

THE WILL IN DESCARTES' THOUGHT

by

Marie Y. Jayasekera

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
(Philosophy)
in The University of Michigan
2010

Doctoral Committee:

Professor Edwin M. Curley, Chair
Professor Victor Caston
Professor Louis E. Loeb
Associate Professor George P. Hoffmann

© Marie Y. Jayasekera
2010

Preface

In this dissertation, I explore a topic that, despite the vast secondary literature on Descartes, has been under-explored. Although there has been substantial discussion of Descartes on issues closely tied to the will—for example, the plausibility of his theory of belief and his conception of freedom—a relative lack of attention has been paid to Descartes’ conception of the will itself and the role the will plays in those issues.

There may be several reasons for this. First, Descartes does not have one work in which he systematically lays out his conception of the will. Instead, he discusses the will throughout his corpus seemingly only incidentally as it arises in various contexts. Furthermore, Descartes’ notion of the will intersects with a wide range of philosophical areas—it doesn’t fall squarely into one of the main areas that have been focused on in the literature on Descartes. And traditionally in the English-language literature, there has been a focus on Descartes’ epistemology, metaphysics, and natural philosophy, and less interest in what he has to say about moral philosophy, and moral psychology in particular—areas in which the will figures prominently. Recently, with growing scholarly interest in Descartes’ final work, *The Passions of the Soul*, it is clear that in this work Descartes reveals previously unappreciated aspects of his conception of the will. Lastly, the will is tied to what has been seen by many as the more confusing, or objectionable, aspects of Descartes’ philosophy: his theory of judgment, his view on human freedom, and his conception of mind-body interaction.

The aim of this dissertation is to pursue a wider-ranging exploration of the human will in Descartes' thought than has been previously carried out in the English-language literature. Discussion of the will has largely been limited to the Fourth Meditation and the issues that arise therein. I expand the scope of the investigation: I look at a broader range of texts—from the *Rules for the Direction of the Mind* (the *Regulae*), Descartes' earliest unpublished work, to *The Passions of the Soul*, his last published work. In so doing, I identify and explore continuities and developments in his views. My approach in this dissertation is to explore the will in contexts that Descartes himself delineates and to provide answers to the questions that arise organically from those contexts.

I begin in Chapter 1 with the question of why Descartes construes judgment as an operation of the will in the *Meditations*. I notice that this is a change in view from the *Regulae* and argue that to make sense of this change, we need to consider Descartes' conceptions of error and activity in the *Regulae*. I trace the development in his philosophical views about error and activity from the *Regulae* to the *Meditations* and show that these commitments can help to make sense of his mature theory of judgment.

In Chapter 2, I then turn to Descartes' conception of freedom in the Fourth Meditation. I suggest that to make sense of Descartes' remarks on freedom, including his much-contested definition of freedom, we need to understand his conception of the will—in particular, its unlimited scope, its indifference (the state of the will when agents do not clearly see what is true or good), and its tendency towards the true and the good. I argue that Descartes does not hold that freedom consists in a two-way power that is undetermined; rather, freedom is compatible with determination and consists in the power of the will to determine itself. I show, further, that Descartes' later correspondence helps

to clarify and unify Descartes' characterization of freedom in the Fourth Meditation: we see that freedom is proportional to the ease of the will's determination of itself.

I end the dissertation with a discussion of the relationship between the will and the passions of the soul (the passions) in Chapter 3. I first address the question of how the passions affect the will, and I argue for a "bifurcated" approach to the function of the passions. According to this interpretation, the passions affect the will differently depending on what kind of volition results—volitions involved in action or volitions involved in judgment. In coordination with one another and with sensations, the passions lead the will to form volitions involved in action. Alternatively, they influence the will to form volitions involved in judgment by strengthening and preserving thoughts that are beneficial to the mind-body composite in some way. I then discuss several ways in which Descartes conceives of the passions as problematic and in need of our control. I conclude by exploring three means Descartes prescribes for controlling them: habituation, indirect control, and the regulation of desire.

In this investigation of the will in Descartes' thought, I do not address several issues in which the will plays an important role. The will is central to Descartes' conceptions of *générosité* and virtue, towards which I only gesture in Chapter 3. Furthermore, I do not here address Descartes' view on weakness of soul, which is intimately tied to his conception of the will. My hope is that this investigation is the beginning of a more comprehensive project that incorporates these other issues of the will in Descartes' thought.

This project could not have been completed without the contributions and support of many people. I would like to thank, first of all, the members of my dissertation

committee: Edwin Curley, Louis Loeb, Victor Caston, and George Hoffmann. In particular, thanks to Ed for guiding the project, for providing incisive feedback, and for helping me to avoid numerous egregious interpretive errors. I am grateful to Louis for encouraging my fledgling ideas on Descartes' theory of judgment during my early years in the program, for tirelessly providing me with countless constructive suggestions, and for serving as a constant source of advice and support. I would like to thank Victor for his encouragement and affirmation during the crucial period after I achieved candidacy, and for his positive and thoughtful comments on many different parts of the project.

