinds of love, namely, affection, friendship, and devotion, based on the amount of esteem we have for the object of love in comparison to ourselves. There is a form of love named intellectual love, which is caused by the soul’s volition to judge that an object is suitable for itself. There are several moral aspects to the passion of love, on Descartes’ view, including that it can increase our perfection and make us more willing to sacrifice ourselves for others.

Chapter III: Considering Oneself as Part of a Whole in Descartes' Philosophy

In his correspondence with Pierre Chanut, Descartes argues that we should arouse love of God by considering ourselves as a small part of a vast universe. He also tells Princess Elisabeth that one must think of oneself as “one part of the universe, and more particularly even, one part of this earth, one part of this state, and this society, and this family” (AT IV: 293; Shapiro: 112). In this chapter, I analyze Descartes' claim that we ought to consider ourselves as part of a whole that we form with others. I argue that Descartes maintains we ought to consider ourselves in this way because we actually are part of a whole that we form with others. We form a whole with others in the sense that we are part of a universe that is intentionally created by God to function well. I argue that Descartes' moral claim that we should consider ourselves as forming a whole with others is based on the metaphysical truth that we do form a whole with others.

In Part I, I examine passages in which Descartes says that we should consider ourselves as forming a whole with others. I also reconstruct Patrick Frierson's argument that we do not form a whole with others in any substantial sense, on Descartes' view. In Part II, I draw on passages from the *Principles of Philosophy*, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, and correspondence with Pierre Chanut in order to argue that we form a whole with other parts of the universe. The universe forms a whole, I argue, in the sense that it is intentionally created by God to function well. In Part III, I argue that Descartes maintains we ought to see ourselves as forming a whole with others because we actually do form a whole with others. I draw on Descartes' view that moral philosophy should be based on metaphysics to argue that the moral claim that we should see ourselves as forming a whole with others is based on the metaphysical

claim that we do form a whole with others. In Part IV, I return to Descartes' claim that considering oneself as a part of God's creation arouses love of God. I argue that we are more benevolent toward other parts of creation when we love God because we imagine ourselves as forming a whole with them. In the conclusion, I explain that in my view, we do not necessarily form functionally organized wholes with individual parts of God's creation.

I. Considering Oneself as Forming a Whole with Others

In his correspondence with Pierre Chanut, Descartes writes that imagining oneself as forming a whole with the rest of the universe arouses the passion of love toward God. Love, on Descartes' view, is typically caused by perceiving objects through the senses that seem suitable to us. Given this description, there are two reasons to think we cannot experience the passion of love toward God. First, God's attributes "are so high above us that we do not see at all how they can be fitting for us;" and second, "nothing about God can be visualized by the imagination" (AT IV: 607; CSMK III: 308-9). Despite these reasons, Descartes maintains that we can experience the passion of love towards God. He provides several methods for arousing love of God, including, "tak[ing] account of the infinity of his power, by which he has created so many things of which we are only a tiny part," and "weigh[ing] our smallness against the greatness of the created universe, observing how all created things depend on God" (AT IV: 608-9; CSMK III: 309). By willing oneself to think about God's power and vast creation, one is able to produce the passion of love toward God. Using terminology from Chapter 2, the soul can will itself to have ideas that cause intellectual love toward God, which then causes the passion of love toward God. As Descartes states in the correspondence, the soul can "represent to itself the truths which arouse such a love" which then "communicate[s] this love to the imaginative faculty so as to make it a passion" (AT IV: 610; CSMK III: 310). It is important, on Descartes' view, that we are

able to love God, since this is the “most delightful and useful passion possible” (AT IV: 608; CSMK III: 309).

In the previous paragraph, we saw that considering oneself as a part of God’s vast creation can arouse love of God. Descartes writes that we can consider the power by which God created many things of which we are a small part, and we can weigh our smallness against the greatness of the universe to produce love of God. Later in his letter to Chanut, Descartes writes,

although we cannot imagine anything in God, who is the object of our love, we can imagine our love itself, which consists in our wanting to unite ourselves to some object. That is, we can consider ourselves in relation to God as a minute part of all the immensity of the created universe (AT IV: 609-10; CSMK III: 310).

The idea that we should consider ourselves as a part of the universe arises elsewhere in Descartes’ writings. In a letter to Elisabeth, Descartes lists truths that are useful for guiding our behavior. Among these truths is the following:

even though each of us is a person separate from others and, by consequence, with interests that are in some manner distinct from those of the rest of the world, one must, all the same, think that one does not know how to subsist alone and that one is, in effect, one part of the universe [*l’une des parties de l’univers*] and, more particularly even, one part of this earth, one part of this state, and this society, and this family, to which one is joined by his home, by his oath, by his birth (AT IV: 293; Shapiro: 112).

Here we see that one should not only consider oneself as part of the universe but also one’s state, society, and family. The majority of this chapter, however, focuses on Descartes’ claim that one should see oneself as part of the universe.

In his article, “Learning to Love: From Egoism to Generosity in Descartes,” Patrick Frierson (2002) examines the claim that we should see ourselves as forming a whole with others. He argues that we should see ourselves as forming a whole with others because doing so increases our joy. He argues that Descartes does not hold that we are metaphysically joined with others. In his correspondence with Elisabeth, Descartes writes,

if we think of ourselves alone, we can enjoy only the goods that are particular to us. On the other hand, if we consider ourselves as a part of some other body, we participate [*participons*] as well in those goods held in common, without being deprived of any of those that are proper to ourselves (AT IV: 308; Shapiro: 117).

Thus, we are able to enjoy goods within others when we see ourselves as forming a whole with them. As Frierson writes, “Insofar as someone considers herself as joined with others, she can enjoy not only ‘her own’ good but also the goods of all those parts of the whole of which she now considers herself a part. The more she loves, the greater her joy” (334). Given that seeing ourselves as part of a whole is a useful way to increase joy, Frierson states that we have practical reasons to see ourselves in this way. On his view, Descartes does not hold that we ought to see ourselves as part of a whole because we actually are part of a whole, but rather we ought to see ourselves as part of a whole because it is useful for us to do so. He writes, “Descartes does *not* in fact mean to claim that we actually *are* one of the many parts of the universe. Rather, his claim is that we ought to *think* of ourselves that way” (333). We know that Descartes does not think we should see ourselves as forming a whole with others because we actually do form a whole with others because “Descartes simply fails to support his metaphysical claim that each person is in fact a part of a greater whole” (325). Frierson also points out Descartes states that “each of us is a person separate from others” before stating that “one must, all the same, think that one does not know how to subsist alone and that one is, in effect, one part of the universe” (AT IV: 293; Shapiro: 112). Frierson states that we should not confuse the “metaphysical truth” that we are separate from others with the “ethical truth” that we should think of ourselves as joined with others (333). On Frierson’s view, Descartes maintains that we should see ourselves as joined with others, but not because we actually do form a whole with others.

II. The Whole We Form with Others

A. We form a whole with other parts of the universe.

I disagree with Frierson's argument that we should see ourselves as joined with others for only practical reasons. I argue that Descartes maintains that we should see ourselves as forming a whole with other parts of the universe because we do form a whole with other parts of the universe. Descartes begins Part III of the *Principles of Philosophy* with a few points that are necessary to keep in mind while describing the structure of the universe. First,

we must bear in mind the infinite power and goodness of God, and not be afraid that our imagination may over-estimate the vastness, beauty and perfection of his works. On the contrary, we must beware of positing limits here, when we have no certain knowledge of any, on pain of appearing to have an insufficient appreciation of the magnificence of God's creative power (AT VIIIA: 80; CSM I: 248).

Thus, God's works are vast, beautiful, and perfect; and we should not think of them as limited.

Descartes goes on to state,

The second point is that we must always remember that our mental capacity is very mediocre, and we must beware of having too high an opinion of ourselves. We should be doing this if we chose to assign limits to the world in the absence of knowledge based on reason or divine revelation – as if our powers of thought could stretch beyond what God has actually made. And it would be the height of presumption if we were to imagine that all things were created by God for our benefit alone, or even to suppose that the power of our minds can grasp the ends which he set before himself in creating the universe (AT VIIIA: 80-1; CSM I: 248).

In contrast to the vastness of God's entire works, our minds are small. Thus, Descartes puts forward a picture of a vast universe of which our minds are a small part.

A similar picture emerges in the *Meditations*. Descartes attempts to reconcile the fact that he errs with the fact that God is not a deceiver. It seems that God would prevent him from making mistakes, yet he does still make mistakes. While Descartes' main solution to this problem relies on his view of the will, he offers a different solution along the way. Descartes writes,

It also occurs to me that whenever we are inquiring whether the works of God are perfect, we ought to look at the whole universe, not just at one created thing on its own. For what would perhaps rightly appear very imperfect if it existed on its own is quite perfect when its function [*rationem*] as a part of the universe is considered. It is true that, since my

decision to doubt everything, it is so far only myself and God whose existence I have been able to know with certainty; but after considering the immense power of God, I cannot deny that many other things have been made by him, or at least could have been made, and hence that I may have a place [*rationem*] in the universal scheme of things (AT VII: 55-6; CSM II: 39).

Given God's perfection, the universe must be perfect, and perhaps the universe is perfect only if some of the individual parts are imperfect. Descartes repeats this solution later in the *Fourth Meditation*, stating,

I cannot therefore deny that there may in some way be more perfection in the universe as a whole because some of its parts are not immune from error, while others are immune, than there would be if all the parts were exactly alike. And I have no right to complain that the role God wished me to undertake in the world is not the principal one or the most perfect of all (AT VII: 61; CSM II: 42-3).

In these passages, Descartes explicitly describes himself as a part and the universe as a whole. When we look at the universe as a whole, we realize that the universe is perfect, even though some of its individual parts are imperfect.

One may argue that the passages from the *Principles* and *Meditations* are primarily epistemic, rather than metaphysical (or more specifically mereological), in nature.³⁵ In the first passage, Descartes tells us to not think of God's works as limited. In the second passage, he reminds us that our mental capacity is mediocre, and thereby unable to fully understand God's works. In the *Meditations*, Descartes writes that we are unable to know that our imperfections do not somehow contribute to the greater perfection of the universe. Thus, one may argue that in these passages, Descartes is not making a metaphysical point that we are a small part of a great universe, but rather an epistemic point that we are unable to fully understand the vastness or perfection in the universe, given our limited cognitive capacities.

³⁵ Regards to Kristopher Phillips for raising this concern.

However, I believe Descartes is making an epistemic *and* metaphysical point in the passages from the *Principles* and *Meditations*. The reason why we should consider our mental capacities as limited and the universe as vast and perfect is that our mental capacities *are* limited and the universe *is* vast and perfect. It would be odd if the beliefs that the universe is vast and perfect and our mental capacities are limited were false, especially since Descartes writes that such beliefs allow us to “philosophize correctly” and “judge well.”³⁶

The most direct mereological terminology Descartes uses in the passages from Section C occurs in the passages from the *Meditations* and his correspondence with Chanut. In the *Meditations*, he writes that there may be “more perfection in the universe as a whole [*in totâ rerum universitate*] because some of its parts [*partes*] are not immune from error” (AT VII: 61; CSM II: 42-3). In his letter to Chanut, he writes that God “created so many things of which we are only a tiny part” (AT IV: 608; CSMK III: 309). Admittedly, Descartes does not directly use part-whole terminology in the passages from the *Principles*, yet I believe his claims are part of a broader mereological picture, namely, the view that the universe is a whole created by God to function well. I will now turn to this point.

B. The universe forms a whole because it is created by God to function well.

I have been arguing that we are part of a whole in the sense that we are part of the universe. One may argue that the universe is a whole only in the sense that it is the totality of all created things. This sense of whole is vacuous, one may argue, and is therefore not suited for the important role seeing oneself as part of a whole plays in Descartes’ moral theory. Indeed,

³⁶ Before the two passages from the *Principles*, Descartes writes that there are two points that must be noted in order to “philosophize correctly” about “the general structure of the entire visible world” (AT VIIIA: 80; CSM I: 248). In his correspondence with Elisabeth, he writes that “only two things are required in order to be always disposed to judge well: one is the knowledge of the truth, and the other is the habit of remembering and acquiescing to this knowledge every time the occasion requires” (AT IV: 291; Shapiro: 111). Among his list of truths are truths about the “nature of our mind” and the “vast extent of the universe” (AT IV: 292; Shapiro: 112).

Frierson (forthcoming) writes that one can consider the “collection of all things” to be a whole, yet this is a whole only in a “superficial sense” (3).

I believe the whole Descartes presents in the above passages is not merely the totality of all created things. The universe as a whole is intentionally created by God to function well. Let us reconsider the passages from the *Principles*, in which Descartes writes that the universe is vast, beautiful, and perfect because God has infinite power and goodness. He emphasizes God’s “creative power” and the “ends which he set before himself in creating the universe” (AT VIII: 80-1; CSM I: 248). In his letter to Chanut, Descartes writes that God has “created so many things” by the “infinity of his power” (AT IV: 608; CSMK III: 309). In the *Fourth Meditation*, Descartes compares God to a skilled craftsman, writing, “The more skilled the craftsman the more perfect the work produced by him; if this is so, how can anything produced by the supreme creator of all things not be complete and perfect in all respects?” (AT VII: 55; CSM II: 38).

The whole Descartes articulates in these passages is similar in some ways to objects that are wholes because they are artifacts and similar in other ways to objects that are wholes because they are functionally organized. Artifacts are generally considered to be objects that are intentionally created.³⁷ Simon Evnine (2016), for example, writes, “Artifacts come into being, are made, by someone’s working with certain intentions on some material that becomes the artifact’s matter” (67). While there is no consensus that artifacts form mereological wholes, many philosophers accept that artifacts do (at least usually) form wholes. For example, ships, watches, and hammers are reasonable candidates for wholes, in part because they were intentionally created by someone. Not only does the universe form a whole in the sense that it was created by God, but also in the sense that God created the universe so that its parts function

³⁷ Some philosophers would add that artifacts are objects that are intentionally created for some purpose.

well together. In the *Meditations*, Descartes writes that “what would perhaps rightly appear very imperfect if it existed on its own is quite perfect when its *function as a part of the universe* [*in mundo rationem partis*] is considered” (AT VII: 56; CSM II: 39; emphasis added). This suggests that the universe forms a whole akin to the way that functionally organized objects form a whole. Michael Rea (1998) writes, “The objects that compose a living organism are functionally organized; and it is because they serve the collective function that they do that we are inclined to regard them as *parts* of a unified whole” (354).

The idea that Descartes sees the universe as a functionally organized whole in a similar way that living organisms are functionally organized wholes receives further support from his frequent comparisons between the whole we form with others and the human body. In his correspondence with Chanut, Descartes writes that “[flowers, birds, and buildings] are not among the nobler parts of the whole which we and they constitute any more than our nails or our hair are among the nobler parts of our body” (AT IV: 612; CSMK III: 311). However, one should “be no more afraid to go to certain death” for their prince or country “than one is afraid to draw a little blood from one’s arm to improve the health of the rest of the body” (AT IV: 612; CSMK III: 311). In the *Fifth Set of Replies*, Descartes responds to Pierre Gassendi’s objection to the view from the *Fourth Meditation* that imperfect parts of the universe may contribute to the overall perfection of the universe. Gassendi argues that this view is akin to saying that a republic has “more perfection if some of its citizens are bad than it would have if they were all good” (AT VII: 311; CSM II: 216). Descartes responds to this objection by rejecting the parallel between a republic and the universe. He says,

your comparison between the citizens of a republic and the parts of the universe is not quite accurate: the bad character of the citizens is, in relation to the republic, something positive, but this does not apply to man’s liability to error, or his lack of all perfections, when this is taken in relation to the good of the universe. A better comparison to make

might be the comparison between someone who wanted the whole of the human body to be covered with eyes so as to look more beautiful (there being no part of the body more beautiful than the eye), and someone who thinks that there ought not to have been any creatures in the world who were liable to error (i.e., not wholly perfect) (AT VII: 376; CSM II: 258-9).

Thus, Descartes argues that the whole we form with others is akin to a human body. It is akin to a human body in the sense that some parts have a more important role to play than others, and that the imperfections of some parts may contribute to the perfection of the body as a whole.

Before ending this section, I would like to address a suggestion that has been raised in Frierson's work and in conversation with other scholars.³⁸ One could argue the view that the universe is a whole in the sense that it is intentionally created and functionally organized is overly complicated. Rather, all we need to argue is that the universe is a whole in the sense that it is one substance. If one holds that Descartes believes the material universe is one substance, one could hold that our body forms a whole with the material universe in a literal sense.³⁹ Further, given that the body forms a union with the mind, one could argue that the mind forms some type of indirect unity with the material universe. Although Frierson ends up rejecting this approach, he summarizes it well, writing,

Because my mind is substantially united to my body, there could be a sort of transitive metaphysical unity. I am united with my body, and my body is really and metaphysically united with the rest of the universe (including other people's bodies), so I am really and metaphysically united with the rest of the universe (forthcoming, 3).

While I think this is an interesting approach, the foundation of it differs from the foundation of my approach. I am arguing that all created things form a whole in the sense that they are created by God to function well together. The union we form with others does not rely on the nature of substance but on God's creation of the universe. Further, all created things includes immaterial

³⁸ Thanks to members of the audience at the 2019 Pacific Division Meeting of the American Philosophical Association for bringing up this approach.

³⁹ The view that the material universe is one substance is, of course, debated in Descartes scholarship.

minds just as it includes material bodies. No “transitive unity” is needed because minds are created by God just as bodies are created by God.

C. Objection based on Descartes’ rejection of teleology

Descartes is famously skeptical of teleology and teleological explanations. One may argue the view that parts of the universe function well together entails that parts of the universe have ends, namely, to function well with other parts of the universe, which is contrary to Descartes’ rejection of teleology.

My first response to this objection is that Descartes does believe we can know the general claim that God created the universe as composed of many parts that function well. We know this from the passages from the *Fourth Meditation* and his correspondence with Chanut, in which he describes the universe as composed of parts that contribute to the perfection of the universe and are created by God’s power. In fact, the passages from the *Fourth Meditation* are prompted by Descartes’ recognition that the universe must be perfect, given God’s perfection. So, we know the universe is created in accordance with God’s power and wisdom. What we do not know, however, is how exactly parts of the universe contribute to the overall perfection of the universe.⁴⁰ We do not know, for example, how our ability to affirm truths that we do not clearly and distinctly perceive contributes to the perfection of the universe; we just know, given God’s perfection, that it does.

My second response to this objection is that since we cannot know exactly *how* parts of the universe contribute to the overall functioning of the universe, we should not use knowledge *that* they contribute to the overall functioning of the universe in our explanations of the natural world. Alison Simmons (2001), along with other commentators, have argued that Descartes is

⁴⁰ Amy Schmitter (2008) describes this line of thinking well (427-8).

not opposed to teleology *per se*, but rather the use of teleology in natural philosophy.⁴¹ Indeed, when Descartes rejects the use of teleology, it is usually in regard to natural philosophy. In the *Meditations*, he writes, “I consider the customary search for final causes to be totally useless *in physics*” (AT VII: 55; CSM II: 39; emphasis added). In the *Principles*, he states,

When dealing with *natural things* we will, then, never derive any explanations from the purposes which God or nature may have had in view when creating them <and we shall entirely banish from our philosophy the search for final causes> (AT VIII A: 15; CSM I: 202; emphasis added).

In the *Fifth Set of Replies*, he acknowledges that teleology may be useful in some domains, such as ethics, but not in physics. He writes,

The function of the various parts of plants and animals etc. makes it appropriate to admire God as their efficient cause – to recognize and glorify the craftsman through examining his works; but we cannot guess from this what purpose God had in creating any given thing. In ethics, then, where we may often legitimately employ conjectures, it may admittedly be pious on occasion to try to guess what purposes God may have had in mind in his direction of the universe; but in physics, where everything must be backed up by the strongest arguments, such conjectures are futile (AT VII: 374-5; CSM II: 258).

Thus, for Descartes, we know parts of the universe contribute to the overall perfection of the universe, but this knowledge should not factor into our physical explanations of the world because how exactly parts of the universe contribute to the overall perfection of the universe is outside the bounds of our knowledge.

III. Why We Should See Ourselves as Forming a Whole with Others

A. We should consider ourselves as forming a whole with others because we do form a whole with others.

I have been arguing that the universe is a whole of which we are a part. In this section, I argue that Descartes believes we should see ourselves as forming a whole with others because we do form a whole with others. Based on what I have argued so far, it could be the case that we

⁴¹ See, for example, Brown (2012).

form a whole with others, yet we should see ourselves in this way because it increases our joy. I argue that this is not the case, since Descartes argues that we should follow and derive joy only from true beliefs. Additionally, considering ourselves as a small part of the vast universe prevents us from forming the false belief that the universe is created for humans.

Throughout his works, Descartes emphasizes the importance of being guided by true beliefs. In the *Rules for the Direction of the Mind*, he writes, “There are two points here which we should keep in mind: we should never assume to be true anything which is false; and our goal should be to attain knowledge of all things” (AT X: 372; CSM I: 16). In the *Discourse on Method*, he writes, “it was always my most earnest desire to learn to distinguish the true from the false in order to see clearly into my own actions and proceed with confidence in this life” (AT VI: 10; CSM I: 115). In his correspondence with Chanut, he writes, “Of course, I agree with you entirely that the safest way to find out how we should live is to discover first what we are, what kind of world we live in, and who is the creator of this world, or the master of the house we live in” (AT IV: 441; CSMK III: 289). The idea that our behavior should be guided by true beliefs about ourselves, the universe, and God is expressed in a well-known passage from the *Principles*. Descartes writes,

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 (AT IXB:14; CSM I: 186).

The metaphysical claim that we form a whole with other parts of the universe is, I am arguing, the foundation for the moral claim that we should consider ourselves as forming a whole with other parts of the universe.

In his correspondence with Elisabeth, Descartes argues that we should avoid deriving pleasure from false beliefs. He writes that there are two kinds of pleasures: “those which pertain to the mind and others which pertain to the human being, that is, to the mind insofar as it is united to a body” (AT IV: 284; Shapiro: 108). He writes that although the pleasures of the mind are typically “more solid” than pleasures of the body, pleasures of the mind “are not always praiseworthy, since they can be founded on a false opinion” (AT IV: 286; Shapiro: 108-9). In a following letter, he argues that it is better to be unhappy and have true beliefs than to be happy and have false beliefs. He writes that “it is a greater perfection to know the truth, even though it is to our disadvantage, than not to know it” (AT IV: 305; Shapiro: 116). For this reason, it is “better to be less gay and to have more knowledge” than to “deceive oneself in going over false imaginings” (AT IV: 305; Shapiro: 116). Thus, on Descartes’ view, we should not try to derive joy from false beliefs but rather acquire true beliefs, even if doing so makes us less joyful.

Frierson’s account, I argue, fails to recognize that Descartes holds we should only derive joy from true beliefs. Frierson (forthcoming) writes, “Cartesian love calls for adopting attitudes towards the world that are at odds with how that world really is; we treat ourselves as united with others, when in fact we are distinct substances” (6). He writes that the practical argument that we should consider ourselves as forming a whole with others because doing so brings us joy involves “a sort of noble lie” (6). The argument “gives an agent reasons to consider herself to be part of a whole without providing any metaphysical justification for the claim that she *is* part of a whole” (6). However, we have seen that Descartes repeatedly states that true beliefs about metaphysics should inform us about how to live.

One could argue that this objection to Frierson’s argument is unsuccessful, since on his view, the person who considers herself as forming a whole with others recognizes that she is

only adopting this belief for practical reasons. Surely, one may argue, it is better (epistemically speaking) to know that one is adopting a false belief for practical reasons than it is to sincerely hold a false belief. I agree that it is a philosophically reasonable position to hold that it is better to knowingly adopt a belief that is false than to unknowingly do so. However, I am not sure that Descartes accepts this position in this context.⁴² In the scenario he discusses in the above passage, it seems the hypothetical person recognizes that she has false beliefs about her goods, yet Descartes still discourages this behavior. He questions the permissibility of making oneself happy by “*imagining* the goods one possesses to be greater and more valuable than they are” and questions whether one should try to “*deceive oneself* in going over false imaginings” (AT IV: 305-6; Shapiro: 116; emphasis added). The wording of these passages suggests that the person is intentionally lying to themselves about the value of goods they possess. However, even if Descartes does accept that it is better to knowingly adopt a belief that is false than to unknowingly do so, it is surely still better to knowingly adopt a belief that is true. I argue that this is what happens when we adopt the belief that we are part of a whole.

- B. Considering ourselves as a small part of a vast universe prevents us from forming the false belief that humans are the end of creation.

Descartes argues that understanding the extensity of the universe prevents one from believing the universe is created for the sake of humans. In a letter to Chanut, Descartes argues that the world is “indefinite” by which he means “we have no reason which proves it has bounds” (AT V: 51; CSMK III: 320). He does not discuss the idea that we form a whole with other parts of the world in this letter, but he does focus on the idea that the world is vast, especially in comparison to individual humans. Recognizing that the world is vast leads to

⁴² Admittedly, Descartes may accept that we should knowingly adopt false beliefs in some contexts. For example, in the *First Meditation*, the meditator knowingly adopts the belief that he is dreaming or being deceived by an evil demon.

questions about the status of humans in relation to the rest of the world. He writes, “if the extension of the universe is supposed indefinite,” the “prerogatives which religion attributes to human beings need some explanation” (AT V: 53; CSMK III: 321). The prerogatives religion attributes to humans include the idea that the world was created for the benefit of humans, and that humans have perfections other creatures do not have. He writes that “created beings are of service to each other,” and “we are [not] obliged to believe that man is the end of creation” (AT V: 53-4; CSMK III: 321). Religious figures lead us to believe that everything in the world was created for the benefit of humans and “do not bring our attention to the other ends for which [God] might be said to have made them” (AT V: 54; CSMK III: 321). Even the Incarnation does not show that humans are privileged above the rest of creation, on Descartes’ view. He writes, “I do not see that the mystery of the Incarnation, and all the other favours God has done to man, rule out his having done countless other great favours to an infinity of other creatures” (AT V: 54; CSMK III: 321). Thus, Descartes maintains that creatures in the universe could be created for purposes unrelated to humans and that God may do “favours” for creatures in the universe besides humans. Recognizing the vastness of the universe leads one to have this realization.

Descartes also maintains that considering the extensity of the universe prevents one from thinking humans have perfections that other creatures do not have. The idea that the universe is indefinite raises the possibility that the universe contains creatures outside of this world. Descartes writes that from the indefinite nature of the universe, he does not “infer that there are intelligent creatures in the stars or elsewhere,” but also does not see “that there is any argument to prove that there are not” (AT V: 55; CSMK III: 321). We are accustomed to believing that humans have “great advantages over other creatures,” but if there are other intelligent creatures in the universe, “it looks as if we lose” these advantages (AT V: 55; CSMK III: 321). Descartes’

response to the idea that humans may not have perfections that are unique to them is to argue that the perfections humans have are not diminished by other creatures also having them. Glory and riches are more valuable the fewer the people who have them. However,

virtue, knowledge, health, and in general all other goods considered in themselves without regard to glory are not in any way lessened in us through being found in many others; and so we have no grounds for being distressed because they are shared by others (AT V: 55; CSMK III: 321-2).

Thus, on Descartes' view, we have no reason to be worried that other creatures in the universe may have perfections that we typically think are unique to humans. In fact, Descartes concludes this point by writing, "when we love God and through him unite ourselves willingly to all the things he has created, then the more great, noble and perfect we reckon them" (AT V: 55; CSMK III: 322).

The idea that humans are not the end of creation arises throughout Descartes' works. In the *Principles*, he writes, "it is wholly improbable that all things were in fact made for our benefit, in the sense that they have no other use" (AT VIIIA: 81; CSM I: 249). In his letter to Hyperaspistes, Descartes writes,

it would be childish and absurd for a metaphysician to assert that God...had no other purpose in making the universe than to win man's praise; or that the sun, which is many times larger than the earth, was created for no other purpose than to give light to man, who occupies a very small part of the earth (AT III: 431-2; CSMK III: 195).

Finally, in his conversation with Frans Burman, Descartes states, "we ought not to have so high an opinion of ourselves as to think that everything in the universe is to be found here on earth, or exists for our benefit" (AT V: 168; CSMK III: 349).⁴³ I point this out here because there is a widely held view that Descartes believes humans are privileged over the rest of creation and should therefore make use of nature for our own ends. Such a view is strongly motivated by his

⁴³ See also AT IV: 292; Shapiro: 112.

claim in the *Discourse on Method* that we can “make ourselves, as it were, the lords and masters of nature” (AT VI: 62; CSM I: 142-3). However, Descartes’ perspective on the relation between humans and the rest of nature is clearly more nuanced than this commonly held view suggests.⁴⁴

IV. Love of God and Considering Oneself as Part of a Whole

We began this chapter with Descartes’ argument that we are able to experience the passion of love toward God by considering the smallness of ourselves in relation to the vastness of God’s creation. This is puzzling because on Descartes’ view, the passion of love is typically caused by perceiving objects through the senses that appear suitable for oneself. Descartes himself says that “the attributes of God most commonly considered are so high above us that we do not see at all how they can be fitting for us” and “nothing about God can be visualized by the imagination” (AT IV: 608; CSMK III: 308-9).

We are, however, able to arouse intellectual love of God by considering ourselves as a small part of God’s creation.⁴⁵ Intellectual love is a form of love that is caused by the soul, rather than by perceptions of external objects. Descartes writes that intellectual love

consists simply in the fact that when our soul perceives some present or absent good, which it judges to be fitting for itself, it joins itself to it willingly, that is to say, it considers itself and the good in question as forming two parts of a single whole (AT IV: 601; CSMK III: 306).

The soul can judge qualities of God to be fitting for itself. For example, it can judge that God’s infinite knowledge is “at the point toward which ours strives” or that God created “so many things of which we are only a tiny part” (AT IV: 608; CSMK III: 309). When the soul experiences intellectual love of God, it imagines itself as forming a whole with the rest of God’s creation. Descartes writes,

⁴⁴ See Cecilia Wee (2001) for an excellent analysis of this topic.

⁴⁵ Descartes also lists other ways in which we can arouse intellectual love of God, such as considering God’s infinite knowledge or power.

although we cannot imagine anything in God, who is the object of our love, we can imagine our love itself, which consists in our wanting to unite ourselves to some object. That is, we can consider ourselves in relation to God as a minute part of all the immensity of the created universe (AT IV: 610; CSMK III: 310).

Thus, Descartes maintains that imagining ourselves as forming a whole with God's creation is the means by which we imagine ourselves as forming a whole with God. In the correspondence with Chanut, Descartes suggests that the main obstacle to experiencing the passion of love toward God is that we cannot imagine ourselves as forming a whole with God. He writes that one may think we are unable to have the passion of love toward God because "it appears that [the soul] cannot communicate [intellectual] love to the imaginative faculty so as to make it a passion" (AT IV: 610; CSMK III: 310).⁴⁶ However, since one can imagine oneself as forming a whole with the rest of God's creation, and since imagining oneself as forming a whole with the rest of God's creation is sufficient for imagining oneself as forming a whole with God, one is able to experience the passion of love toward God when one imagines oneself as forming a whole with the rest of God's creation.

In his correspondence with Elisabeth, Descartes writes that love of God causes one to further the interests of the wholes of which one is a part over one's own. This occurs in the letter in which he writes that we should think of ourselves as a part of the universe and earth, as well as our state, society, and family (AT IV: 293; Shapiro: 112). For the majority of this letter, he focuses on the wholes we form with our state, society, and family, rather than the whole we form with the universe. We should further the interests of our states, societies, and families over our own for various reasons, including that doing so makes us more virtuous, heroic, and benevolent (AT IV: 293-4; Shapiro: 112). Descartes writes that one is "naturally drawn" to have the

⁴⁶ See also: Intellectual love "would have to pass through the imagination if it were to reach the senses by way of the intellect" (AT IV: 607; CSMK III: 309).

consideration that “he owes more to the public of which he is a part than to himself in particular,” when “one knows and loves God as one should” (AT IV: 294; Shapiro: 113). The reason for this is that when one knows and loves God as one should, one “abandon[s] oneself completely to His will, one divests oneself of one’s proper interests, and one has no other passion than that of doing what one believes would be agreeable to Him” (AT IV: 294; Shapiro: 113). In order to fully understand this claim, we should examine the consequences of loving God, as well as the relation between the universe and smaller societies.

When one knows and loves God as one should, one imagines oneself as forming a whole with the rest of creation. Moreover, when one imagines oneself as forming a whole with the rest of creation, one becomes more caring toward the rest of creation. This is clear from Descartes’ general rule that when one considers oneself as forming a whole with something, one becomes more caring toward them. In his correspondence with Chanut, he writes, “It is the nature of love to make one consider oneself and the object loved as single whole of which one is but a part; and to transfer the care one previously took of oneself to the preservation of this whole” (AT IV: 611; CSMK III: 311).⁴⁷ As we saw above, when one loves God, one does not imagine oneself as forming a whole with God, but rather imagines oneself as forming a whole with God’s creation. Since we are benevolent toward the whole of which we imagine ourselves to be a part, we are benevolent toward God’s creation when we love God. This goes some way in explaining why we care about the interests of the public over our own when we know and love God: We are more caring toward other parts of God’s creation because we imagine ourselves as forming a whole with them.

⁴⁷ See also: “For as soon as we have joined ourselves in volition to some object, whatever its nature may be, we have benevolence for it” (AT XI: 388; Voss: 63).

In his letter to Elisabeth, though, Descartes does not say that we are more benevolent toward the rest of creation when we love God, but that we are more benevolent toward the public of which we are a part. What is the relation between the whole of creation and societies within the whole? There are a few passages in which Descartes suggests societies are established by God in the same way that the universe is established by God. That is, societies are also created by God to function well. He writes,

God has so established the order of things and conjoined men together in so tight a society that even if each person related himself wholly to himself and had no charity for others, he would not ordinarily fail to work for them in everything that would be in his power, so long as he used prudence, and principally if he lived in a time when mores were not corrupted (AT IV: 316-7; Shapiro 121-2).

Descartes also repeatedly says that sovereigns are instituted by God. He writes that “God has set up sovereigns over his people” (AT VI: 61; CSM I: 142), and that “God gives the right to those to whom he gives force” (AT IV: 487; Shapiro: 141). Based on these passages, some scholars have argued that Descartes maintains societies are established by God in the same way the universe is established by God. For example, Simone Goyard-Fabre (1973) writes, “According to Descartes, the order of cities is, in the same way as the order of nature, the work of God” (312).⁴⁸ Descartes comments on the structure of societies so infrequently, however, that I do not believe we have enough textual evidence to prove that societies are created by God to function well on his view. I also do not think that my view that the universe is a whole created by God to function well commits me to the view that societies are also wholes created by God to function well. It

⁴⁸ “Original text: “*L’ordre des cites est d’ailleurs, selon lui, au même titre que l’ordre de la nature, l’oeuvre de Dieu. Cela suffit à expliquer sa déférente allégance.*” Cecilia Wee (2002) also discusses the relation between the order of the universe and smaller societies, though she does not make such a strong claim. She states, “the Cartesian ethical agent sees the universe as embodying a God-enacted order. Far from being alienated from the universe, she recognizes herself to be a part of this wider order, fulfilling a specific function within the overall whole. In recognizing herself to be part of this (and smaller) God-enacted order, she does not relentlessly pursue her own goods and gains, but places the interests of these orders above her own” (262-3). See also Morgan 1994, pgs. 84-5.

could be that some societies function poorly, and the poor functioning of these societies somehow contributes to the overall well-functioning of the universe, in the same way that imperfections in a human can contribute to the overall perfection of the universe.

The reason, I argue, why we are more benevolent to the public when we know and love God is that imagining oneself as a small part of a vast universe (which, as we have seen, occurs when we love God) causes one to esteem members of the public more highly. As we saw in Section III.B, Descartes maintains that considering oneself as a small part of a vast universe prevents one from thinking of oneself as the end of creation. When we consider the vastness of the universe, we recognize our own smallness, as well as the possibility for other creatures to have the same perfections that are within us. As Descartes writes, “when we love God and through him unite ourselves willingly to all the things he has created, then the more great, noble and perfect we reckon them” (AT V: 55; CSMK III: 322). He also maintains that the more highly we esteem something, the more care we afford it. In his correspondence with Chanut, he writes that when one loves someone, one “keeps for oneself only a part of one’s care, a part which is great or little in proportion to whether one thinks oneself a larger or smaller part of the whole to which one has given one’s affection” (AT IV: 611-2; CSMK: 311). In *The Passions of the Soul*, he writes that “we are always ready to abandon the lesser part of the whole we compose with [the thing loved] in order to preserve the other” (AT XI: 390; Voss: 64). Since we esteem other parts of creation more highly when we love God, and since we are more willing to sacrifice our interests for those we esteem highly, we will be more willing to sacrifice our interests for other members of the public when we love God.