Amanda Roth and Sean Greenberg have provided invaluable feedback on far more of the dissertation than could have been expected. Thanks to Amanda for her support, encouragement, and friendship throughout these six years. Our writing meetings kept me going during the most difficult times and I expect they will continue to do so for a very long time. I owe a special thanks to Sean for his hospitality and challenging questions during a fruitful six months visiting the UCI philosophy department, and for continuing to provide me with encouragement, helpful advice, and constructive feedback.

I would also like to thank others who have helped me develop and clarify the ideas in this dissertation: among others, Ian Flora, Paul Hoffman, Nicholas Jolley, Dan Kaufman, Shen-yi Liao, Jamie Tappenden, Lei Zhong, and the participants and audiences at several conferences, workshops, and talks where I presented versions of this material, including the Fourth Biennial Margaret Dauler Wilson Conference, the *Scientia* Workshop at the UCI Department of Philosophy, the University of Michigan, the University of Cincinnati, Haverford College, Santa Clara University, Syracuse University, and Colgate University.

I am grateful to those who have helped me through the dissertation writing and job market processes. I'd like to thank, in addition to those I have already mentioned, Sarah Buss, Vanessa Carbonell, Peter Railton, Rich Thomason, and Ken Walton for their help in navigating the choppy job market waters; Rachael Criso, J. Mike Courage, and Deborah Ross for their aid with languages; and Jude Beck, Kelly Coveleski, Sue London, Maureen Lopez, Molly Mahony, and Linda Shultes for their invaluable day-to-day support of the graduate program at Michigan. For their generous financial support, I'd like to thank the Rackham School of Graduate Studies and the Department of Philosophy at the University of Michigan.

My family has been the source of continual moral support and encouragement: thanks to my parents Mary and Tai, and to Mollie, Michelle, Drew, Leela and Bandula, Charmalie and David, Rasika, and Hilary. I am grateful to Cecilia, Kurt, Conrad (and Tizsa) for their good cheer, especially during the final push. And, most importantly, I cannot thank my husband Mihira enough for always encouraging and helping me to become a better philosopher, and more importantly, a better person.

Table of Contents

Preface.....	ii
Translations and Abbreviations.....	viii
Chapter 1: Error, Activity, and the Theory of Judgment.....	1
Chapter 2: Human Freedom in the Fourth Meditation.....	30
Chapter 3: The Relationship between the Will and the Passions of the Soul.....	60
Bibliography.....	95

Translations and Abbreviations

References of Descartes' works are to Adam and Tannery (AT). Translations of *The Passions of the Soul* are from the Stephen Voss translation (SV). Translations of Descartes' correspondence with Elisabeth are from the Lisa Shapiro translation (LS). Translations of Descartes' other works are from the Cottingham, Stoothoff, and Murdoch editions (CSM I and CSM II), the Cottingham, Stoothoff, Murdoch and Kenny edition (CSMK), unless unspecified, in which case translations are my own or otherwise noted.

- | | |
|------|--|
| AT | Charles Adam and Paul Tannery, editors, <i>Oeuvres de Descartes</i> , vols. I-XI, Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, Paris, 1964. |
| CSM | John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch, editors and translators, <i>The Philosophical Writings of Descartes</i> , Volumes I-II, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1985-91. |
| CSMK | John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch, and Anthony Kenny, editors and translators, <i>The Philosophical Writings of Descartes</i> , Volume III, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1991. |
| LS | Lisa Shapiro, editor and translator, <i>The Correspondence between Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia and René Descartes</i> , University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2007. |
| SV | Stephen Voss, translator, <i>The Passions of the Soul</i> , Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis, 1989. |

Chapter 1

Error, Activity, and the Theory of Judgment

Introduction

The theory of judgment that Descartes presents in the Fourth Meditation seems quite problematic to many. According to this theory, judgment is the product of two faculties, the intellect and the will. The intellect supplies the subject matter of the judgment, and the will then affirms or denies what the intellect perceives (AT VII 56-62; CSM II 39-43).¹ Some have taken the main problem with making judgment an operation of the will, as this theory does, to be that belief then seems to be a kind of voluntary action, akin to deciding what to do.² But this strikes many as implausible—we don't have the same kind of control over our beliefs, they say, as we do over our decisions.