V. Conclusion

I have been arguing that we form a whole with the universe because it is created by God to function well. One may wonder whether we also form a whole with individual things in the universe. For example, one may wonder about the relation between a particular person and a tree outside of their home, given the view that the universe is a functionally organized whole created by God. On my view, all individual things in the universe are parts of a functionally organized whole created by God. However, I am not arguing that random combinations of individual things in the universe also form wholes.⁴⁹ For example, a person and tree are both parts of a functionally organized whole created by God, but on their own, they may not form a whole.

I am thus doubtful of the idea that Descartes accepts mereological universalism, the view that any combination of objects forms a whole.⁵⁰ According to mereological universalism, a person and tree outside of their home form a whole, and to use Michael Rea's example, my left tennis shoe, W.V. Quine, and the Taj Mahal form a whole (1998, 347). I do not see any evidence for thinking Descartes accepts this view. He maintains the universe forms a whole because it is created by God to function well, but that does not entail that combinations of things in the universe are also created by God to function well. Analogously, one may hold that a watch forms a whole, but the hour hand and strap (on their own) do not form a whole. The body forms a whole, one may think, but the nose and left thumb (on their own) do not form a whole. This is the view, I think, Descartes accepts with regard to the universe. The universe in its entirety is a functionally organized whole, but combinations of things in the universe do not necessarily form functionally organized wholes.

⁴⁹ Descartes does maintain that we can form wholes with those we love (AT XI: 387; Voss: 62, AT IV: 601-2; CSMK III: 306; AT IV: 612; CSMK III: 311). I will address this view in Chapter 4. Here, I am addressing whether we form a whole with random objects in the universe.

⁵⁰ See van Inwagen (1990) Chapter 8 and Rea (1998).

In this chapter, I have analyzed Descartes' claim that we should consider ourselves as forming a whole with others. I have argued that we should consider ourselves as forming a whole with others because we actually do form a whole with others. We form a whole with other parts of the universe in the sense that parts of the universe are intentionally created by God to function well together. This sense of forming a whole is similar in some ways to the sense in which intentionally created objects form a whole and similar in other ways to the sense in which functionally organized objects form a whole. Descartes repeatedly says that our moral beliefs should be based on metaphysical truths, and he warns against deriving joy from false beliefs. Frierson's view that we do not form a whole with others, but should consider ourselves as forming a whole with others because doing so increases our joy is contrary to this view. I have shown that Descartes' moral claim that we should see ourselves as forming a whole with others is based on the metaphysical truth that we do form a whole with others. Finally, I argued that the passion of love toward God leads one to treat other parts of creation more benevolently because the passion of love toward God involves considering oneself as forming a whole with other parts of creation.

Chapter IV: Descartes on Hatred and Love Toward Humans

In this chapter, I examine the effects of hatred and love on the soul. Hatred separates us from goods within others, causes sadness, and produces vicious character traits. Love of good objects, however, increases our perfection, causes joy, and produces virtuous character traits. We should avoid hating others, on Descartes' view, because of the harmful effects of hatred. While one may argue that hatred is necessary to protect the body, according to Descartes, I argue that there are other means of protecting the body that do not require hatred. We are not obligated to love every person, but we do receive beneficial effects of love when we love any person. All people have perfections, and we are able to share in these perfections when we love them.

I begin in Section I by outlining the definitions of hatred and love. I explain that hatred separates us from goods within others, causes sadness, and makes us malicious. Love of good objects, on the other hand, increases our perfection, produces joy, and makes us more caring. In Section II, I argue that hatred is not necessary to protect the body because there are other means of protecting the body that do not require hatred, namely pain and judgments about harmful objects. In Section III, I argue that love of any person is able to increase our perfection, produce joy, and make us more caring. Every person has good qualities within them, and love allows us to join with these good qualities. I argue that we are not obligated to love every person equally, but we are obligated to esteem them equally, since every person has free will.

I. The Harms of Hatred and Benefits of Love

In his discussion of the passions "insofar as they belong to the soul," Descartes writes that hatred "cannot be so little that it fails to harm" (AT XI: 433; Voss: 94). Love of good

objects, however, “cannot be too great” and is “incomparably better” than hatred (AT XI: 433; Voss: 93-4). Hatred is harmful to the soul because it separates the soul from goods, produces sadness, and makes one malicious. Love of good objects is beneficial to the soul because it joins goods to us, causes joy, and makes us more caring. I begin by outlining Descartes’ definitions of hatred and love. I then examine Descartes’ reasons for thinking that we should not hate; namely, hatred separates us from goods within others, causes sadness, and produces vicious character traits. Finally, I explain his reasons for thinking that we should love; namely, love joins goods to us, causes joy, and makes us more caring.

A. The definitions of hatred and love

Descartes defines hatred as “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” (AT XI: 387; Voss: 62). Let us recall that he defines love as “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” (AT XI: 387; Voss: 62). As we have seen, passions are typically caused by perceptions of objects that can affect our wellbeing. Hatred is typically caused by the perception of an object that appears harmful to oneself, while love is typically caused by the perception of an object that appears good for oneself. As Descartes writes, “when a thing is represented to us as good from our point of view, that is, as being suitable to us, this makes us have Love for it, and when it is represented to us as bad or harmful, this excites us to Hatred” (AT XI: 374; Voss: 53). We have also seen that passions are “perceptions or sensations or excitations of the soul...which are caused, maintained, and strengthened by some movement of the spirits” (AT XI: 349; Voss: 34). Thus, hatred consists of a thought of an object that appears harmful that is caused, maintained, and strengthened by animal spirits. Love, as we discussed in Chapter 2, consists of a thought of an

object that appears suitable that is caused, maintained, and strengthened by animal spirits.

Descartes writes that in hatred, “spirits going to the brain...strengthen the ideas of Hatred that are imprinted there already,” whereas in love, “spirits...[strengthen] the impression which the first thought of the lovable object has formed there [and] compel the soul to dwell upon that thought” (AT XI: 404-5; Voss: 75).

Hatred typically causes the volition to separate oneself from the object of hatred. Love typically causes the volition to join oneself with the object of love. In Chapter 2, I argued that the volition to join oneself with an object of love is an action of the soul that typically follows from the passion of love. It is an action of the soul because the soul wills to consider itself as forming a whole with the object of love. We know the volition to join with an object typically follows, rather than is part of the essence of love, because it is a volition rather than a passion. It is unclear how a volition could be an essential part of a passion, given Descartes’ distinction between volitions and passions (AT XI: 342; Voss: 28). Additionally, Descartes repeatedly describes passions as thoughts that cause actions that are beneficial to the body.⁵¹ On my view, the passion of love is the thought of an apparent good, and this thought typically causes the action to join with the object of love. Similarly, hatred is the thought of an object that appears harmful to oneself, and this thought typically causes the action to separate oneself from the object of hatred. When one wills to separate oneself from an object, one imagines oneself as separate from the object. As Descartes says, “in hatred we consider ourselves alone as a whole, entirely separated from the thing for which we have the aversion” (AT XI: 387; Voss: 62).

B. The harmfulness of hatred

⁵¹He describes passions as thoughts in this passage: AT XI: 349-50; Voss: 33-4. He states that passions lead to actions that are beneficial for the body in these passages: AT XI: 359; Voss: 40-1, AT XI: 372; Voss: 51-2, and AT XI: 430; Voss: 92.

Descartes holds that whenever we think of ourselves as separate from an object, we separate ourselves from the goods within that object. This claim relies on the substantive metaphysical view that evil is a privation of the good, and every existing object must be good in some way. We see Descartes endorse this view in *The Passions* and in his correspondence with Elisabeth. In *The Passions*, he says, “evil, being only a privation, cannot be conceived without some real subject which it is in, and there is nothing real that does not have some goodness in it” (AT XI: 433; Voss: 95).⁵² In a letter to Elisabeth, Descartes writes, “according to philosophy, evil is nothing real but only a privation” (AT IV: 308; Shapiro: 117).⁵³ Since evil is a privation, everything that exists must have some goodness within it simply because something that exists is not a complete privation. Hatred toward an object separates us from the goodness within the object. In Descartes’ words, “Hatred that estranges us from some evil estranges us by that very means from the good it is joined to” (AT XI: 433; Voss: 95). As an example, Descartes states that the “hatred that estranges us from someone’s bad behavior estranges us by that very means from his company, in which we would otherwise be able to find some good” (AT XI: 433; Voss: 95). He therefore presents a view in which everything in the world has some goodness within it. Hatred causes us to consider ourselves as separate from objects that appear harmful, which separates us from the goods within those objects.

Separating ourselves from goods within others causes sadness. Descartes defines sadness as an “unpleasant languor, wherein consists the distress which the soul receives from the evil or defect which the impressions of the brain represent to it as belonging to it” (AT XI: 397; Voss: 70). In hatred, the evil or defect that is presented to the soul is the lack of the good from which

⁵² For further analysis on Descartes’ view of evil as a privation, particularly how his view is influenced by Augustine, see Menn 1998, 306-7.

⁵³ See also: “there is no good whose privation is not an evil” (AT XI: 393; Voss: 66).

hatred separates us. In other words, one is sad when one experiences hatred because one is estranged from the good within the object of hatred, and this estrangement is represented to the soul as something bad that belongs to it. In Descartes' words,

[Hatred] is never without Sadness, because evil, being only a privation, cannot be conceived without some real subject 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 (AT XI: 433; Voss: 95).

To return to Descartes' example of the person with bad behavior, the person who estranges himself from his friend experiences sadness at the lack of his friend's company (AT XI: 433; Voss: 95). Here, the defect that is represented as belonging to himself is the missed company of his friend.

Another reason why it is bad to separate oneself from goods is that separation from goods causes one to become malicious and friendless. Corresponding with Descartes, Chanut asks whether immoderate love or immoderate hatred is worse (AT IV: 613; CSMK III: 311).

Descartes says that if we consider the worse passion to be the passion that decreases virtue, then hatred is worse than love (AT IV: 613; CSMK III: 312). His reason for thinking that hatred decreases virtue relies on his observation of the "inclinations or habits which arise" from hatred (AT IV: 614; CSMK III: 312). He says,

Love, however immoderate, always has the good for its object, and so it seems to me that it cannot corrupt our morals as much as hatred, whose only object is evil. We see by experience that the best people, if they are obliged to hate someone, become malicious by degrees; for even if their hatred is just, they so often call to mind the evils they receive from their enemy, and the evils they wish him, that they become gradually accustomed to malice (AT IV: 614; CSMK III: 312).

Thus, Descartes asserts that we can know from observation that individuals who are inclined to hatred develop negative character traits and lack friends. Descartes also makes this point in his

correspondence with Elisabeth. He writes that “if one related everything to oneself,” one would “not fear harming other men” and would have “no true friends” (AT IV: 293; Shapiro: 112).

Thus, hatred causes us to treat others maliciously and prevents us from having friends.

C. Beneficial effects of love

Descartes writes that love of truly good objects is “extremely good because, joining true goods to us, it perfects us to that extent” (AT XI: 432; Voss: 94). Love of truly good objects increases the perfection of the soul. Descartes maintains there are effects of love on the soul that are unrelated to the body. In articles 139 to 142, he examines the use of the passions “insofar as they belong to the soul” (AT XI: 432; Voss: 93). He explains that when he considers passions insofar as they belong to the soul, he considers them “in abstraction, in themselves, and when they do not incline us to any action” (AT XI: 435; Voss: 96). Love of truly good objects, then, is good for the soul regardless of the actions it leads to or how it affects the body. In the above passage, we see that love of truly good objects “join[s] true goods to us” and thereby “perfects us.” The soul becomes more perfect when it loves truly good objects because it shares in the good qualities within the object of love. As Descartes writes, “the only thing that the most immoderate [love] can do is join us so perfectly to those goods that the Love we have for ourselves in particular makes no distinction between us and them” (AT XI: 432; Voss: 94). He makes a similar point in his correspondence with Elisabeth, although he does not mention love specifically. He writes, “if we consider ourselves as a part of some other body, we participate as well in those goods held in common” (AT IV: 308; Shapiro: 117). Some scholars, such as Patrick Frierson (2002), have interpreted this passage to mean that we enjoy the goods within those we love.⁵⁴ However, Descartes does not say we enjoy these goods; he says that we “participate” in

⁵⁴ See Frierson (2002), pages 333-4.

them. We are able to share in the good qualities within those we love, which increases our perfection.

Descartes writes that love of good objects “never fails to produce Joy” (AT XI: 432; Voss: 94). He holds that joy is caused by the representation of a good that belongs to oneself. When we love a good object, we have the representation of this good belonging to us, which then produces joy. As Descartes says, love “is necessarily followed by Joy because it represents to us what we love as a good that belongs to us” (AT XI: 432; Voss: 94). Since love produces the representation that a good belongs to us, and since joy is caused by this representation, love always produces joy. In his correspondence with Chanut, Descartes writes, “Love...however immoderate it may be, gives pleasure” (AT IV: 614; CSMK III: 312). Thus, on Descartes’ view, we experience pleasure when we consider ourselves as forming a whole with someone or something. We have the representation that goods belong to us when we consider ourselves as forming a whole with something, which then produces the passion of joy.⁵⁵

Finally, love is beneficial for the soul because it makes us more caring. As we have seen, Descartes maintains that the “inclinations or habits” that arise from love are better than those that arise from hatred (AT IV: 613; CSMK III: 312). He writes that “Love, however immoderate, always has the good for its object” (AT IV: 614; CSMK III: 312). The idea that we want good things to happen to objects of love appears throughout Descartes’ discussions of love. He writes that it is within the “nature of love” to “transfer the care one previously took of oneself” to the whole one forms with the object of one’s love (AT IV: 611; CSMK III: 311). He provides

⁵⁵ There is a passage in Descartes’ correspondence with Chanut that undermines the claim that intellectual love always produces joy. Descartes writes that we will experience sadness if we perceive that the object of our love is absent, or desire if we perceive that it “would be a good thing to acquire” the object of love (AT IV: 601-2; CSMK III: 306). I am not sure what to make of this inconsistency. Descartes clearly and repeatedly says that love insofar as it belongs to the soul is always followed by joy in *The Passions*. My hypothesis is that Descartes was working out his views on intellectual love between the time of his letter to Chanut and the publication of *The Passions*.

several examples of people who strive to bring about good things for the object of their love. For example, a “good father” seeks his children’s “good as his own or with even greater solicitude” and “often prefers their interests to his” (AT XI: 389; Voss: 63-4). One who considers oneself as a “part of the public” “act[s] well toward everyone” and “does not fear even exposing one’s life for the service of others” (AT IV: 293; Shapiro: 112).⁵⁶ Thus, Descartes maintains that the inclinations that arise from love are better than those that arise from hatred because the inclinations that arise from love involve benevolence and care toward other people. Hence, Descartes maintains that “those who abandon themselves to love, even if their love is immoderate and frivolous, often become more decent and virtuous than if they turned their mind to other thoughts” (AT IV: 614; CSMK III: 312).

II. Hatred and Preservation of the Body

The reasons why hatred is harmful primarily have to do with its effects on the soul. As we saw in the previous section, hatred separates the soul from goods, causes sadness, and makes one malicious. However, one might argue that individuals should experience hatred in some cases because hatred preserves the body. I argue that this is mistaken because there are means of preserving the body that do not require hatred. Given the harmful effects of hatred on the soul, we should strive to employ these other methods for protecting the body and avoid hatred.

In article 137, Descartes describes the “use” of love, hatred, joy, sadness, and desire “insofar as they have reference to the body” (AT XI: 429; Voss: 91). The use of these passions, he writes, 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” (AT XI: 430; Voss: 92). The feeling of pain causes sadness, sadness causes hatred, and hatred causes the desire to eliminate the source of the

⁵⁶ See also AT XI: 388; Voss: 63.

pain (AT XI: 430; Voss: 92). Thus, Descartes writes, hatred is “in a way primary and more necessary” 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” (AT XI: 430; Voss: 92). While hatred is harmful to the soul, Descartes writes that “Hatred of evil manifested only by pain is necessary with respect to the body” (AT XI: 433; Voss: 95).

The point that hatred is useful for the preservation of the body is picked up by Hasana Sharp (2011) in “Hate’s Body: Danger and the Flesh in Descartes’ *Passions of the Soul*.” She writes that “attention to Descartes’ account of hatred, love’s necessary complement...reveals that it is precisely our embodiment that requires us to assert and maintain our power to withdraw from relationships and affirm our distinctness” (2011, 356). Descartes writes, “*if we had no body*, I should be so bold as to say that we could not abandon ourselves too much to Love and Joy, or shun Hatred and Sadness too much” (AT XI: 434; Voss: 95; emphasis added). While hatred is harmful to the soul, the interests of the body are opposed to the interests of the soul, and as long as we are embodied, hatred “cannot be shunned but must be moderately sustained and given due weight to protect ourselves from noxious elements” (367-8).

While Descartes does maintain that hatred can be useful in protecting the body, I do not think he holds that hatred is *necessary* to protect the body. In what follows, I specify two ways that the passions are typically thought to protect the body – by informing individuals about the ways in which objects can affect their wellbeing and by motivating individuals to undertake salutary actions. I then show that hatred is not necessary to protect the body, because we can be informed about the harmfulness of objects and motivate ourselves to separate from harmful objects without experiencing hatred. Finally, I argue that Descartes’ remarks about the wellbeing of the soul and generosity support my claim that on his view, we should not hate others.

A. How the passions protect the body

Many commentators think Descartes holds that passions inform us about the different ways in which objects can affect our wellbeing.⁵⁷ For instance, Lisa Shapiro (2003) writes that “it is through the passions that nature tells us what is useful to us” (221). Amy Schmitter (2008) states that a passion “conveys a great deal of information about its object” (187). The primary textual evidence for this view is that Descartes repeatedly describes passions as representing their objects in particular ways. For example, he says, “Abhorrence is instituted by Nature to represent to the soul a sudden and unexpected death,” and “Delight is particular instituted by Nature to represent the enjoyment of what delights as the greatest of all the goods that belong to man” (AT XI: 394-5; Voss: 67). Thus, many commentators think passions include representational content about the importance of objects to us. For instance, John Marshall (1998) says that “Cartesian passions have propositional content; they represent things as having value or disvalue” (121). Susan James (1999) argues that passions contain “evaluations of good and harm” (103).⁵⁸ If it is the case that passions include accurate representational content about the various ways that external objects can affect our wellbeing, then passions will be useful to us as a source of information. On this view, hatred would be useful to the body because it provides us with accurate information about which objects are harmful to us.

Other commentators argue that passions are useful to us, according to Descartes, because they influence the will to take actions that are beneficial for the body. His description of the use of the passions and his physiological account of the passions provide the main textual support for this position. In passages where Descartes explicitly states why he thinks the passions are useful,

⁵⁷ I also discuss the use of the passions in Chapter 1 Section C.

⁵⁸ See also Alanen (2003), who states that “in feeling fear, I represent its object as threatening or dangerous. Fear as an emotion is a mode of representing or thinking of a thing” (187).

he emphasizes the influence of the passions on the will. For example, he states that “the use of all the passions consists in this alone: they *dispose the soul to will the things* nature tells us are useful and to persist in this volition” (AT XI: 372; Voss: 51; emphasis added).⁵⁹ Further in article 74, he writes that the “utility of all the passions consists only in their strengthening thoughts which it is good that [the soul] preserve” (AT XI: 383; Voss: 59). This has led commentators to argue that passions influence the will in order to bring about salutary actions. For example, Marie Jayasekera (2020) argues that passions “incline the will” by “representing things or situations as possessing various properties” (73). Sean Greenberg (2007) argues the passions can “bring the will to incline one way rather than another in cases where it might otherwise have remained indifferent” (726).⁶⁰

As we saw in Chapter 1, passions influence the will by moving the pineal gland via the animal spirits. The movement of animal spirits that accompanies passions also prepares the body to take actions that are beneficial to it. As Descartes says, “the same agitation of spirits that usually causes [passions] disposes the body to the movements conducive to the execution of” the “things nature tells us are useful” (AT XI: 372; Voss: 52). For example, “the course...spirits take...to impart the movement to the gland by which fear is put in the soul” also “proceed at the same time toward the nerves that move the legs to flee” (AT XI: 358; Voss: 40). Jayasekera (2020) explains this phenomenon well, writing, “the physiological mechanisms causing and accompanying the passions...initiate the bodily movements that are conducive to the well-being

⁵⁹ See also: The passions “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” (AT XI: 430; Voss: 92; emphasis added). “For it is necessary to notice that the principal effect of all the passions in men is that they *incite and dispose their soul to will the things* for which they prepare their body” (AT XI: 359; Voss: 40-1; emphasis added).

⁶⁰ See also Brown (2006), pgs. 73-4.

of the mind-body composite, in tandem with the passions' effect on the will" (88).⁶¹ On this view, passions are useful because they influence the will to take actions that are beneficial to the body and prepare the body to take these actions. Hatred in particular would influence the will and prepare the body to separate itself from objects that appear harmful.

B. Why hatred is not necessary to protect the body

I do not deny that hatred can inform us about harmful objects. However, I think there are other ways to receive information about harmful objects that do not require hatred. In *The Passions of the Soul*, Descartes states that we can be informed about harmful objects through our senses, particularly pain. He says, "For the soul is immediately informed of things that harm the body only by the sensation it has of pain" (AT XI: 430; Voss: 92). In another passage in *The Passions*, Descartes writes that pain is "instituted by nature to signify to the soul the damage the body receives" (AT XI: 400; Voss: 71). He makes this point in the *Meditations* as well, stating, "The proper purpose of the sensory perceptions given me by nature is simply to inform the mind of what is beneficial or harmful for the composite of which the mind is a part" (AT VII: 83; CSM II: 57).⁶² In these passages, we see that pain informs us about objects that are harmful to us. Thus, we do not need to experience hatred to know that an object is harmful to us. Let us recall that Descartes states, "Hatred of evil manifested *only by pain* is necessary with respect to the body" (AT XI: 433; Voss: 95; emphasis added). Here, Descartes suggests that pain is necessary to protect our body, but other aspects of hatred, such as the thought of a harmful object that is caused, maintained, and strengthened by animal spirits, are not necessary.

⁶¹ See also Marshall (1998): "Typically, the same motions of the gland that cause the passions also cause the muscles and limbs to move in ways that preserve the integrity, strength, and health of the body" (102).

⁶² See also: "There is nothing that my own nature teaches me more vividly than that I have a body, and that when I feel pain there is something wrong with the body" (AT VII: 80; CSM II: 56).

I also do not deny that hatred can motivate us to separate from an object that appears harmful. However, I argue that our judgments can motivate us to separate ourselves from an object that appears harmful. In fact, Descartes maintains that our judgments are better guides for action than passions. Descartes holds that passions often misrepresent the goodness or badness of objects. He writes, “there are many things harmful to the body that cause no Sadness at the beginning, or even give Joy, and others that are useful to it though they are distressing at first” (AT XI: 431; Voss: 93). Moreover, the passions almost always exaggerate the goodness or badness of their objects. He writes that the passions “almost always make both the goods and the evils they represent appear much greater and more important than they are, so that they incite us to seek the former and flee the latter with more ardor and more anxiety than is suitable” (AT XI: 431; Voss: 93). In his correspondence with Elisabeth, he writes that “all our passions represent to us the goods they incite us to seek as much greater than they actually are” (AT IV: 295; Shapiro: 113).⁶³

These comments have led scholars, such as Shoshanna Brassfield (2012), to argue that “Descartes thinks that we should make an effort *not* to let our passions influence our judgements about what is beneficial or harmful” (467).⁶⁴ Rather, we should use reason to figure out the true value of objects that are presented to our senses. Descartes makes this point repeatedly in *The Passions* and correspondence with Elisabeth. He writes that “we should make use of experience and reason to distinguish the good from the evil and to discern their true worth” (AT XI: 431; Voss: 93). In his correspondence with Elisabeth, he states, “the true use of our reason in the conduct of life consists only in examining and considering without passion the value of all

⁶³ See also AT IV: 285; Shapiro: 108 and AT IV: 284; Shapiro: 108.

⁶⁴ See also Greenberg (2007) and Jayasekera (2020).

perfections...that can be acquired by our conduct” (AT IV: 286; Shapiro: 109).⁶⁵ He provides a “general remedy” for the passions that requires us to “abstain from making any immediate judgment” about objects that are presented to us by the passions and to “take into consideration and to follow the reasons opposed to those the Passion represents” (AT XI: 487; Voss: 134). Thus, on Descartes’ view, reason provides us with more accurate information about the value of objects than passions and is therefore a better guide for actions. Indeed, he writes that the “strongest souls” are those who have “firm and decisive judgments concerning the knowledge of good and evil, which it has resolved to follow in conducting the actions of its life,” while the “weakest souls” are those “whose will does not decide in this way to follow certain judgments, but continually allows itself to be carried away by present passions” (AT XI: 367; Voss: 46). Thus, on Descartes’ view, it is better to be guided by judgments regarding the harmfulness of objects than by hatred.

C. The wellbeing of the soul and generosity

Throughout his writings, Descartes places more value on the wellbeing of the soul than the body. After considering the usefulness of the passions to the body, he states, “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” (AT XI: 432; Voss: 93). In his correspondence with Elisabeth, he writes that the mind “subsists without the body and is much more noble than it and capable of enjoying an infinite number of contentments which are not found in this life” (AT IV: 292; Shapiro: 112). The “pleasures of the soul,” he writes, “can be as immortal as can it,” whereas “the pleasures proper to [the body] hardly last” (AT IV: 286; Shapiro: 109). I have argued that hatred has several harmful effects on the soul – it

⁶⁵ See also AT IV: 284; Shapiro: 108.

separates us from goods, produces sadness, and makes us malicious. Given the harmful effects of hatred on the soul and the importance of the wellbeing of the soul, we should strive to prevent ourselves from experiencing hatred. If hatred were necessary to protect the body, we would need to make difficult choices about whether the harm done to the soul in hatred is necessary to protect the wellbeing of the body. Fortunately, hatred is not necessary to protect the body. Thus, we are able to avoid experiencing the harmful effects of hatred on the soul while also protecting our body.

The idea that we should not hate others, on Descartes' view, is reinforced by his account of generosity. Generosity is central to Descartes' ethical views and theory of the passions. He describes generosity as "the key to all the other virtues, and a general remedy for all the disorders of the Passions" (AT XI: 454; Voss: 109).⁶⁶ Descartes defines generosity as the "understanding that there is nothing which truly belongs to [one] but this free control of [one's] volitions" and "feeling within [oneself] a firm and constant resolution to use it well" (AT XI: 446; Voss: 104). The generous person, to use a phrase from Deborah Brown (2006), "stands as an ideal measure of appropriate passions" (207). Thus, we can learn a lot about how we should experience passions, on Descartes' view, by observing how the generous person experiences passions.

Fortunately, Descartes devotes an article to explaining how generosity "serves as a remedy for all the disorders of the Passions" (AT XI: 447; Voss: 105). He writes,

[Those who are Generous] are entirely masters of their Passions – particularly Desires, Jealousy, and Envy, because there is nothing whose acquisition does not depend on them which they think is worth enough to deserve being greatly wished for; and Hatred of men, because they esteem them all; and finally Anger, because, esteeming only very little all things that depend on others, they never give their enemies such an advantage as to acknowledge being injured by them (AT XI: 448; Voss: 105).

⁶⁶ See also: Generosity "serves as a remedy for all the disorders of the Passions" (AT XI: 447; Voss: 105).

In this passage, we see that generous people are “masters” of hatred because they esteem every other person. In fact, Vance Morgan (1994) has described generosity as a “general remedy for contempt or hatred toward others” (198). The generous person, on Descartes’ view, realizes that every other person has free will and the ability to use it well. In his words, generous people “never scorn anyone” because they are “convinced that every other man can also have [this understanding and this feeling] about himself” (AT XI: 446; Voss: 106). Commentators have pointed out that on Descartes’ view, generous people do not even scorn vicious people. Marshall (1998) writes, “those who are characteristically unjust, cruel, brutal, greedy, arrogant, deceitful, ungrateful, bigoted, and boorish...do not merit contempt because, vicious as they may be, they have free will and are therefore capable of becoming *généreux* themselves” (152).⁶⁷

In the above passage, we also see that generous people do not display anger, which is a kind of hatred (AT XI: 477; Voss: 125), because the harms that others cause have little effect on them. He writes that generosity is the “best remedy” for excesses of anger because generosity makes us “greatly esteem liberty and absolute dominion over ourselves, which we cease to have when we can be injured by anyone” (AT XI: 481; Voss: 129). Thus, generous people do not hate others because they understand that everyone has the ability to recognize and use their free will well, and they do not become excessively angry because doing so would prevent them from being in control of themselves.

III. Humans as Proper Objects of Love

In this section, I argue that love of any person can increase our perfection, cause joy, and make us more caring. Descartes maintains that love of any object, regardless of its goodness,

⁶⁷ See also Marquardt (2015): “This optimistic evaluation of others is based on the view that a ‘virtuous will’, alone is worthy of esteem in oneself and in others, and above all, a generous person supposes others *capable* of virtue rather than supposing them to be somehow naturally inferior” (76).

produces joy and makes one more caring. However, he holds that only love of “truly good” objects increases our perfection (AT XI: 432; Voss: 94). I argue that every person is a “truly good” object of love in the sense that loving them joins us with their perfections. Every person possesses the perfection of free will and many possess other perfections as well, such as intelligence and virtue. There are several benefits to loving people, but we are not required to love every person. We should, however, esteem every person because every person has free will.

A. Love of any object produces joy and makes one more caring.

Descartes holds that joy always follows love, regardless of whether the object of love is truly good. He writes that love “is necessarily followed by Joy” (AT XI: 432; Voss: 94) and that even “immoderate” love “gives pleasure” (AT IV: 614; CSMK III: 312). The reason why love always causes joy is that love “represents to us what we love as a good that belongs to us” (AT XI: 432; Voss: 94). Joy is caused by the representation that a good belongs to us (AT XI: 396; Voss: 69). Thus, love always produces joy, regardless of whether the object of love actually is a good that belongs to us.

Descartes also maintains that love of any object makes us more caring. In his correspondence with Chanut, he writes that love is better than hatred, even when immoderate, because the “inclinations or habits” that arise from love are better than those that arise from hatred (AT IV: 613; CSMK III: 312). He states that people who “abandon themselves to love...often become more decent and virtuous than they would if they turned their mind to other thoughts” (AT IV: 614; CSMK III: 312). Generally, love is a passion that causes us to care and

have benevolence for objects of love.⁶⁸ Thus, love always produces benevolence, regardless of whether the object of love is good.

However, Descartes does not hold that love always increases our perfection. In his correspondence with Chanut, Descartes states,

love for an undeserving object can make us worse than hatred for an object we should love, because there is more danger in being joined to a thing which is bad, and in being as it were transformed into this thing, than there is in being separated willingly from a thing which is good (AT IV: 613; CSMK III: 312).

In *The Passions of the Soul*, he writes, “Love that is unjust joins us to things which may harm, or at least which deserve less consideration than we pay them, which disgraces and debases us” (AT XI: 435; Voss: 96). Thus, love does not always increase our perfection. In fact, love can be dangerous to us, as it can “transform” us into bad objects, and “disgrace and debase” us. In these passages, Descartes specifies that love of “undeserving objects” or objects “which deserve less consideration than we pay them” produces these negative effects. Thus, in order to show that love of any person can increase our perfection, we must show that every person is a “deserving” object of love. I argue that all humans possess good qualities, and these good qualities make them deserving objects of love.

B. All people possess good qualities.

One way to approach Descartes’ account of goodness is by examining qualities he repeatedly describes as good. Virtue, on his view, is good. He defines virtue as the “firm and constant resolution to execute all that reason advises [one] to do” (AT IV: 265; Shapiro: 98).⁶⁹ Having this firm and constant resolution, Descartes writes, is the “supreme good of each

⁶⁸ In *The Passions of the Soul*, Descartes writes that “as soon as we have joined ourselves in volition to some object, whatever its nature may be, we have benevolence for it” (AT XI: 388; Voss: 63). See also: love “always has the good for its object” (AT IV: 614; CSMK III: 312).

⁶⁹ See also AT V: 83; CSMK III: 325, AT XI: 442; Voss: 101, and AT XI: 446; Voss: 104.

individual” (AT V: 82; CSMK III: 324). In the *Principles of Philosophy*, Descartes describes wisdom as the supreme good. He writes, “the highest degree of wisdom...constitutes the supreme good of human life” (AT VIII A: 9; CSM I: 183).⁷⁰ Writing to Elisabeth, he describes health and joy as goods, saying, “you are now in better health and feel more joy than I have seen before. After virtue...I believe that these are the two principal goods we can have in this life” (AT IV: 589; Shapiro: 152-3). In the *Discourse on Method*, he writes, “the maintenance of health...is undoubtedly the chief good and the foundation of all the other goods in this life” (AT VI: 62; CSM I: 143). There is, of course, an apparent tension between the claims that virtue, wisdom, and health are all the supreme (or chief) good. One could resolve the tension between the claim that virtue is the supreme good and wisdom is the supreme good by arguing that wisdom consists in the firm and constant resolution to do what reason advises, which is how Descartes defines virtue. One could resolve the tension between the claim that virtue is the supreme good and health is the chief good by emphasizing that Descartes says health is the chief good *in this life*. One could argue that while we are embodied, health is necessary for us to practice virtue, and is therefore the most important good in this life. In any case, we see from these passages that virtue, wisdom, health, and joy are goods, according to Descartes.⁷¹

Another way to approach Descartes’ view of what objects are truly good is by examining the account of perfection he presents in the *Third Meditation*.⁷² In this meditation, Descartes

⁷⁰ See also: “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” (AT VIII A: 4; CSM I: 180-1).

⁷¹ One may argue that there are goods, on Descartes’ view, that I have not listed. Descartes occasionally mentions riches, honors, glory, and beauty as perfections (AT XI: 446; Voss: 104) (AT XI: 449; Voss: 106). I am not convinced, however, that Descartes actually believes these are perfections. In passages where he lists these qualities as perfections, he also warns against esteeming them too highly. By “perfections” in these passages I think he may mean “qualities which are typically considered to be perfections.” Of course, my interpretation of this claim needs more explanation and defense. Here, I focus on qualities Descartes clearly believes are good.

⁷² Svensson (2020) provides an especially thorough account of how perfection in the *Meditations* influences Descartes’ moral philosophy. See also Marshall (1998), especially pgs. 132-3.

identifies perfection and reality, stating, “what is more perfect – that is, contains in itself more reality – cannot arise from what is less perfect” (AT VII: 40; CSM II: 28). God is the most perfect and real being. Descartes states that God “possesses within him everything in which we can clearly recognize some perfection that is infinite or unlimited by any imperfection” (AT VIIIA: 13; CSM I: 200). Among the qualities that contribute to God’s perfection are infinitude, eternity, immutability, independence, intelligence, power, and the ability to create (AT VII: 45; CSM II: 31).

Humans are, of course, less perfect than God. Yet, humans have some perfections that are in God to a finite degree. We have eternal souls, intelligence, power, and the ability to create new objects and ideas. One of the most important perfections in God and humans is free will. Descartes writes, “it is above all in virtue of the will that I understand myself to bear in some way the image and likeness of God” (AT VII: 57; CSM II: 40). He describes the will as a perfection in humans throughout his works. In the *Principles of Philosophy*, he writes, “it is a supreme perfection in man that he acts voluntarily, that is, freely” (AT VIIIA: 18; CSM I: 205). In his correspondence with Queen Christina, he states, “free will is in itself the noblest thing we can have, since it makes us in a way equal to God” (AT V: 85; CSMK III: 326). In his early writings, he describes free will as a “marvel” alongside creation *ex nihilo* and the Incarnation (AT X: 218; CSM I: 5).