One strategy for dealing with the seeming implausibility of this theory of judgment is to give a story that accounts for why Descartes would have held such a view. The standard approach of this kind, what I will call the “theodicean explanation,” focuses on the origin of the theory of judgment to account for its idiosyncrasies. This approach first finds a theodicy—an explanation of how the existence of a good God is compatible

¹ Descartes also explicitly affirms this theory of judgment in the *Principles*. See *Principles* I. 34 (AT VIIIA 18; CSM I 204).

² E. M. Curley interprets Spinoza as making an objection of this sort. See Curley 1975, esp. 167-178. For a contemporary discussion of this issue, see Della Rocca 2006, 148-152. In this chapter, I will raise considerations that should make us question whether this inference is justified for Descartes' theory of judgment.

with the existence of evil—that Descartes would likely have been familiar with. The argument then goes that Descartes adapted the theodicy for his own purposes, and that his theory of judgment falls out of that adaptation. For example, Etienne Gilson argues that the theory of judgment of the Fourth Meditation results from Descartes’ application of Aquinas’ theodicy to the Cartesian version of the problem of evil, the problem of error. Descartes lumps together erroneous judgment and sinful volition in his theory of judgment by making judgment an act of the will. He then can use Aquinas’ arguments concerning the problem of evil to exonerate God from human error in the Fourth Meditation.³ Alternatively, Stephen Menn argues that Descartes adapts Augustine’s theodicy from *De Libero Arbitrio*.⁴

I don’t think that this account is right, for the reasons I outline in the first section of this chapter.⁵ But there seems to be very little in Descartes’ own work with which to generate an alternative.⁶ Descartes does not present a clear statement of the theory of judgment in his own published and unpublished works until the *Meditations*. In fact, the theory of judgment of the Fourth Meditation seems to represent a change in Descartes’ thought on judgment. We see this from the *Rules for the Direction of the Mind* (*Regulae ad Directionem Ingenii*, what I’ll refer to as the *Regulae*), Descartes’ first major unpublished work written at least thirteen years before the publication of the

³ Gilson, 1913. Ariew et al. also tentatively put forward the theodicean explanation to explain the development of Descartes’ view of judgment. See the entry on judgment, Ariew et al. 2003, 148. See Caton 1975, 90 for another version of the theodicean explanation.

⁴ See Menn 1998, 301-336 and 302, in particular, for evidence that he advocates the theodicean explanation. See Matthews 2008 for a critical exploration of Menn’s view that Descartes’ Fourth Meditation theodicy is a restatement of Augustine’s theodicy from *De Libero Arbitrio*.

⁵ Others who disagree with the theodicean explanation include Rosenthal 1986 and Wilson 1978.

⁶ David Rosenthal focuses on the *Meditations* to provide a non-theodicean account of why Descartes makes judgment an operation of the will. According to his view, the theory of judgment “is a direct response to the difficulty of conceiving of judgments as being due to a single, undifferentiated aspect of our mental nature” (Rosenthal 1986, 410).

Meditations.⁷ In the *Regulae*, Descartes does not have a full-fledged theory of judgment. But he seems to hold the standard scholastic view⁸ that judgment is an operation of the *intellect*: for example, he says, “we distinguish between the faculty by which our intellect intuitively knows things and the faculty by which it makes affirmative or negative judgments” (CSM I 45; AT X 420).⁹

Although the *Regulae* does not provide us with much direct illumination on the development of Descartes’ theory of judgment, I will suggest that it does provide us with other resources for understanding why Descartes ends up conceiving judgment as an act of the will. In the *Regulae*, Descartes lays out a substantive theory of error that has important continuities with the theory of error he presents in the *Meditations*. Furthermore, in the *Regulae*, Descartes introduces a distinction between activity and passivity that will become central to demarcating the faculties of the intellect and the will in his later works. I will argue that the continuities in his theory of error and the distinction between activity and passivity can be marshaled to provide a plausible alternative to the theodicean explanation.

In this chapter, I begin with two reasons for why we should seek an alternative to the theodicean explanation. Next, I discuss Descartes’ theory of error, first in the *Regulae*, and then in the *Meditations*, with a brief discussion of the *Discourse* along the way. I then show the development of Descartes’ activity-passivity distinction and present an interpretation of it, which, lastly, I argue shows us that Descartes conceives of both

⁷ Jean-Paul Weber’s detailed study, *La constitution du texte des “Regulae,”* dates the writing of the *Regulae* to the period between 1619 and 1628.

⁸ See Menn 1998, 310 for a general characterization of the scholastic account of the intellect and Kenny 1972, 3-5 for a characterization of Aquinas’ conception of judgment.

⁹ Anthony Kenny also takes Descartes as holding the view in the *Regulae* that judgment is an act of the intellect (Kenny 1972, 1-5).

error, from the *Regulae* to the *Meditations*, and judgment in the *Meditations* as resulting from mental activity. My goal, in tracing out these previously unnoticed developments in Descartes' thought, is to show that Descartes holds other philosophical commitments that might have structured his theory of judgment.