All humans, on Descartes’ view, possess at least one perfection, since all humans possess free will. Moreover, humans can possess other perfections, such as intelligence, virtue, power, and the ability to create. The fact that all humans have perfections suggests that all humans are proper objects of love. This idea receives further support from Descartes’ discussion of friendship in *The Passions of the Soul*. He defines friendship as a form of love that is directed

toward those we esteem as equal to ourselves (AT XI: 390; Voss: 64). He maintains that we are able to have friendship for any person who loves us in return, stating, “there is no man so imperfect that we cannot have a quite perfect friendship for him when we think ourselves loved by him, and have a truly noble and generous soul” (AT XI: 390; Voss: 64). As we have seen, Descartes maintains that generosity is the “key to all the other virtues, and a general remedy for all the disorders of the Passions” (AT XI: 454; Voss: 109). Here, we see that the generous person is able to love anyone who loves them in return. Since the generous person experiences passions in an ideal way, it is ideal for us to be able to love any person who loves us in return.

C. Loving other people increases our perfection.

One may object that the fact that humans have perfections is insufficient to show that they are proper objects of love. In order for humans to be proper objects of love, one may argue, they must be good *for us*. Descartes maintains that love is typically caused by objects that appear “suitable to us” or “good from our point of view” (AT XI: 374; Voss: 53).⁷³ Thus, one may argue that perfections in other humans must be suitable for us in some way, in order for love of them to be justified. Patrick Frierson (forthcoming) accepts this view, arguing that “things’ perfection” is not “sufficient to justify love” (4). John Marshall (1998) argues that love “places objects on a scale of value in which they...relate to us” (136). The idea that love of objects is justified only if these objects somehow benefit us is reinforced by a passage in Descartes’ correspondence with Queen Christina. Descartes distinguishes between the “goodness of each thing...in itself without reference to anything else” and “goodness in relation to ourselves” (AT V: 82; CSMK III: 324). He writes that “we should not consider anything as good, in relation to ourselves, unless we either possess it or have the power to acquire it” (AT V: 82; CSMK III: 324). One could argue

⁷³ See also AT XI: 387; Voss: 62.

that we do not possess or have the power to acquire others' perfections. Thus, we should not consider humans as good for us because they possess perfections.

I disagree with the idea that we are unable to possess or acquire other people's perfections. As we saw earlier, Descartes maintains that love affects the soul. The increase in perfection we have when we love "truly good" objects occurs in the soul. In his discussion of passions "insofar as they belong to the soul," Descartes considers the passions "in abstraction, in themselves, and when they do not incline us to any action" (AT XI: 435-6; Voss: 96). Thus, we do not increase in perfection when we love good objects because love leads to good actions. We increase in perfection because our soul acquires some new good. This fits well with Descartes' description of the effects of love on the soul, as he writes that "joining true goods to us, [love] perfects us to that extent" (AT XI: 432; Voss: 94). Thus, on Descartes' view, the goods within those we love are joined to us. Marshall (1998) makes the point that we "possess" those we love, on Descartes' view, writing, "love is the suitable manner in which we possess God, just as love is the suitable manner in which we may possess friends, members of our family, and members of our society" (133). I agree that we are able to possess those we love in the sense that we are able to acquire goods within them. Since every person has goods within them, we are able to possess goods when we love any person.

The idea that we are able to possess goods within those we love undermines the commonly held view that we do not form a whole with those we love in any metaphysical sense, on Descartes' view. Alberto Frigo (2016) argues that we do not form a "mutual conjunction" or "virtual fusion" with those we love (1104). Rather, Descartes writes that we form a whole with those we love "to give an account of the various forms of love and the different attitudes the lover can take toward his connection with the beloved object" (1104). Susan James (2008) writes

that the whole we form with those we love is “not a complete merging” (44). A person who forms a whole with another “continues to identify certain qualities as his own, and conceives of himself as a distinct part of the whole” (44). Sharp references a passage we saw earlier in which Descartes states that we are “as it were transformed” into objects that we love (AT IV: 613; CSMK III: 312). She writes, “Descartes signals that the loss of ourselves provoked by loving what is bad for us is not a literal ontological mutation but is a metaphorical exaggeration of how love affects us” (364).

While Descartes may not hold that we are fully transformed into those we love, he does hold that we share in goods within those we love. Love not only affects our actions but also the perfection of our soul. Thus, we form a union with those we love in some metaphysical sense – we share in the good qualities within those we love, which influences our perfection. In his discussion of love insofar as it belongs to the soul, Descartes writes,

I say [love of good objects] cannot be too great, since the only thing that the most immoderate [love] can do is join us so perfectly to those goods that the Love we have for ourselves in particular makes no distinction between us and them, which I believe can never be bad (AT XI: 432; Voss: 94).

Thus, love can blur the distinction between us and those we love. I have been arguing that love blurs this distinction because it allows us to share in the good qualities within those we love.

D. We are not obligated to love all people, but we are obligated to esteem them.

Though we receive benefits from loving any person, we are not obligated to love every person, on Descartes’ view. In his correspondence with Chanut, Descartes writes,

because we cannot love equally all those in whom we observe equal worth, I think that our only obligation is to esteem them equally; and since the chief good of life is friendship, we are right to prefer those to whom we are joined by secret inclinations, provided we also see worth in them (AT V: 58; CSMK III: 322-3).

Descartes does not clarify why we cannot love everyone equally, but I suspect the reason is that love demands our time and attention, and we only have so much time and attention. He writes that when one considers oneself as forming a whole with another, one “transfer[s] the care one previously took of oneself to the preservation of this whole” (AT IV: 611; CSMK III: 311).⁷⁴ He also states that love “engrosses the soul with the consideration of the object loved” (AT XI: 417; Voss: 82). It seems likely that we cannot transfer our care to every person or be engrossed with the idea of every person. Morgan (1994) makes this point, stating that friendship is a “particularly demanding relationship; hence, a certain amount of selectivity is necessary in one’s friendships” (95-6).

Descartes identifies two reasons why we are inclined “to love one person rather than another before we know their worth” (AT V: 56; CSMK III: 322). One of the reasons has to do with the body and the other with the mind. The reason “in the mind presupposes too many things concerning the nature of our souls which I would not dare to try to explain in a letter” (AT V: 56; CSMK III: 322). The only hint Descartes provides about this reason is that inclinations “aroused in the mind...are reciprocated” and should “always be followed” (AT V: 58; CSMK III: 323). I think any interpretation of this claim will be speculative. My suspicion is that Descartes holds that God places inclinations in souls toward other souls with whom it would be particularly beneficial to join. One reason to think this interpretation is correct is that Descartes maintains “Nature” inclines one to join with one romantic partner over others. In *The Passions of the Soul*, Descartes writes that “Nature does not make one imagine that one needs more than one half,” but rather when one person “gives more delight” than others, the soul “feel[s] for that one alone all

⁷⁴ See also: “For as soon as we have joined ourselves in volition to some object, whatever its nature may be, we have benevolence for it” (AT XI: 388; Voss: 63).

the inclination Nature gives [the soul]” to seek another person (AT XI: 396; Voss: 69). Perhaps Nature, or God, also inclines us to join with certain people as friends over other people.

The second reason we are inclined to love some people over others is physiological. Descartes maintains that when we perceive an object we love, “there make as it were folds [in the brain],” and “the place where they were made has a tendency to be folded again in the same manner by another object resembling even incompletely the original object” (AT V: 57; CSMK III: 322). When we perceive an object we love, folds are made in our brain, and objects that appear similar to the original object are likely to make the same folds. Thus, Descartes writes, “when we are inclined to love someone without knowing the reason, we may believe that this is because he has some similarity to something in an earlier object of love” (AT V: 57; CSMK III: 322-3). In any case, Descartes maintains that we can focus on forming friendships with those to whom we are inclined, as long as we also see worth in them. In the previous section, we saw that there are many features of persons, such as free will, intelligence, and virtue, that make them worthy objects of love. Some commentators downplay the importance of identifying qualities in friends that make them worthy objects of love. For example, Morgan (1994) states,

When one is attracted to another by the passion of friendship...one must identify whether the attractive person is worthy of attraction. Descartes leaves it entirely open concerning what objective factors establish or fail to establish worthiness (95).⁷⁵

I disagree with Morgan’s view that Descartes leaves the qualities that make a person worthy of love “entirely open.” As I have argued, there are several qualities within humans, such as free will, intelligence, and virtue, that make them deserving objects of love. We are able to focus on

⁷⁵ See also Marshall (1998): “what makes [friends] specifically friends – that is, what constitutes their special value for us – is not a value we can determine intellectually; what makes them friends is, although obscure, often discovered through our passions” (135).

friendships with those to whom we are inclined, but we should also recognize their truly good qualities.

Although we are not obligated to love all people equally, we are obligated to esteem them equally. Esteem, on Descartes' view, can refer to "the opinion someone has, without any passion, of a thing's worth" or the passion that inclines "the soul...to represent to itself the worth of the thing esteemed" (AT XI: 444; Voss: 102). Every person is worthy of equal esteem because every person has the capacity to use their free will well. Descartes writes that there is "a single thing in us which could give us just cause to esteem ourselves, namely the use of our free will and the dominion we have over our volitions" (AT XI: 445; Voss: 103). He states that if we esteem ourselves for "anything other than the volition we feel within ourselves always to make good use of our free will," we experience a "most blameworthy Pride" (AT XI: 449; Voss: 106). Thus, the proper quality for which we should esteem ourselves is the control we have over our volitions.

Further, the proper quality for which we should esteem others is the control they are capable of having over their volitions. After Descartes defines generosity as the "understanding that there is nothing which truly belongs to [oneself] but this free control of [one's] volitions" and the "feeling within [oneself] a firm and constant resolution to use it well," he writes that generous people "are easily convinced that every other man can also have [this understanding and feeling] about himself" (AT XI: 446; Voss: 104). Generous people esteem others for the same reason they esteem themselves – others are able to recognize they have free will and resolve to use it well. Descartes states,

[Generous people] 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 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 (AT XI: 446-7; Voss: 104).

Thus, generous people esteem all people equally because they recognize that all people have free will and the ability to use it well. Generosity, as we have seen, is “the key to all the other virtues, and a general remedy for all the disorders of the Passions” (AT XI: 454; Voss: 109). Thus, it is good, on Descartes’ view, to esteem all people equally because they have the ability use their free will well.

IV. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that we should not hate others, on Descartes’ view, because hatred separates us from goods within others, causes sadness, and produces vicious character traits. I have also argued that we are able to experience the beneficial effects of love when we love any person. Descartes maintains that love always produces joy and makes us more caring, however he warns that love of “undeserving” objects is dangerous to the soul. I argue that all humans are deserving objects of love, since all humans possess free will, which is a good quality. We are able to share in good qualities in those we love, which increases our perfection. While we are not obligated to love all people equally, we are obligated to esteem them equally, since all people have the capacity to use their free will well.

Chapter V: Intellectual Love and Intellectual Joy as Remedies for Hatred and Sadness

In this chapter, I argue that intellectual love can serve as a remedy for hatred and intellectual joy can serve as a remedy for sadness. Intellectual love and intellectual joy are forms of intellectual emotions, which are emotions that are caused by the soul and can occur alongside passions. When we experience an intellectual emotion alongside a passion, we experience the effects of the intellectual emotion more strongly than the passion. Descartes holds we are able to cause intellectual love toward any person or object because every person and object has some good quality. We are also able to excite intellectual joy in any situation because all situations are good in some way. Thus, when we hate someone or something, or when we feel sad, we are able to excite intellectual love or intellectual joy. Doing so will mitigate the harmful effects of hatred or sadness. Generally, Descartes holds we are able to alter our passions by willing ourselves to have particular thoughts. The thought that some good quality belongs in a person or object produces an intellectual love that can alter the passion of hatred, and the thought that some good quality belongs to oneself produces an intellectual joy that can alter the passion of sadness.

Throughout *The Passions of the Soul*, Descartes describes methods for controlling the passions, including following virtue, reflecting on divine providence, and using reason to oppose the passions. The method of using intellectual emotions to prevent harm from the passions has been less examined than others. It is surprising that not much attention has been paid to intellectual emotions, since Descartes holds that “our good and our ill depend principally on inner excitations,” and he writes that this consideration is “very good for keeping us from

suffering any distress from the Passions” (AT XI: 440; Voss: 100).⁷⁶ Examining the remedy of intellectual emotions will provide us with a more complete picture of Descartes’ methods for controlling harmful passions. Moreover, as we saw in the previous chapter, Descartes maintains that love is beneficial to the soul, while hatred is harmful. Intellectual love is an effective way to prevent harm from hatred and receive the benefits of love.

In Section I, I explain that intellectual emotions are caused by actions of the soul. Intellectual love is caused by considering a good quality within an object. Intellectual joy is caused by considering a good quality that belongs to oneself. I also show that intellectual emotions can occur alongside opposing passions. For instance, intellectual love can occur alongside hatred, and intellectual joy can occur alongside sadness. In Section II, I argue that when intellectual joy occurs alongside sadness, intellectual joy affects the soul more strongly than sadness. I also explain that Descartes maintains we should only derive intellectual joy from qualities that are truly good, such as one’s knowledge, health, or ability to experience passions. In Section III, I argue that intellectual love can prevent harm from hatred. We experience the beneficial effects of intellectual love more strongly than the harmful effects of hatred, and we are able to excite intellectual love toward any person when we consider good qualities that belong to them. In Section IV, I compare the method of causing intellectual emotions to prevent harm from passions to another remedy Descartes presents in *The Passions of the Soul*, namely willing oneself to have thoughts typically joined with passions one wants to have. Comparing these two

⁷⁶ I consider the terms “intellectual emotion,” “inner excitation,” and “interior emotion” as equivalent. In this passage, Descartes uses the term “*émotions intérieures*.” Earlier in *The Passions of the Soul*, Descartes uses the term “*joie intellectuelle*” for “intellectual joy.” In his correspondence with Chanut, he uses the term “*amour intellectuelle*” to describe intellectual love. Since he defines *émotions intellectuelles* and *émotions intérieures* in the same way – emotions caused by the soul – I do not see any need to differentiate between the two.

remedies helps us understand the physiological process of causing intellectual emotions alongside passions.

I. Main Features of Intellectual Emotions

A. Intellectual emotions are caused by the soul.

As we saw in Chapters 1 and 2, Descartes distinguishes between actions and passions of the soul in Part I of *The Passions*. He writes that actions “come directly from our soul and seem to depend only on it,” while the soul “receives” passions (AT XI: 342; Voss: 28). He identifies actions of the soul with volitions, writing that the soul’s “actions are all of our volitions” (AT XI: 342; Voss: 28). Volitions can have their “terminus” in the soul or body (AT XI: 343; Voss: 28). Volitions that have their terminus in the soul include the volition “to apply our thought to some object that is not material” (AT XI: 343; Voss: 28), “to imagine something which does not exist” (AT XI: 344; Voss: 29), “to imagine something we have never seen” (AT XI: 361; Voss: 29), and to “fix our attention to consider a single object for some time” (AT XI: 361; Voss: 42). As I explained in Chapters 1 and 2, the account of volition Descartes presents in *The Passions of the Soul* focuses on different aspects of volition than his account in the *Fourth Meditation*. While in the *Fourth Meditation*, he focuses on the role of volition in affirming or denying perceptions from the intellect, in *The Passions of the Soul*, he focuses on the role of volition in bringing about particular thoughts. For example, he writes that the soul can have the volition to “represent to itself an enchanted palace or a chimera” (AT XI: 344; Voss: 29) or to “remember something” (AT XI: 360; Voss: 41). This is not to say that Descartes denies the will can bring about particular thoughts in the *Fourth Meditation* or that he denies the will can form judgments in *The Passions of the Soul*. This is just to say that bringing about particular thoughts is an important function of the will, especially in the context of Descartes’ theory of the passions. As I will

argue, intellectual joy and intellectual love are caused by the soul's volition to bring about particular thoughts.

Later in *The Passions*, Descartes distinguishes between a broad and narrow sense of passions. The broad sense of passions includes all those thoughts that the soul "receives," that is, thoughts that do *not* "come directly from the soul" (AT XI: 342; Voss: 28). This includes perceptions of external objects and internal states (such as hunger and thirst). It also includes passions in the narrow sense, or "passions of the soul" (AT XI: 348; Voss: 32). The passions of the soul are "perceptions or sensations or excitations of the soul which are referred to it in particular and which are caused, maintained, and strengthened by some movement of the spirits" (AT XI: 349; Voss: 34). Passions in the narrow sense are what we typically think of as emotions and are the primary subject of *The Passions of the Soul*.

The central difference between passions of the soul and intellectual emotions is that passions of the soul are caused by animal spirits and intellectual emotions are caused by volitions of the soul. Descartes writes that "inner excitations...are excited in the soul only by the soul itself – in which respect they differ from those passions that always depend on some motion of the spirits" (AT XI: 440; Voss: 100). The fact that intellectual emotions are caused by the soul, while passions are caused by animal spirits is not only central to their definitions, but also to the way they affect our wellbeing. Since intellectual emotions are caused by volitions, we have much more control over them than we do passions. Descartes states that actions of the soul "are absolutely in its power and can only indirectly be altered by the body," whereas passions "depend absolutely on the actions that produce them and can only indirectly be altered by the soul" (AT XI: 359; Voss: 41).⁷⁷

⁷⁷ See Anik Waldow (2017) for a thorough analysis of the importance of having an active mind, on Descartes' view.

B. The volitions that cause intellectual emotions

There are different kinds of intellectual emotions. Descartes mentions intellectual joy, intellectual love, and intellectual sadness explicitly. These intellectual emotions are caused by different volitions. Intellectual joy is caused by the volition to consider some good that belongs to oneself. Descartes writes that intellectual joy consists in “the enjoyment [the soul] has of the good which its understanding represents to it as its own” (AT XI: 397; Voss: 69-70). The understanding’s representation of some good that belongs to the soul is the cause of intellectual joy. As we will see, the examples Descartes provides of individuals who experience intellectual joy will themselves to consider qualities that truly belong to their soul and are truly good, such as knowledge, being joined to a healthy body, or having the ability to experience passions while remaining in control. However, it is possible, on Descartes’ view, for individuals to bring about intellectual joy by considering qualities that are not truly good or do not truly belong to their soul. As long as the individual who excites intellectual joy *believes* the quality is good and belongs to their soul, they will experience intellectual joy. For example, one could excite intellectual joy by considering one’s own virtue, even if one is not truly virtuous. One could bring about intellectual joy by considering one’s own fame, even if fame is not truly good. However, as we will see in Section II.C., we should strive to identify qualities within ourselves that are truly good in order to excite intellectual joy.

Descartes primarily discusses intellectual love in his correspondence with Pierre Chanut.

He writes,

the love which is purely intellectual...consists simply in the fact that when our soul perceives some present or absent good, which it judges to be fitting for itself, it joins itself to it willingly, that is to say, it considers itself and the good in question as forming two parts of a single whole (AT IV: 601; CSMK III: 306).

There is also a veiled reference to intellectual love after Descartes defines love in *The Passions of the Soul*. He writes that the passion of love is distinct from “judgments which also incline the soul to join itself in volition with the things it deems good...and from excitations which these judgments excite by themselves in the soul” (AT XI: 387; Voss: 62). Let us recall that the passion of love is typically caused by perceptions of objects that appear suitable for oneself. In contrast, intellectual love is caused by the soul’s volition to judge that an object is suitable for oneself. The only other thoughts that (one could argue) could cause intellectual love are the perception of a good or the volition to join with the object of one’s love. I do not think the perception of a good causes intellectual love because the perception is a passion (in the broad sense) rather than an action. The volition to join with the object of one’s love may be an action of the soul that occurs in intellectual love, but the judgment that something is good for oneself occurs before the volition to join with the object of one’s love. Thus, one must first judge that an object is good for oneself in order to excite intellectual love.

Descartes mentions intellectual sadness briefly but does not define it (AT XI: 397; Voss: 70). The *passion* of sadness is caused by “impressions of the brain” that represent an “evil or defect” that belongs to the soul (AT XI: 397; Voss: 70). Thus, we can assume that intellectual sadness is caused by the soul’s volition to represent an evil or defect that belongs to itself. This is a justified assumption because intellectual joy and intellectual love mirror their corresponding passions; thus, it seems that intellectual sadness would as well. We have seen that intellectual emotions are caused by volitions. Thus, intellectual sadness is caused by a volition, specifically, the volition to consider some evil or defect that belongs to oneself. It is unclear why someone would will herself to consider evils or defects that belong to her. To my knowledge, Descartes does not provide an example of someone who wills herself to experience intellectual sadness.

Perhaps if someone is experiencing an overwhelming passion of joy, one would will oneself to consider defects that belong to oneself in order to calm down. Descartes does write that “the bodily movements that accompany [Love and Joy] can be harmful to the health, when they are extremely vigorous” (AT XI: 434; Voss: 95). Perhaps intellectual sadness could calm these bodily movements. In any case, it is clear that intellectual sadness is not a remedy for the passion of sadness, since intellectual sadness “hardly ever fails to be accompanied by” the passion (AT XI: 397; Voss: 70).⁷⁸

Throughout his works, Descartes provides examples in which people excite intellectual joy in themselves by considering some good that belongs to them. In his correspondence with Elisabeth, he describes the “greatest souls” as those who “have reasoning so strong and so powerful” that they are able to “make it such that even afflictions serve them” (AT IV: 202; Shapiro: 87). He writes that when the greatest souls “feel pain in their bodies they make an effort to support it patiently, and this show of their strength is agreeable to them” (AT IV: 203; Shapiro: 87). Although Descartes does not clarify here whether the greatest souls actively will themselves to think they are strong enough to endure physical pain or passively receive this idea, it seems likely that the greatest souls (at least in some circumstances) will themselves to have this thought. Especially when the greatest souls are in pain, it seems unlikely that thoughts that produce joy will passively come into their mind. Thus, in this example, we see that the greatest souls actively will themselves to think they are strong enough to endure physical pain, and this

⁷⁸ One may wonder about the absence of intellectual hatred. Descartes never uses the phrase “intellectual hatred.” However, after Descartes defines the passions of love and hatred, he writes, “I say these excitations are caused by the spirits in order to distinguish Love and Hatred, which are passions and depend on the body, both from judgments which also incline the soul to join itself in volition with the things it deems good and to separate itself from those it deems bad, and from excitations which these judgments excite by themselves in the soul” (AT XI: 387; Voss: 62). Thus, on Descartes’ view, there is a form of hatred that arises from judgements. Since Descartes does not expand on the form of hatred that arises from judgments, and since intellectual hatred would not be a remedy for harmful passions in any obvious way, I do not analyze it here.

thought produces pleasure. This pleasure, I argue, is intellectual joy, as it is produced by an actively willed thought about some good that belongs to oneself – being strong enough to endure pain.

There are several similar examples in Descartes' correspondence with Elisabeth and *The Passions of the Soul*. He writes that when the greatest souls “[see] their friends under some great affliction, they feel compassion at the friend's ill fortune and do everything possible to deliver the friend from it” (AT IV: 203; Shapiro: 87). The greatest souls' “conscience tells them that they fulfill their duty,” and this “testimony makes them more happy, so that all the sadness their compassion affords them does not afflict them” (AT IV: 203; Shapiro: 88). Here, the greatest souls' “conscience tells them” that they have some good quality – they are fulfilling their duty. Later in his correspondence with Elisabeth, Descartes writes that we find “exercises of the body, such as hunting, tennis, and other similar exercises” pleasurable, even though they are often difficult and tiring (AT IV: 309; Shapiro: 118). He states, “The cause of the contentment the soul receives from these exercises consists in that they make it notice the strength, or the skill, or some other perfection of the body to which it is joined” (AT IV: 309; Shapiro: 118). Thus, in this case, the soul recognizes a good quality in its body, which then produces pleasure. In *The Passions of the Soul*, Descartes writes that young people experience pleasure from “undertaking difficult things and exposing themselves to great perils” because they have the thought that it is “good to feel so courageous, fortunate, skillful, or strong as to dare to run a risk” (AT XI: 400; Voss: 71-2). Elderly people feel content when they “recall evils they have suffered” because “they represent to themselves that it is a good to have been able to survive notwithstanding” (AT XI: 400; Voss: 72). Thus, in these examples, young people and elderly people have a

representation of a good that belongs to them – their courage, fortune, skill, strength, or perseverance through difficulties. The representation of these goods produces intellectual joy.

To this point, I have focused on the kind of thoughts that produce intellectual joy. The reason for this is that Descartes discusses intellectual joy much more than he discusses intellectual love or intellectual sadness. There is one example of a thought that produces intellectual love in his correspondence with Chanut. Descartes writes, “[I]f the soul perceived that there are many very fine things to be known about nature, its will would be infallibly impelled to love the knowledge of those things, that is, to consider it as belonging to itself” (AT IV: 602; CSMK III: 306). Hence, if the soul judges that knowledge is good for itself, then it will experience intellectual love for knowledge. Even though Descartes does not elaborate on the thoughts that produce intellectual love or intellectual sadness, I believe we can speculate about these thoughts, given their definitions and the examples of intellectual joy. If someone judges that a family member is good for them, they will experience intellectual love for that family member. If someone judges that being creative is good for them, they will experience intellectual love for creativity. If someone wills herself to consider her own cowardice, she will experience intellectual sadness. If someone wills herself to consider her ignorance, she will experience intellectual sadness.

C. Intellectual emotions can occur alongside passions.

Near the end of Part II of *The Passions of the Soul*, Descartes writes, “I shall add but one further consideration here, which seems to me to be very good for keeping us from suffering any distress from the Passions: our good and our ill depend principally on inner excitations” (AT XI: 440; Voss: 100). He goes on to write that intellectual emotions can occur alongside passions. He states, “although these excitations of the soul are often joined with the passions that are like

them, they may also frequently be found with others, and may even originate from those that are in opposition to them” (AT XI: 440-441; Voss: 100). When intellectual emotions occur alongside passions, the soul is more deeply affected by the intellectual emotions. He writes that “inner excitations affect us more intimately and consequently have much more power over us than the Passions from which they differ but which are found with them” (AT XI: 441-2; Voss: 101). Thus, intellectual emotions can occur alongside passions, and when they do, the soul is more deeply affected by the intellectual emotion.

Intellectual emotions typically occur alongside corresponding passions. This point is found throughout Descartes’ discussion of intellectual emotions. He writes that “while the soul is joined to the body, this intellectual joy can hardly fail to be accompanied by the one that is a passion” (AT XI: 397; Voss: 70).⁷⁹ Regarding intellectual love, Descartes states that “while our soul is joined to the body, this rational love is commonly accompanied by the other kind of love, which can be called sensual or sensuous” (AT IV: 602; CSMK III: 306).⁸⁰

However, Descartes emphasizes the fact that intellectual emotions can occur alongside opposing passions in his discussion of intellectual emotions’ ability to prevent distress from the passions. He provides two examples in which people experience intellectual joy alongside other emotions and are more deeply affected by intellectual joy. First,

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 (AT XI: 441; Voss: 100-101).

⁷⁹ See also (AT XI: 398; Voss: 70).

⁸⁰ See also (AT IV: 603-4; CSMK III: 307).

This example is puzzling for several reasons. Why does the husband experience intellectual joy at his wife's death? How is this intellectual joy more powerful than sadness, love, or pity?

Descartes' second example is as follows:

when we read of unusual adventures in a book or see them represented on a stage, this sometimes excites Sadness in us, sometimes Joy or Love or Hatred, and in general all the Passions, according to the diversity of the objects offered to our imagination; but along with this we have the pleasure of feeling them excited in us, and this pleasure is an intellectual Joy, which can originate from Sadness as well as from any of the other Passions (AT XI: 441; Voss: 101).

This example is perhaps more familiar to us, but still raises questions about intellectual joy. Why do we experience joy when observing scenes that arouse hatred or sadness? How is this example related to the mourning husband? I return to these examples in Part II Section B.

D. James's account of intellectual emotions

Before concluding Part I, I analyze Susan James's account of Descartes' view of intellectual emotions, as she presents it in Chapter 8 of *Passion and Action: The Emotions in Seventeenth-Century Philosophy*. I examine James's account because she is one of the few commentators who discuss Descartes' view of intellectual emotions at length, and her account differs from mine in interesting ways.⁸¹ James argues that intellectual emotions motivate us to pursue knowledge, on Descartes' view. She notes that many seventeenth-century philosophers hold that "we feel joy in the intellectual operations of our minds" (196). The "activity of reasoning," James writes, "moves us" and is a source of "delight," according to many early modern philosophers (196). Descartes in particular, she argues, holds that the "independent operations of the soul are...a source of joy" (197). James points out that Descartes maintains intellectual emotions are caused by actions of the soul. As we have seen, Descartes writes that

⁸¹ Williston (2003) also discusses intellectual emotions, especially intellectual joy. See also Schmitter (2002) for a brief discussion.

intellectual emotions “are excited in the soul only by the soul itself” (AT XI: 440; Voss: 100). James maintains that on Descartes’ view, “the mind always contains thoughts caused by the soul itself” and the mind is always aware of its own activity (197). James writes that the mind contains thoughts that are caused by the soul itself when it “contemplates the ideas assembled in the common sense,” “attends to ideas in the imagination,” or “focuses on ideas that are not in the body” (196). She claims that the mind is always aware of its own activity because, on Descartes’ view, “we cannot think without being aware that we are thinking” (197). Moreover, in *The Passions of the Soul*, Descartes states that active thoughts are “all of our volitions” (AT XI: 342; Voss: 28), and he writes that “we could not will anything unless we perceived by the same means that we willed it” (AT XI: 343; Voss: 29). Thus, James argues that Descartes maintains the soul is always aware of its active thoughts and always has active thoughts.

Moreover, James argues the soul takes pleasure in the awareness of its own activity. She writes that “thoughts caused by the soul itself...are all imbued with *émotions intérieures*, with a kind of joy that the mind takes in its own operations” (197). James maintains that intellectual joy is not directed at the content of one’s thoughts but arises from the process of thinking. She writes, “This delight is...independent of the content of [the soul’s] thoughts; whether it rejoices in what it judges to be good or grieves in what it judges to be bad, the soul takes pleasure in its awareness of its own activity” (197). The fact that the soul takes pleasure in the awareness of its own activity provides an explanation for why we are motivated to pursue knowledge, on Descartes’ view. The question of why we are motivated to pursue knowledge arises because knowledge was typically thought to be “free from the epistemological effects of passion,” in seventeenth-century philosophy (184). If passions of joy or desire do not motivate us to pursue knowledge, what does? James argues the joy we experience from the activity of our mind, or

intellectual joy, motivates us to pursue knowledge, on Descartes' view. Intellectual joy is "free from the passions' more destructive consequences," James argues, because the operations of our mind which arouse intellectual joy "have the soul as their cause" (197). The joy we take in the activity of our mind is pleasurable, and this pleasure motivates us to have an active mind. In James's words, "When we reason with intelligible ideas, reflect on ideas derived from sense, or bring the will to bear on our perceptions, we experience a delight which motivates us to persist in these kinds of intellectual activity" (198).

There is a point of disagreement between James's interpretation and my interpretation of Descartes' account of intellectual emotions. On my view, only some thoughts that are caused by the soul produce intellectual emotions. On James's view, all thoughts that are caused by the soul produce intellectual emotions. In James's words, "Descartes is committed, then, to the view that the kinds of ideas that do not depend on the body arouse *émotions intérieures*" (200). I am not sure why James maintains that all thoughts that depend on the soul alone arouse intellectual emotions. Descartes says that intellectual emotions are "excited in the soul only by the soul itself" (AT XI: 441; Voss: 100). This does not entail that all thoughts caused by the soul produce intellectual emotions. I argue that Descartes holds that only some thoughts caused by the soul produce intellectual emotions. In particular, he maintains that intellectual joy is caused by the volition to consider a good that belongs to oneself, intellectual love is caused by judging that something is good, and intellectual sadness is caused by the volition to consider a defect that belongs to oneself, as I explained in Section B. On my view, intellectual emotions arise from the content of particular thoughts, whereas on James's view, intellectual emotions arise from the process of thinking. This explains why I discuss Descartes' distinction between different types of intellectual emotions, whereas James only discusses intellectual joy. Types of intellectual

emotions are distinguished from one another based on the content of the thought that causes them. James could maintain that intellectual emotions arise from the content of thoughts, as well as from the process of thinking, but she does not directly state this.

On my view, the process of thinking arouses intellectual joy only if the soul considers the process of thinking as a good that belongs to it. Descartes defines intellectual joy as an emotion “wherein consists the enjoyment [the soul] has of the good which its understanding represents to it as its own” (AT XI: 397; Voss: 69-70). As we saw in Section B, Descartes provides several examples of people who experience intellectual joy. In each these examples, the person recognizes they possess a good quality. A person who has compassion for a friend recognizes “they fulfill their duty” (AT IV: 203; Shapiro: 88), a person who engages in strenuous physical exercise recognizes a “perfection of the body” (AT IV: 309; Shapiro: 118), an elderly person who has suffered evils recognizes “it is a good to have been able to survive notwithstanding” (ATXI: 400; Voss: 72). Hence, I think Descartes maintains that a person must recognize they possess some good in order to experience intellectual joy. If a person recognizes that having an active mind is a good that belongs to them, they will experience intellectual joy. However, if a person has an active mind, but does not recognize it as good, they will not experience intellectual joy. James seems to maintain that as long as a person has an active mind, they will experience intellectual joy. This is the main point on which our views differ.

II. How Intellectual Joy Prevents Harm from Sadness

A. Intellectual joy as a remedy for sadness

Descartes recommends willing oneself to experience intellectual joy as a remedy for sadness in his correspondence with Elisabeth. Sadness needs a remedy because it is intrinsically harmful to the soul, on Descartes’ view. He writes, “Sadness [cannot fail to be] bad with respect

to the soul, because all the distress the soul receives from evil consists in [sadness]” (AT XI: 434; Voss: 95). Sadness, he states in *The Passions of the Soul*, consists in an “unpleasant languor” (AT XI: 397; Voss: 70). In May of 1645, Descartes learns that Elisabeth has been ill and believes that her illness is caused by sadness brought about by difficult circumstances affecting her family.⁸² He proposes several remedies for her sadness, yet one of his most consistent pieces of advice is to consider objects that bring joy. One should “divert one’s imagination and one’s senses as much as possible” from “unpleasant things” and only consider such things “when one is obliged to by prudence” (AT IV: 218; Shapiro: 91). He writes that a person who “takes great care to turn her imagination” from “sources of displeasure” will be able to “judge more soundly” and would even become physically healthier (AT IV: 219; Shapiro: 92). He states that one can “get one’s mind in order and make it tranquil” by “making an effort to consider all the benefits one can take” from what appears to be a “great mishap,” and by “turning one’s attention away from the evils one had imagined there” (AT IV: 237; Shapiro: 94).⁸³ One of the themes in these passages is that it requires some effort to consider those good things that belong to oneself. One must divert one’s mind, take great care to change one’s thoughts, and make an effort to consider particular goods that belong to oneself. The process of actively considering good aspects of one’s circumstances in order to excite joy is, I argue, the process of exciting intellectual joy.

Further, Descartes maintains that we are *always* able to excite intellectual joy. Regardless of how bad our circumstances appear, we are able to find some way that they benefit us. He advises Elisabeth, “there are no events so disastrous, or so absolutely bad in the judgment of people, that a reasonable person could not look at them from an angle which will make them

⁸² For more information about Elisabeth’s life, see Zedler (1989) and Godfrey (1909).

⁸³ See also AT IV: 203-4; Shapiro: 88.

appear favorable” (AT IV: 237; Shapiro: 94-5).⁸⁴ Later in his correspondence, he qualifies this idea by saying, “*Almost* all the things in the world are such that we can regard them from a side which makes them appear good and from another which makes us notice defects” (AT IV: 306; Shapiro: 116; emphasis added). I am unsure why Descartes qualifies this claim, especially since he has justification for the stronger claim that all of our circumstances are good in some way. He writes that we are able to “appreciate all the things that come to us” and to “draw joy even from our afflictions” when we remember that all things are “sent to us expressly by God” (AT IV: 291-2; Shapiro: 111). When we “elevate our mind to considering God as he is,” we will realize that “His will is carried out as we receive [afflictions]” (AT IV: 292; Shapiro: 111). Thus, we can derive joy from *any* circumstance, as our circumstances are sent to us by a benevolent God.

B. Explanation of the playgoer and mourning husband examples

In Part I, we saw that Descartes provides a puzzling example of a mourning husband who experiences intellectual joy at his wife’s death and playgoers who experience intellectual joy while observing sad scenes in the theater. In the correspondence with Elisabeth, Descartes explains the reason why we experience joy when we observe sad scenes in the theater. He writes,

the contentment that [the soul] has from crying upon seeing some pitiable and disastrous action represented in the theater comes principally from its seeming to it that it is doing something virtuous for having compassion for the afflicted (AT IV: 309; Shapiro: 118).