I. Problems with the theodicean explanation

As I explained, the theodicean explanation holds that Descartes makes judgment an operation of the will *solely* because of the demands of the theodicy of the Fourth Meditation. But there are two pressing problems with this view.

First, I will address what I call the *ad hoc* objection. The theodicean explanation makes Descartes' theory of judgment seem *ad hoc*, as it postulates that the theory of judgment was formulated directly in response to the theodicean concerns of the Fourth Meditation. This is a problem because Descartes' theory of judgment is clearly not *ad hoc*—it is, in fact, central to the *Meditations*, as it is presupposed by Descartes' method of doubt.¹⁰ Early in the First Meditation, Descartes proposes the method of doubt:

Reason now leads me to think that I should hold back my assent from opinions which are not completely certain and indubitable just as carefully as I do from those which are patently false. So for the purpose of rejecting all my opinions, it will be enough if I find in each of them at least some reason for doubt. (AT VII 18; CSM II 12)

At this point, it seems that the method of doubt requires only that we seek (and find) some reason for doubt. Yet some of our former beliefs are recalcitrant—to doubt them, they require more than simply seeking reasons for doubt:

¹⁰ See Curley 1975, 167; Curley 1978, 43-44; and Williams 1978, 163-164 for further discussion of this point.

My habitual opinions keep coming back, and, despite my wishes, they capture my belief, which is as it were bound over to them as a result of long occupation and the law of custom. I shall never get out of the habit of confidently assenting to these opinions, so long as I suppose them to be what in fact they are, namely highly probable opinions which, despite the fact that they are in a sense doubtful...it is still much more reasonable to believe than to deny. (AT VII 22; CSM II 15)

Descartes thus suggests a stronger approach: to doubt these opinions, he thinks “it will be a good plan to turn my will in completely the opposite direction and deceive myself, by pretending for a time that these former opinions are utterly false and imaginary” (AT VII 22; CSM II 15). At this point, the participation of the will in the method of doubt seems tied to our supposing that what we believed to be true is in fact false. Yet Descartes states in the Fourth Meditation that the will can suspend judgment about all matters that we do not clearly and distinctly perceive. It is only when the will affirms or denies something that the intellect puts forth that we make judgments, and the will can refrain from affirming and denying what the intellect puts forth, as long as we do not clearly and distinctly perceive it. This capacity of the will to suspend judgment enables us to systematically doubt even our most habitual opinions.

There is a second and more fundamental objection to the theodicean explanation: the theory that errors, like all judgments, are acts of the will does not seem to be Descartes’ ultimate solution to the problem of reconciling his errors with his creation by a perfect God. Toward the end of the Fourth Meditation Descartes entertains the possibility that God could have created him in such a way that he would never make a mistake while being completely free. In presenting this possibility, he seems to give his ultimate explanation of error: that it was better for the world as a whole to have parts that are not immune from error. He says, “I cannot 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” (AT VII 51; CSM II 42-43). In other words, the ultimate explanation of error seems to be that the more diversity in the world, the more perfect the world is, and Descartes says, “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 51; CSM II 43).¹¹ For there to be such diversity in the world, Descartes need only hold that some parts be subject to error. If this is his ultimate explanation of error, it is unclear why judgment has to be attributed to the will.

Thus, even if the theodicean explanation survived the *ad hoc* objection, it does not sufficiently explain why judgment has to be an act of the *will*. These two objections serve as compelling reasons to search for an alternative explanation for the development of Descartes’ theory of judgment. I begin my sketch of an alternative by discussing Descartes’ theory of error, from the *Regulae* to the *Meditations*.

II. Theory of error of the Regulae

The *Regulae* has been viewed in the literature as significant primarily for the light it sheds on Descartes’ method of inquiry. Yet, as I will show, it also provides us with much insight into his thoughts on error. I will argue that error in the *Regulae* is not simply the falsity of our judgments but that it is also a function of the process by which the judgment arises. Specifically, in the *Regulae* error occurs when we misuse the sole faculty of knowledge—the intellect—by composing objects of our thought using processes that do not lead to certain knowledge.

¹¹ See Lovejoy 1964 for more on this.

Some important background information will provide the context. In the *Regulae*, Descartes is first and foremost concerned with developing a “method” that will allow us to reliably increase our knowledge of truths, to reach “a true understanding of everything within one’s capacity” (AT X 372; CSM I 16).¹² Descartes defines method in the following way:

By ‘a method’ I mean reliable rules which are easy to apply, and such that if one follows them exactly one will never take what is false to be true or fruitlessly expend one’s mental efforts, but will gradually and constantly increase one’s knowledge till one arrives at a true understanding of everything within one’s capacity. (AT X 371-372; CSM I 16)

The model he uses for knowledge is mathematics (arithmetic and geometry) and he takes the certainty of mathematics to be largely unproblematic.¹³ Descartes says of arithmetic and geometry: “where these sciences are concerned it scarcely seems humanly possible to err, except through inadvertence” (AT X 365; CSM I 12).

Descartes focuses in the *Regulae* on the faculty of the intellect, because at this point in his thought, the intellect is the only faculty of knowledge. He says, “it is the intellect alone that is capable of knowledge” (AT X 398; CSM I 32) and “it is of course only the intellect that is capable of perceiving the truth” (AT X 411; CSM I 39). The other mental faculties Descartes discusses at any length in the *Regulae*—imagination, sense perception, and memory—are subsidiary faculties and merely “help” or “hinder”

¹² Stephen Gaukroger says that Descartes’ search for a “method” was for a fundamental discipline, “a master problem-solving discipline which underlay every area of inquiry, physical and mathematical” (Gaukroger 2002, 8). For additional general thoughts on how the *Regulae* illuminates Descartes’ method, see Curley 1978, 21-45 and Beck 1952. In this chapter I cannot address the controversy prominent in the secondary literature on the *Regulae* about the relationship between Descartes’ “universal method” and “*mathesis universalis*” (AT XI 378), and thus I do not take up the textual debate about Rule IV initiated in 1964 by Jean-Paul Weber’s *La constitution du texte des Regulae*. Weber’s argument that Rule IV should be viewed as two heterogeneous and incompatible sections, IV-A (AT X 371-374; CSM I 15-17) and IV-B (AT X 374-379; CSM I 20) has been the source of much discussion, including Marion 1975, Van De Pitte 1979, Kraus 1983, Van De Pitte 1991, and most recently, Doyle 2009.

¹³ E. M. Curley highlights this as one way in which the *Regulae* differs from Descartes’ later works. See Curley 1978, pp. 23-24.

(AT X 398; CSM I 32) the intellect.¹⁴ Without the intellect, these other faculties cannot give us knowledge.¹⁵

In the *Regulae*, there are only two processes that lead to knowledge, intuition and necessary deduction (AT X 368,¹⁶ 372, 425; CSM I 14, 16, 48). Not only are these the exclusive processes by which we have knowledge, but moreover, they enable us have “knowledge of things with no fear of being mistaken,” he says (AT X 368; CSM I 14). This is a bold claim. Unlike in the *Meditations*, Descartes here is not worried about justifying his view that these processes unproblematically lead us to certain knowledge, as he does not entertain the possibility of global skepticism in the *Regulae*. Intuition and deduction, Descartes thinks, are “the simplest of all” of the operations of our minds “and quite basic” (AT X 372; CSM I 16). They are so simple and basic that he holds that his method does not need to instruct us how to carry them out. In fact, intuition and deduction underlie Descartes’ inquiry in the *Regulae*—they allow us to carry out the rules that will allow us to have knowledge of “everything within [our] capacity” (CSM I, 16; AT X, 372): he says that “if our intellect were not already able to perform them, it would not comprehend any of the rules of the method, however easy they might be” (CSM I, 16; AT X, 372).

¹⁴ Descartes discusses the ways in which the other faculties affect the intellect in the first part of Rule 12. See AT X 410-417; CSM I 39-43. Since Descartes’ discussion here does not affect my point that in the *Regulae* the intellect is the main faculty of knowledge, I will not go into the details of his account here.

¹⁵ This changes in the *Meditations*—in the Sixth Meditation, Descartes holds that sensations—what we receive through sense perception—“inform the mind of what is beneficial or harmful for the composite of which the mind is a part; to this extent they are sufficiently clear and distinct” (AT VII 83; CSM II 57). I take it that Descartes calling sensations “sufficiently clear and distinct” in this respect means that he holds that they are a genuine source of knowledge, knowledge about what’s beneficial or harmful to the mind-body composite. Yet in the *Meditations*, like in the *Regulae*, the senses by themselves cannot give us metaphysical knowledge—knowledge about the essential nature of bodies: “this is an area where they provide only very obscure information” (AT VII 83; CSM II 58).

¹⁶ L. J. Beck notes that there is some question about the term at AT X 368—whether it is *inductio* or *deductio*—due to differences in the manuscripts (Beck 1952, 84, note 3). Yet Descartes’ point here is corroborated by the other passages I cite.