He makes a similar point in *The Passions*, writing that the sadness “caused by the fateful actions we see represented on a stage” occurs alongside “the satisfaction of thinking [the soul] is doing its duty in being compassionate to the afflicted” (AT XI: 470; Voss: 120). Not only do we experience joy in recognizing our ability to have compassion, “the soul is pleased in feeling itself

⁸⁴ See also: “I believe that as there is no good in the world except good sense which we can call absolutely good, there is also no evil from which we cannot draw some benefit, having good sense” (AT IV: 237; Shapiro: 95).

moved by passions, no matter what nature they are, so long as it remains in control” (AT IV: 309; Shapiro: 118). Again, a similar point arises in *The Passions*:

one naturally takes pleasure in feeling moved to all sorts of Passions, even Sadness and Hatred, when these passions are caused only by the unusual adventures one sees represented on a stage or by other similar matters, which, not being able to harm us in any way, seem to titillate our soul in affecting it (AT XI: 399; Voss: 71).

Thus, the pleasure we experience when we observe scenes in the theater is due to our recognition of our own virtue or our ability to experience passions in a controlled way.⁸⁵ As we have seen, Descartes maintains that intellectual joy is caused by the volition to consider a good that belongs to oneself. Hence, the playgoers will themselves to consider their own virtue or ability to experience passions in a controlled way in order to excite intellectual joy. The playgoers will experience intellectual joy more strongly than passions that occur alongside it.

Descartes’ explanation of the playgoer example allows us to further understand the mourning husband example. He compares the joy the playgoers experience to the joy a highly rational person experiences in their daily life. In his correspondence with Elisabeth, he writes that the “greatest souls” “esteem this life so little with respect to eternity that they give events no more consideration than we do events in comedies” (AT IV: 202; Shapiro: 87). In the same way that the playgoers experience joy when they are moved by the passions, the greatest souls experience joy when they are moved by the passions. He states,

Just as those sad and lamentable stories which we see represented on a stage often entertain us as much as the happy ones, even though they bring tears to our eyes, in this way the greatest souls of which I speak draw a satisfaction in themselves from all the things that happen to them, even the most annoying and insupportable (AT IV: 202-3; Shapiro: 87).

⁸⁵ Descartes’ view leads to an explanation to why some people do not enjoy particular pieces of entertainment. On his view, we only experience pleasure when we are in control of the emotions that entertainment arouses in us. Thus, if someone feels as if they are not in control of the emotions that a piece of entertainment arouses in them, they will not experience pleasure. For example, if one cannot control the fear that horror movies induce in them, one will not enjoy horror movies.

The playgoers and greatest souls are similar in the sense that they experience a range of passions while remaining in control of them. As we have seen, Descartes maintains that the soul experiences intellectual joy when it recognizes it is able to be moved by the passions, while remaining in control of them. The greatest souls are always in control of their passions. Descartes writes that there are two kinds of people, the “vulgar souls” who “give themselves over to their passions,” and the “greatest souls” who have “reasoning so strong and so powerful that, even though they too have passions, and often even more violent ones than most do, their reason nevertheless remains mistress” (AT IV: 202; Shapiro: 87). Hence, on Descartes’ view, the greatest souls experience pleasure when they are moved by the passions because they recognize that they are able to experience passions while remaining in control of them. As we have seen, Descartes maintains that intellectual joy is caused by the volition to consider a good quality that belongs to oneself. Thus, the greatest souls will themselves to consider their own ability to experience controlled passions as a good that belongs to themselves.

At this point, we have one explanation for why the mourning husband experiences joy at his wife’s death. Perhaps he has a “great soul” and feels pleasure when moved by all the passions, even sadness. Later in his correspondence, Descartes offers what I believe to be a more general explanation. He writes that we can will ourselves to consider the good aspects of any situation in order to prevent sadness.⁸⁶ Thus, the mourning husband could will himself to think that it is good he is able to experience a range of passions while remaining in control. But, he could also will himself to think of other good aspects of his situation, for example, that his wife’s soul is eternal or that her body no longer suffers. Descartes writes that “there are always more good things than evil ones in this life” because “we can always render good” those things that

⁸⁶ See passages cited in the previous section, especially AT IV: 237; Shapiro: 94-5 and AT IV: 306; Shapiro: 116.

depend on our free will (AT IV: 355; Shapiro: 131). By rendering good those things that depend on our will, we “can prevent...all the evils that come from elsewhere, as great as they may be, from entering into our soul any further than does the sadness excited there by the comedians when they represent some very tragic events before us” (AT IV: 355; Shapiro: 131). While the death of the husband’s spouse does not depend on his free will, the husband’s thoughts do, on Descartes’ view. Thus, the husband can will himself to have particular thoughts that “render good” the tragedy before him. I describe this as a more general explanation for the mourning husband example because in both this explanation and the previous explanation, the mourning husband wills himself to consider some good that belongs to him. In the first explanation, he wills himself to think it is good he is able to experience a range of passions while remaining in control. In the second explanation, he can will himself to think of any good quality that belongs to him in order to arouse intellectual joy.

C. Appropriate qualities from which to derive intellectual joy

I have argued that intellectual joy can serve as a remedy for sadness. However, one may question whether it is *always* appropriate to cause intellectual joy in the face of sadness. Descartes warns against deriving joy from qualities that are not truly good, and intuitively, there are some aspects of our circumstances from which we should not derive joy. For example, we may find it inappropriate for the mourning husband to feel joy at his wife’s funeral because he no longer has to pay for her medical care. How do we distinguish, then, between things from which it is appropriate to derive joy and those from which it is not? In what follows, I analyze examples Descartes provides of intellectual joy in order to find qualities from which it is appropriate to derive intellectual joy, on his view. He most often discusses one’s knowledge, the health of one’s

body, and having compassion for others as qualities from which it is appropriate to derive intellectual joy.

Descartes holds that it is important to derive joy from qualities that are truly good. In his correspondence with Elisabeth, he considers whether

it is better to be gay and content, in imagining the goods one possesses to be greater and more valuable than they are...or to have more consideration and knowledge in order to know the just value of the one and the other (AT IV: 305; Shapiro: 115-6).

He provides several reasons for thinking it is better to have more knowledge, including that knowledge is a “greater perfection” than joy, and pleasure from “false imaginings” “can only touch the surface of the soul” (AT IV: 305-6; Shapiro: 116). He writes that one should not derive joy from taking vengeance on others, but rather from showing restraint or mastering one’s anger (AT IV: 285; Shapiro: 108).⁸⁷ In the most extreme case, he argues that “if some people take pleasure in doing harm to others...their delight is like that of the demons” (AT IV: 614; CSMK III: 312). These examples show that Descartes believes there are some things from which we should not derive joy.⁸⁸

Although we do not yet know from what qualities it is appropriate to derive intellectual joy, we do know that in all situations, on Descartes’ view, there are good qualities from which we can derive intellectual joy. As we saw earlier in this chapter (II.A), we are always able to derive intellectual joy because we can always will ourselves to consider some good aspect of our circumstances. We know there must be some good in our circumstances because our circumstances are sent to us by God. So, if we can find no other good quality within our

⁸⁷ Similarly, he says that we should not take joy in slander (AT IV: 286; Shapiro: 108-9).

⁸⁸ Descartes also makes a general comment at the end of Part I of *The Passions of the Soul* that it is good for the thoughts we will ourselves to have to be true (AT XI: 368; Voss: 47).

circumstances, we can always will ourselves to think – this circumstance is sent to me by God and therefore must be good for me – in order to excite intellectual joy.

Descartes provides several examples of people who experience intellectual joy because they recognize they have some good quality. Among the good qualities Descartes mentions are one's knowledge, the health of one's body, and compassion for others. Writing to Elisabeth, he says that she can will herself to think that her negative circumstances, particularly the loss of her family's empire, have allowed her to "cultivate her mind to the point that she has" (AT IV: 237; Shapiro: 95). This is a good, he writes, that she should "value more than an empire" (AT IV: 237; Shapiro: 95). Also in his correspondence with Elisabeth, he writes the "greatest souls" are able to derive joy from enduring physical pain and having compassion for their friends (AT IV: 203; Shapiro: 87-8). Descartes repeats the point that one can derive joy from physical challenges and compassion for others throughout his works. He writes that difficult physical exercises provide a sense of contentment because they make the soul "notice the strength, or the skill, or some other perfection of the body to which it is joined" (AT IV: 309; Shapiro: 118).⁸⁹ Descartes writes that the soul receives contentment when it observes tragedies in a play because the soul feels it is "doing something virtuous in having compassion for the afflicted" (AT IV: 309; Shapiro: 118).⁹⁰ More generally, Descartes holds that we experience "interior satisfaction" when we take actions "which proceed from a pure affection for others" (AT IV: 309; Shapiro: 117). Thus, on Descartes' view, we can appropriately excite intellectual joy by considering our knowledge, health, or compassion for others.

I do not want to restrict the qualities from which it is appropriate to derive intellectual joy to these, however. There are surely other good qualities within us that we could will

⁸⁹ See also AT XI: 400; Voss: 71-2.

⁹⁰ See also AT XI: 470; Voss: 120-121.

ourselves to consider in order to excite intellectual joy. For example, in the *Discourse on Method*, Descartes lists qualities that make a mind “more perfect” (AT VI: 2; CSM I: 111). He writes, “I have often wished to have as quick a wit, or as sharp and distinct an imagination, or as ample or prompt a memory as some others” (AT VI: 2; CSM I: 111-2). If someone has one of these qualities, one could will oneself to consider the quality in order to excite intellectual joy, as these qualities are perfections of the mind.

D. Elisabeth’s response to Descartes’ account of intellectual joy

As I mentioned in Sections A and B, Descartes repeatedly advises Elisabeth to consider good aspects of her circumstances in order to excite intellectual joy and prevent harm from sadness. Elisabeth initially responds to his advice with deference. She maintains that the remedy would be effective if only she were able to implement it. She writes, “If I could yet make my mind conform to your last precepts, there is no doubt that I would cure myself promptly of maladies of the body and weaknesses of the mind” (AT IV: 233; Shapiro: 93). Elisabeth states that her body and mind are too strongly affected by passions for the remedy to be successful. She writes that when she is surprised by misfortunes, her “body becomes so strongly disordered that several months are necessary for me to restore it” (AT IV: 234; Shapiro: 93). After learning that Descartes cured himself of a physical illness by having the “inclination to regard things which present themselves to me from the most favorable perspective,” Elisabeth responds that she is unable to do the same because she is not as rational as he is (AT IV: 221; Shapiro: 92).⁹¹ She writes, “It is at this moment that I feel the inconvenience of being but a little rational. [...] For... if I were as rational as you, I would cure myself as you have done” (AT IV: 234; Shapiro: 93-4).

⁹¹ These self-critical comments are part of a general tendency of Elisabeth to doubt her own intellectual abilities. See AT IV: 233; Shapiro: 93, AT III: 660; Shapiro: 61, and AT III: 684; Shapiro: 68. Shapiro (1999b), Wartenberg (1999), and Lloyd (2006) closely examine this tendency from Elisabeth.

Thus, Elisabeth's initial response to Descartes' method of using intellectual joy to remedy sadness is deferential. She maintains that the remedy would be effective if she had the strength to implement it.

However, as their correspondence continues, Elisabeth reveals her views on evil, which are contrary to Descartes' view that we can derive intellectual joy from any situation. As support for his remedy, Descartes writes that knowledge of God's providence "teaches us to appreciate all the things that come to us" and allows us to "draw joy even from our afflictions" (AT IV: 291-2; Shapiro: 111). Elisabeth disagrees with this point, stating,

The knowledge of the existence of God and his attributes can console us from the mishaps which come to us from the ordinary course of nature and from the order He has established there, such as losing one's well-being [*le bien*] in a storm, or health by an infection of the air, or friends through death. But it cannot console us from those mishaps that are brought upon us by other men. For it seems to us that the will of these men is entirely free, as we have nothing but faith alone to persuade us that God cares to rule these wills and that He has determined the fate of each person before the creation of the world (AT IV: 302; Shapiro: 114).

Elisabeth thus rejects one of the foundational claims for Descartes' remedy. He holds that we can derive joy from any circumstance because God sends these circumstances to us. However, she argues that our circumstances are often influenced by others, and others often "bring mishaps upon us." Elisabeth echoes this point later in the correspondence. Descartes writes that "we always have more goods in this life than evils" (AT IV: 333; Shapiro: 126), yet Elisabeth has "trouble persuading [herself] that we will always have more goods in life than evils" (AT IV: 337; Shapiro: 128). One of the reasons she thinks we do not always have more goods than evils is that "there are so many persons who have the intent and the power to harm and few who have either one or the other to help" (AT IV: 337; Shapiro: 128). Thus, Elisabeth holds that our circumstances are not wholly brought about by God, since humans have free will and often have

the intent to harm us. Since our circumstances are not wholly brought about by God, there is no guarantee that they are truly for the best.

III. How Intellectual Love Prevents Harm from Hatred

A. Intellectual love as a remedy for hatred

In Chapter 4, we saw that Descartes maintains that hatred has several harmful effects on the soul, while love of good objects has several beneficial effects. Hatred separates us from goods within others, causes sadness, and makes us malicious. Love of good objects increases our perfection, produces joy, and makes us more virtuous. In this chapter, we have seen that we experience the effects of intellectual emotions more strongly than passions that occur alongside them. Thus, if we experience intellectual love alongside hatred, we will experience the effects of intellectual love more strongly than hatred. In Descartes' words, "inner excitations affect us more intimately and consequently have much more power over us than the Passions from which they differ but which are found with them" (AT XI: 441-2; Voss: 101). Hence, if we hate an object, we can will ourselves to experience intellectual love toward it. When we do so, we will increase in perfection, experience joy, and become more virtuous. We will experience these effects more strongly than the effects of hatred, namely, separation from goods, sadness, and malice.

Descartes provides an example that allows us to illustrate this idea. He writes that "hatred that estranges us from someone's bad behavior estranges us by that very means from his company, in which we would otherwise be able to find some good" (AT XI: 433; Voss: 95). If we are tempted to hate someone because of their "bad behavior," we can will ourselves to consider some good quality within them, which will then arouse intellectual love. As I argued in Chapter 4, love of good objects increases our perfection in the sense that it joins us with good

qualities in the object of love. In the case of the person with bad behavior, we can will ourselves to consider some good quality in the person in order to arouse intellectual love. It seems reasonable, then, that we join with the good quality that we considered. Love also produces joy because love represents to us a good that belongs to us, and joy is caused by the representation of a good that belongs to us. Thus, we have the representation that the person we are tempted to hate is a good that belongs to us. Of course, they belong to us only in the sense that we are able to share in their good qualities and form a relationship with them. Finally, love causes us to become more caring. It makes sense that willing oneself to consider good qualities within a person one is tempted to hate makes one more caring toward them. Hate “dispose[s] the soul to thoughts full of sharpness and bitterness” (AT XI: 405; Voss: 75), while love “always has the good for its object” (AT IV: 614; CSMK III: 312). Thus, when we are tempted to hate someone, we can excite intellectual love by considering a good quality within them. When we do so, we will increase in perfection, experience joy, and become more caring. We experience these effects more deeply than the effects of hatred.

B. Appropriate qualities from which to derive intellectual love

Descartes warns against deriving intellectual love from qualities that are not truly good in the same way he warns against deriving intellectual joy from qualities that are not truly good. He writes that love “cannot be too great” only when it is directed toward objects that are “truly good” (AT XI: 432; Voss: 94). He holds that it is dangerous to love harmful objects, writing, “Love that is unjust joins us to things which may harm, or at least which deserve less consideration than we pay them, which disgraces and debases us” (AT XI: 435; Voss: 96).⁹²

⁹² See also: “love for an undeserving object can make us worse than hatred for an object we should love, because there is more danger in being joined to a thing which is bad, and in being as it were transformed into this thing, than there is in being separated willingly from a thing which is good” (AT IV: 613; CSMK III: 312).

Thus, it is important that we only derive intellectual love from qualities within others that are truly good. In other words, when we will ourselves to consider a good quality within someone or something in order to excite intellectual love toward them, we should strive to identify a quality that is actually good.

Although we do not yet know from what qualities it is appropriate to derive intellectual love, we do know that in all situations and within all objects, there are good qualities. As we saw in Chapter 4, there are always good qualities within existing things because existing things are not mere privations. Descartes writes that “evil, being only a privation, cannot be conceived without some real subject which it is in, and there is nothing real that does not have some goodness in it” (AT XI: 433; Voss: 95). In a letter to Elisabeth, Descartes states, “according to philosophy, evil is nothing real but only a privation” (AT IV: 308; Shapiro: 117).⁹³ Thus, we know there are good qualities within all people and objects, on Descartes’ view, even if we do not know exactly what these good qualities are.

Descartes provides significantly fewer examples of intellectual love than intellectual joy. He writes that the soul experiences intellectual love when it perceives “that there are many very fine things to be known about nature” (AT IV: 602; CSMK III: 306). In this case, the soul’s intellectual love is directed toward knowledge of nature. He holds that we are able to experience intellectual love of God, which then causes the passion of love toward God, the “most delightful and useful passion possible” (AT IV: 608; CSMK III: 309).⁹⁴ Thus, we know that knowledge and God are appropriate objects of intellectual love.

While Descartes does not explicitly say that we can will ourselves to consider that other people have the capacity for free will in order to excite intellectual love toward them, I think this

⁹³ See also: “there is no good whose privation is not an evil” (AT XI: 393; Voss: 66).

⁹⁴ See Chapter 3, Section IV for more detail on this process.

follows from his views of free will and intellectual love. As we have seen, Descartes maintains that free will is a “supreme perfection in man” (AT VIII A: 18; CSM I: 205). In the *Meditations*, he writes that free will makes us “bear in some way the image and likeness of God” (AT VII: 57; CSM II: 40). In his early writings, he describes free will as a “marvel” alongside creation *ex nihilo* and the Incarnation (AT X: 218; CSM I: 5).⁹⁵ Thus, we can will ourselves to consider the fact that someone has free will in order to excite intellectual love toward them. This is a powerful consideration because all humans, on Descartes’ view, have free will. Hence, for any human we encounter, we can will ourselves to think they have free will, which is a truly good quality.