Descartes defines intuition as “the conception of a clear and attentive mind, which is so easy and distinct that there can be no room for doubt about what we are understanding” (AT X 368; CSM I 14). Because intuition is so easy and distinct, what we know from intuition is “self-evident” (AT X 369; CSM I 14), and “certain” (AT X 369; CSM I 14). The primary objects of intuition are simple natures.¹⁷ Descartes frames his discussion of simple natures not in terms of “how they exist in reality”, but rather “only in so far as they are perceived by the intellect” (AT X 418; CSM I 44). He illustrates the difference with the example of a body—that is, a material object. A body cannot exist without also having extension and shape, and thus, “with respect to the thing itself, it is one single and simple entity” (AT X 418; CSM I 44). But we can conceptually distinguish between corporeal nature, extension, and shape, and so with respect to the intellect, Descartes holds that “we call [the body] a composite made up of these three natures” (AT X 418; CSM I 44). Simple natures then are “only those things which we know so clearly and distinctly that they cannot be divided by the mind into others which are more distinctly known” (AT X 418; CSM I 44).

Descartes gives many examples of simple natures,¹⁸ and in Rule 12 he groups them into three main categories: the “purely intellectual,” the “purely material,” and “common notions” (AT X 419; CSM I 44-45). “Those simple natures which the intellect recognizes by means of a sort of innate light, without the aid of any corporeal image, are purely intellectual” (AT X 419; CSM I 44), he says. Knowledge, doubt, ignorance and

¹⁷ Although not the only objects—Descartes also holds that we intuit composite natures, as I will discuss shortly.

¹⁸ I will not undertake the task of reconciling and figuring out the underlying commonality between the two lists of examples of simple natures Descartes presents in Rule VI and Rule XII. For discussion of this issue, see O’Neil 1972.

volition are examples of purely intellectual simple natures. Those simple natures recognized to be present only in bodies are purely material, such as shape, extension, and motion. Common notions are those simple natures that sometimes apply to bodies and sometimes apply to minds—for example, existence, unity, and duration. Rules of inference and notions that connect simple natures are common notions—for example, “things that are the same as a third thing are the same as each other,” and “things that cannot be related in the same way to a third thing are different in some respect” (AT X 419; CSM I 45).¹⁹

In contrast with his discussion of simple natures, Descartes focuses in his discussion of composite natures on the processes by which we have access to them. He differentiates between two kinds of composite natures: those that we experience as composite, and those that are composite because we ourselves compose them. The first is not a source of error, but the second is: Descartes says “there can be no falsity save in composite natures which are put together by the intellect” (AT X 399; CSM I 32), and “we can be deceived only when we ourselves compose in some way the things we believe” (AT X 423). We experience composite natures “by sense, whatever we hear from others, and generally, whatever arrives at our intellect either from elsewhere or from the intellect’s reflection on itself” (AT X 422). It is surprising that experience understood in this way would not be a source of error, and Descartes does seem to allow for error from experience:

¹⁹ Corresponding privations and negations are also simple natures—for example, nothing, an instant, and rest (AT X 420; CSM I 45)

The intellect can never be deceived by any experience if it considers²⁰ precisely only the thing presented to it, according to whether it has it either in itself or in an image,²¹ and furthermore, does not judge that the imagination faithfully represents the objects of the senses, or that the senses take on the true shapes of things, or finally, that external things are not always such as they appear to be. (AT X 423)

In this passage, Descartes seems to imply that there are situations in which the intellect *can* be deceived by experience—namely, those circumstances in which the intellect does not do the things he prescribes. Looking more closely, though, we can see that those circumstances are cases in which we ourselves compose what we believe—that is, cases in which “we believe that there is something in [the things we understand] which has been perceived immediately by our mind without any experience” (AT X 423).

Descartes’ example of the jaundiced man makes this clear:

For example, if someone who has jaundice persuades himself that what he sees is yellow, this thought of his will be composed from what his imagination represents to him and from what he assumes of himself, namely, that the color does not appear yellow because of some defect of the eye, but because the things he sees really are yellow. (AT X 423)

Descartes says explicitly that in this case we ourselves compose what we believe, but he also characterizes the case as one in which the intellect has *not* restricted itself to only the thing presented to it. Instead, contrary to Descartes’ prohibition, the intellect has in this case judged that external things are as they appear to be. It is not the experience *per se* of the jaundiced man that leads to error, but rather his assumption that his perceptions of

²⁰ The translation, thanks to Ed Curley, that I employ of the paragraph at AT X 422-423, beginning “Sixth, we say... [*Dicimus sexto*],” differs with CSM. I will note the differences if they have some philosophical import. The verb here is *intueatur*, a form of *intueri*, which CSM treats as a technical term, translating it as “intuit.” But *intueri* has a broad range of meaning, and Descartes does not consistently use it as a technical term. Specifically, he does not seem to be using it as a technical term here, because he is talking about *experimenta*, which, as he has just explained, include a wide range of mental phenomena.

²¹ The term is *phantasma*, which CSM translates “imagination.” But it looks as though Descartes uses *imaginatio* or *phantasia* when he wants to refer to the faculty, and *phantasma* to refer to the images that occur in the faculty.

things as yellow represent the way the world really is—that is, that the world really is yellow.

Thus, although Descartes talks of composite natures as containing falsity, it is not the composite-ness of the object that makes it false or erroneous. It is not the fact that what we believe or judge is composite as opposed to simple that accounts for the error, since things we experience as composite don't contain error in themselves. Descartes also says “there can be no falsity in the mere intuition of things, be they simple *or conjoined*” (AT X 432; CSM I 53, my emphasis). Thus, if we intuit a conjoined thing (another term for composite nature²²), we cannot go wrong. Instead, as we have seen, Descartes holds that error arises in composite natures only when “we ourselves put them together” (AT X 422; CSM I 46). So error does not reside in the composite nature of the object of thought but is a result of our composing it wrongly.²³

Descartes specifically notes three ways that composition can come about—through impulse, through conjecture, and through deduction. All three forms of composition may lead to error. The error from composition has to do with the specific way we come to have our belief. With composition by impulse, we err because “our mind leads us to believe something, not because good reasons convince us of it, but simply because we are determined to believe it [*sed tantum determinati*]” (AT X 424). Descartes distinguishes three causes of composition through impulse—some superior power, our freedom (*propria libertate*), and the disposition of the imagination. But the first is never a

²² In talking about composition, Descartes alternately interchanges and glosses “composition” (*compositionem*) with what CSM translates as “conjoined” (*conjunctas*, e.g. AT X 425; CSM I 48) and “put together” (*componimus*, e.g. AT X 399; CSM I 32).

²³ Descartes holds that there is one way in which we can compose the objects of thought without erring—necessary deduction. I will elaborate upon this shortly.

source of error. It is only when we ourselves are the cause of our belief that we err: our freedom is “rarely” (but, presumably, at times) a source of error whereas the disposition of the imagination is “almost always” (AT X 424; CSM I 47). It is interesting that in the *Regulae*, our freedom is rarely a source of error, for in the *Meditations*, our freedom always plays a role in our errors when we don’t have sufficient reason.²⁴ The second kind of composition, composition by conjecture, leads to error when we “surmise” (AT X 424; CSM I 47) something and “assert it to be true” when we should instead “judge it to be merely probable” (AT X 424; CSM I 48). Lastly, composition by deduction leads to error when we conjoin objects of belief without any necessary connection between them. An example of this kind of composition is when we conclude that a space full of air is empty simply because our senses do not perceive anything in it. In this case, we are incorrectly combining the nature of the space with the nature of a vacuum. The error of each of the three forms of composition stems from the way the belief is formed—that we believe it not because of reason; that we surmise it; and that we conjoin things when there is no necessary connection between them.

The last form of composition, deduction, can be carried out in such a way that we never make mistakes. Recall that deduction is the second process of the intellect, along with intuition, by which we can have certain knowledge. Deduction is “the inference of something as following necessarily from some other propositions which are known with certainty” (AT X 369; CSM I 15).²⁵ Deduction differs from intuition mainly in that the process is not immediate; rather, since deduction is an inference, there is a “movement of

²⁴ That is, when we don’t clearly and distinctly perceive something as true or good.

²⁵ Despite Descartes’ characterization of deduction here, deduction does not require a plurality of premises. Descartes calls inferring a proposition immediately from first principles a kind of deduction—see AT X 370; CSM I 15.

thought” (AT X 369-370; CSM I 15). So unlike intuition, deduction is not necessarily immediately self-evident because one must mentally move from one proposition to the next. But if the deduction occurs swiftly and in a continuous movement, “[we] seem to intuit the whole thing at once” (AT X 388; CSM I 25). Descartes says, “deduction...remains as our sole means of compounding things in a way that enables us to be certain of their truth” (AT X 424; CSM I 48). But Descartes notes that “even with deduction there can be many drawbacks” (AT X 424; CSM I 48)—that we can in fact make mistakes. To carry out deduction in the right way, the intellect must only compose things if the connection between the two things is necessary: “it is within our power to avoid this error, viz. by never conjoining things unless we intuit that the conjunction of one with the other is wholly necessary” (AT X 425; CSM I 48). So, there is only one “right” way for composition to occur that is relevant for his method: necessary deduction. All other forms of composition can lead to error.²⁶

It follows for Descartes that we ought not form the objects of our thought through these other processes, even though it is possible for the process to generate a true belief. He says that his aim in part is “to see where falsity can come in, so that we may guard against it, and to see what can be known with certainty, so that we may concern ourselves exclusively with that” (AT X 417; CSM I 43). Processes other than intuition and necessary deduction allow “falsity to come in,” and although it is possible that they could lead to true beliefs, what would be known would not be known with certainty.