Moreover, in Chapter 4, I provided an account of several qualities that Descartes describes as good. He writes that virtue is the “supreme good of each individual” (AT V: 82; CSMK III: 324). Wisdom, he writes, “constitutes the supreme good of human life” (AT VIII A: 9; CSM I: 183). Humans are able to share in some of the perfections that are in God, such as intelligence, power, and the ability to create.⁹⁶ All of these are appropriate qualities from which to derive intellectual love. In other words, we are able to will ourselves to consider another person’s virtue, intelligence, power, or ability to create in order to excite intellectual love toward them. This intellectual love will be appropriate because it is derived from qualities that are truly good, on Descartes’ view. Once again, I do not want to restrict the qualities from which it is appropriate to derive intellectual love to these qualities. There may be other good qualities that we could will ourselves to consider in order to excite intellectual love toward others. In the previous section, we saw that Descartes describes a quick wit, “sharp and distinct” imagination, and “ample or prompt” memory as perfections of the mind (AT VI: 2; CSM I: 111-2). Thus, if

⁹⁵ See also AT V: 85; CSMK III: 326.

⁹⁶ Descartes describes these as perfection in God in this passage: “By the word ‘God’ I understand a substance that is infinite, <eternal, immutable,> independent, supremely intelligent, supremely powerful, and which created both myself and everything else (if there be anything else) that exists” (AT VII: 45; CSM II: 31).

we come across someone who has one of these qualities, we could will ourselves to think about the quality in order to excite intellectual love toward them.

IV. Intellectual Emotions and Using Volitions to Alter Passions

In order to further our understanding of how intellectual joy and intellectual love are able to prevent harm from sadness and hatred, I want to compare the remedy of causing intellectual emotions to another remedy for harmful passions. Near the end of Part I of *The Passions of the Soul*, Descartes examines the extent to which the will can alter passions. He maintains that the will can change passions by generating thoughts that usually accompany the passions one wants to have. Causing intellectual emotions alongside harmful passions is similar to this remedy because in both, the soul wills itself to have particular thoughts in order to alter the passions. One of the benefits of comparing intellectual emotions to this remedy is that Descartes thoroughly explains what occurs physiologically when the soul wills itself to have thoughts in order to change its passions. I use this physiological account to explain what happens to the mind-body union when we will ourselves to experience an intellectual emotion alongside a passion.

A. Using volitions to alter passions

Throughout *The Passions of the Soul*, Descartes mentions reasons why we may need to correct the passions. For example, passions represent objects as more harmful or beneficial than they truly are (AT XI: 431; Voss: 93), they can lead us to take rash actions (AT XI: 487; Voss: 134), and they can negatively affect our physical health (AT XI: 434; Voss: 95). At the end of Part I of *The Passions of the Soul*, Descartes considers “[w]hat the power of the soul is with respect to its passions” (AT XI: 362; Voss: 43). He argues that the soul is unable to alter passions directly, that is, merely will itself to feel or not feel passions. In his words, “Our passions cannot...be directly excited or displaced by the action of our will” (AT XI: 362; Voss: 43).

However, the soul is able to alter passions indirectly by willing itself to have thoughts that typically accompany the passions it wants to have or are opposed to the passions it does not want to have. In his words, the passions “can be [excited or displaced] indirectly by the representation of things which are usually joined with the passions we will to have and opposed to the ones we will to reject” (AT XI: 362-3; Voss: 43).⁹⁷ He provides a helpful example to illustrate this idea, writing,

in order to excite boldness and displace fear in oneself, it is not sufficient to have the volition to do so – one must apply oneself to attend to reasons, objects, or precedents that convince [one] that the peril is not great, that there is always more security in defense than in flight, that one will have glory and joy from having conquered, whereas one can expect only regret and shame from having fled, and similar things (AT XI: 363; Voss: 43).

Thus, on Descartes’ view, willing oneself to have particular thoughts that are usually joined with the passions one wants to have or are contrary to the passions one does not want to have is an effective way to alter the passions.⁹⁸

Let us consider this method for remedying the passions in the context of sadness and hatred. When one is sad and wants to feel joy, one should, according to the above remedy, will oneself to attend to thoughts that typically occur alongside joy and are opposed to sadness. The thoughts that typically occur alongside joy are thoughts of good qualities that belong to oneself, and the thoughts that typically occur alongside sadness are thoughts of defects that belong to oneself (AT XI: 396-7; Voss: 69-70). Thus, when one wants to displace sadness with joy, one should will oneself to consider good qualities that belong to oneself and avoid thoughts of defects that belong to oneself. The first action – willing oneself to consider good qualities that

⁹⁷ He briefly mentions this remedy in his correspondence with Elisabeth as well (AT V: 65; Shapiro: 81).

⁹⁸ This method of altering the passions has been discussed much more than the method of causing intellectual emotions. See, for example, Schmitter (2008), especially pg. 437, Williston (1999), especially pgs. 47-51, and Shapiro (2003).

belong to oneself – is the action that causes intellectual joy. What should we make of this? Let us recall that intellectual joy typically causes the passion of joy (AT XI; 397; Voss: 70). The passion of joy involves a physical response in the body, whereas intellectual joy does not. I argue Descartes maintains that willing oneself to consider thoughts that are typically joined with joy – namely, thoughts of good qualities that belong to oneself – necessarily produces intellectual joy, which then typically produces the passion of joy. We know that thoughts of good qualities that belong to oneself necessarily produce intellectual joy because Descartes defines intellectual joy as caused by the representation of a good that belongs to oneself (AT XI: 397; Voss: 69-70). There is no guarantee that intellectual joy will produce the passion of joy because the passion of joy requires a physical response in the body, which (as we will see in the next section) is not necessarily caused by willing oneself to have particular thoughts.

A similar situation, I argue, occurs in the context of love and hatred. When one is experiencing hatred, but wants to experience love, one should, according to the remedy, will oneself to have thoughts that typically accompany love and are opposed to hatred. That is, one should will oneself to consider good qualities within the object of hatred and avoid thoughts that an object is harmful to oneself.⁹⁹ Willing oneself to consider good qualities within an object necessarily causes intellectual love, which then typically causes the passion of love. Descartes maintains that intellectual love (like intellectual joy) usually causes its corresponding passion (AT IV: 602; CSMK III: 306). Thus, considering thoughts that are usually joined with love – namely, thoughts about the goodness of an object – will first produce intellectual love and then typically produce the passion of love.

⁹⁹ One may worry that avoiding thoughts that an object is harmful to oneself will put one in danger. However, as I argued in Chapter 4, we are able to protect our body by using pain and dispassionate judgments about objects that harm in order to protect our body.

Causing intellectual emotions alongside passions, then, is similar to the remedy Descartes presents at the end of Part I of *The Passions* in the sense that in both, the soul wills itself to have particular thoughts in order to alter the passions. In the case of intellectual joy, the soul wills itself to consider some good quality that belongs to itself, and in the case of intellectual love, the soul wills itself to consider some good quality within an object. The remedy that Descartes provides in Part I is much broader, as he argues that we can will ourselves to have any thought that is typically joined with a passion we want to have or opposed to a passion we want to reject in order to alter the passions. The remedy also differs from Descartes' view of intellectual emotions since the remedy is about willing oneself to have thoughts that produce passions, rather than intellectual emotions. However, as we saw in the two previous paragraphs, the remedies are closely connected because intellectual joy and intellectual love usually produce their corresponding passions.

B. Physiological explanation of how volitions alter passions

Descartes thoroughly explains what happens physiologically when the soul wills itself to have particular thoughts in order to alter the passions. This physiological explanation is very helpful for understanding what happens to the mind-body union when it experiences an intellectual emotion alongside a passion. Descartes maintains that when the soul wills itself to have a particular thought, it moves the pineal gland. He writes, "the whole action of the soul consists in this: merely by willing something, it makes the little gland to which it is closely joined move in the way required to produce the effect corresponding to this volition" (AT XI: 360; Voss: 41). The passions also move the pineal gland. In fact, conflicts in the soul occur when the soul moves the pineal gland in one direction and the passions move it in another. Descartes writes,

all 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 (AT XI: 364; Voss: 44).

As we have repeatedly seen, the passions are “caused, maintained, and strengthened” by animal spirits, which, as we see here, can move the pineal gland in ways that are contrary to the soul (AT XI: 349; Voss: 34). When we cause an intellectual emotion, the volition to have the thought that causes the intellectual emotion moves the pineal gland.¹⁰⁰ When we cause an intellectual emotion alongside a passion, the pineal gland is still affected by the movement of animal spirits that accompanies the passion. There is a conflict, then, between the movement of the pineal gland by the soul and the movement of the pineal gland by the body, specifically the animal spirits.

The animal spirits do not merely affect the pineal gland, but flow throughout the organs, muscles, and nerves to affect the whole body. The movement of the animal spirits depends on the specific passions they accompany. In hatred, for example, the animal spirits flow toward the stomach, spleen, and liver, which disrupts digestion and the flow of blood to the heart (AT XI: 404-5; Voss: 74). The reason the soul cannot directly alter its passions is because the animal spirits affect various parts of the body. In Descartes’ words,

There is one particular reason why the soul cannot readily alter or check its passions [...] The reason is that they are almost all accompanied by some excitation taking place in the heart, and consequently also throughout the blood and the spirits, so that until this excitation has ceased they remain present to our thought (AT XI: 363; Voss: 44).

Thus, we cannot merely will ourselves to change our passions because the passions involve a movement of animal spirits that is not fully within control of the will.

¹⁰⁰ Of course, these comments apply to intellectual emotions that occur in embodied souls only. Descartes does maintain that intellectual emotions could occur in a disembodied soul (AT IV: 602; CSMK III: 306).

The fact that the animal spirits flow throughout the body and cannot simply be stopped by volitions explains why people who experience intellectual emotions alongside passions still experience physical effects of the passions. For example, the mourning husband's heart is "constricted by...Sadness" and "some remnants of love or pity...draw genuine tears from his eyes" (AT XI: 441; Voss: 100-1). Playgoers, of course, may be brought to tears by "those sad and lamentable stories...represented on a stage" (AT IV: 202; Shapiro: 87).¹⁰¹ The reason for this is that the mourning husband and playgoers still experience the movement of animal spirits that accompany their passions, even though they experience intellectual joy more strongly. Descartes specifies that tears are caused by "moderate" sadness, especially when "accompanied or followed by some sensation of Love, or Joy" (AT XI: 423; Voss: 86-7). When one experiences sadness, "the heart's openings are tightly contracted" (AT XI: 406; Voss: 75). Thus, it makes sense that the playgoers cry, and the husband cries and feels constriction in his heart. They experience the physical effects of sadness, love, and pity, even though they also experience intellectual joy.¹⁰²

V. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that intellectual love can serve as a remedy for hatred, and intellectual joy can serve as a remedy for sadness. Descartes provides two puzzling examples to illustrate intellectual emotions – a mourning husband who feels joy at his wife's funeral and playgoers who feel joy while observing sad scenes in a theater. The mourning husband and playgoers experience an emotion that is caused by the soul, occurs alongside passions, and affects them more strongly than the passions it occurs alongside. Similarly, we are able to

¹⁰¹ See also AT IV: 309; Shapiro: 118.

¹⁰² André Gombay (2008) examines instances of mental or emotional conflict, on Descartes' view. He also pays close attention to the physical state of the body when it experiences these conflicts.

experience a form of love and joy that we cause ourselves, can occur alongside hatred and sadness, and affects us more deeply than hatred and sadness. When we hate someone or something, we can will ourselves to consider some good quality in them to excite intellectual love toward them. When we feel sad, we can will ourselves to consider some good quality that belongs to us in order to excite intellectual joy. Causing intellectual love and intellectual joy is such a powerful remedy for hatred and sadness because we are *always* able to find some good within ourselves and others. If goods are not immediately apparent, we can always will ourselves to remember that every person has free will or that our circumstances are sent to us by God.

Conclusion

In this dissertation, I have examined Descartes' theory of love. The passion of love, I have argued, is the thought of an apparent good that is caused, maintained, and strengthened by animal spirits. This understanding of love is based on Descartes' definition of passions as "perceptions or sensations or excitations of the soul...which are caused, maintained, and strengthened by some movement of the spirits" (AT XI: 349: Voss: 34). The passion of love typically leads one to join oneself in volition to the object of love. We know that joining in volition to the object of love is an effect, rather than part of the essence of love, because joining in volition is a volition, and Descartes strictly divides passions and volitions. When one joins oneself in volition to an object of love, one wills oneself to imagine a whole one forms with the object of love. While Alanen (2019) argues that the role of volition in love is to affirm that the object of love is suitable for oneself, I argue that the role of volition in love is to form a mental image of a whole one forms with the object of love.

I have argued that we should consider ourselves as forming a whole with the rest of the universe because we actually do form a whole with the rest of the universe. I drew from passages in the *Principles of Philosophy*, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, and correspondence with Pierre Chanut in order to argue that Descartes maintains the universe forms a whole in the sense that it is intentionally created by God to function well. The universe forms a whole in a similar way that artifacts form a whole, since both are intentionally created, and in a similar way that functionally organized objects form a whole, since both are composed of parts that function well together. I argued that Descartes' moral claim that we should consider ourselves as forming a whole with

others is based on his metaphysical view that we do form a whole with others. This fits well with his general view that moral philosophy should be based on true beliefs about metaphysics.

I also argued that Descartes maintains all humans are proper objects of love, since love of any human can increase our perfection, produce joy in us, and make us more benevolent. All humans are proper objects of love because all humans have perfections in them, such as free will, intelligence, virtue, and the ability to create new things. While we are not obligated to love all humans, we are obligated to esteem them equally, as all humans have the ability to use their free will well. We should never hate others, on Descartes' view, because hatred separates us from goods within others, causes sadness, and makes us malicious. While Sharp (2011) argues that hatred is necessary to protect the body, I argue there are other means of protecting the body that do not require hatred.

Finally, I argued that intellectual love can serve as remedy for hatred, and intellectual joy can serve as a remedy for sadness. Intellectual love is caused by considering a good quality within an object, and intellectual joy is caused by considering a good quality that belongs to us. There are always good qualities within others and good qualities that belong to us. Hence, we can always will ourselves to experience intellectual love and intellectual joy. When we experience intellectual love alongside hatred, or intellectual joy alongside sadness, we experience the effects of intellectual love or intellectual joy more deeply than the effects of hatred or sadness. We should strive to identify qualities within others and within ourselves that are truly good in order to excite intellectual love and intellectual joy. Fortunately, there are always truly good qualities in ourselves and in others, as all of our circumstances are sent to us by God and all objects are good in some way.

My dissertation has had several overarching aims. I strived to further our understanding of how Descartes' moral philosophy is based on his metaphysics. In the *Principles of Philosophy*, he famously compares philosophy to a tree, writing,

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 (AT IXB: 14; CSM I: 186).

Although Descartes never published a work on moral philosophy, he discusses morality throughout his works. In the *Discourse on Method*, he discusses the "provisional moral code [*morale par provision*]" he followed while establishing the foundation of his philosophical system (AT VI: 22; CSM I: 122).¹⁰³ In his correspondence with Elisabeth, Descartes discusses the relation between happiness and goodness, as well as how we should treat members of our communities.¹⁰⁴ In *The Passions of the Soul*, he writes that "virtue is a supreme remedy for the Passions" (AT XI: 441; Voss: 101) and presents his account of generosity, which is "the key to all the other virtues" (AT XI: 454; Voss: 109).

Several concepts in Descartes' moral philosophy are rooted in his metaphysics. In his correspondence with Elisabeth, he writes that knowledge of God's perfections, understanding the nature of our mind, and recognizing the vastness of the universe allow us to "discern the best course in all actions of life" (AT IV: 291; Shapiro: 111). In *The Passions of the Soul*, Descartes emphasizes the importance of reflecting on divine providence to prevent desires for objects that do not depend on oneself. Regulation of vain desires, he writes, is what the "principal utility of

¹⁰³ There is a significant amount of discussion about the significance of the provisional moral code in Descartes' broader views of morality. See Shapiro (2008) and Marshall (1998) for more discussion.

¹⁰⁴ See especially the letters from August 4, 1645 to October 6, 1645. Svensson (2020), (2015), and (2010) provides an especially astute analysis of the moral philosophy in Descartes' correspondence with Elisabeth. See also Viljanen (forthcoming).

Moral Philosophy consists in” (AT XI: 436; Voss: 97). Generosity requires that one understands that “free control of [one’s] volitions” is the only thing which “truly belongs” to oneself (AT XI: 446; Voss: 104).

Throughout my dissertation, I aimed to show that several concepts in Descartes’ theory of love are also based on his metaphysics. I argued that Descartes’ claim that we should consider ourselves as forming a whole with the rest of the universe is based on his metaphysical view that we do form a whole with the rest of the universe. His position that we should not hate others is based on his view that evil is a privation of the good, so all existing things must have some goodness within them. Finally, his view that every person is a proper object of love is based on his position that every person has free will, which is a quality that makes us “bear in some way the image and likeness of God” (AT VII: 57; CSM II: 40).

Another overarching aim of my dissertation has been to contribute to recent efforts to create a more nuanced and complete understanding of Descartes’ philosophy. Historically, commentary on Descartes has been dominated by his epistemology and metaphysics. Surely one of the reasons for this is that many of his works, such as the *Meditations on First Philosophy*, *Principles of Philosophy*, and *Discourse on Method*, are primarily concerned with epistemology and metaphysics. In addition, Descartes clearly thought considerably about epistemology and metaphysics, and presents his ideas on these topics as complete. He describes his epistemology as an attempt to “establish anything at all in the sciences that was stable and likely to last” (AT VII: 17-18; CSM II: 12) and he presents his metaphysics as “discovering the true principles of material things” (AT IXB: 14; CSM I: 186).

However, scholars have recently paid closer attention to Descartes’ theory of the passions and moral philosophy. In doing so, widely held views about Descartes’ perspective on human

nature have been brought into question. Descartes is often seen as believing that humans are highly rational and are primarily thinking, rather than embodied, beings. However, in *The Passions of the Soul*, he portrays humans as having a deeply intertwined mind and body, and states that the passions are “all in their nature good” (AT XI: 485; Voss: 132). His passage in the *Discourse on Method* that we can use knowledge to “make ourselves, as it were, lords and masters of nature” has led some scholars to think he believes humans should manipulate nature to serve their own ends (AT VI: 62; CSM I: 142-3). In his correspondence with Chanut, however, Descartes provides several reasons for thinking we should not see humans as the end of creation, and he writes that love of God causes us to esteem other parts of creation more highly. Throughout his works, Descartes urges us to see ourselves as a small part of a vast, God-created universe and argues that doing so leads us to act benevolently toward other parts of the universe.

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