²⁶ Technically, there is another form of composition that does not lead to error, but Descartes dismisses this as irrelevant, since it does not fall within the scope of his method. When composition by impulse is caused by “some superior power,” we never err, as I mentioned above. Since Descartes is concerned with formulating a procedure that we can follow in order to have knowledge, and we cannot make ourselves believe something by a superior being, the first cause is not within the scope of his method.

III. The theory of error in the Meditations

I will now turn to Descartes' theory of error in the *Meditations*. In the Fourth Meditation, Descartes focuses on providing an explanation for why we err. The framework for the theory of error in the *Meditations* differs drastically from that of the *Regulae*. The Fourth Meditation comes on the heels of Descartes' first proof of the existence of God in the Third Meditation, which relies on conceiving God as "a most perfect being" (AT VII 51; CSM II 35). At the end of the Third Meditation, Descartes points out one particular consequence of God's perfection: his non-deception, or veracity. If God is all-perfect, Descartes reasons, he must not be a deceiver, since deception is an imperfection. Descartes thus begins the Fourth Meditation with the worry: if an all-perfect, non-deceiving God exists, then why do we make mistakes in judgment? In the *Meditations*, then, Descartes has a significant concern that was absent in the *Regulae*: to explain how our errors are compatible with God's nature.

Before he gives his solution to this problem, Descartes spells out two doctrines that arise from these properties of God: (1) that every faculty is "perfect of its kind" (AT VII 55; CSM II 38), and (2) that no faculty would lead to error if used correctly. The first doctrine arises as consequence of God's perfection. Descartes reasons, "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 second doctrine arises as a consequence of God's veracity—that no faculty would lead to error if used correctly: "since God does not wish to deceive me, he surely did not give me the kind of faculty which would ever enable me to go wrong while using it correctly" (AT VII 54; CSM II 37-38).

Descartes then applies these two doctrines to the two faculties he is focused on in the Fourth Meditation, the intellect and the will. As I will discuss further in the next section, between the time of the *Regulae* and the *Meditations*, Descartes' model of the mind changes significantly. In the *Regulae*, as we saw, the intellect is the main faculty and memory, imagination, and sense perception are all subsidiary faculties that serve only to help or hinder the intellect. By the time of the *Meditations*, Descartes has developed a two-faculty psychology in which the intellect is the mind's passivity (with imagination and sense perception subsumed under it), and the will is the mind's activity.²⁷

To figure out the nature of his errors, then, Descartes must inspect each of the faculties one at a time to see whether either faculty is responsible for error, and if so, how. The first doctrine—that each faculty is perfect of its kind—has distinct implications for the intellect and the will because of the difference in their natures. That the intellect is perfect means that “it turns out to contain no error in the proper sense of that term” (AT VII 56; CSM II 39). Since “all the intellect does is to enable me to perceive the ideas which are subjects for possible judgments” (AT VII 56; CSM II 39), it is perfect in the sense that its perceptions never contain error “in the strict sense” (AT VII 43; CSM II 30). The will's perfection consists in the fact that “it is not restricted in any way” (AT VII 56-57; CSM II 39) and, as a result, it has the ability to affirm, deny, or suspend judgment on any perception presented to it that is not clear and distinct.²⁸

²⁷ Descartes most clearly and concisely presents his two-faculty psychology in *Principles* I.32: “All modes of thinking that we experience within ourselves can be brought under two general headings: perception, or the operation of the intellect, and volition, or the operation of the will. Sensory perception, imagination and pure understanding are simply various modes of perception; desire, aversion, assertion, denial and doubt are various modes of willing” (AT VIII A 17; CSM I 204). He doesn't specify, but I think memory also falls under the intellect.

²⁸ I discuss the implications of the will's being unrestricted for Descartes' conception of freedom in Chapter 2.

According to the second doctrine—that no faculty would lead to error if used correctly—when we make intellectual judgments we will never err as long as we use the will correctly. To use the will correctly, the will must affirm or deny only those things that the intellect perceives clearly and distinctly. Because the will’s perfection means that it has the ability to affirm, deny, or suspend judgment regarding anything that could lead us to err (any perception that is not clear and distinct), we are not doomed to error; we can always refrain from making a judgment about anything we do not clearly and distinctly perceive.²⁹

Error is not just a matter of the falsity of the judgment we make. When we affirm or deny something we do not clearly and distinctly perceive, we use our will incorrectly, even if the judgment that results is true: Descartes says that if it is “by pure chance that I arrive at the truth” then “I shall be at fault” (AT VII 60; CSM II 41). Error results when we improperly use our perfect faculties.

We can find the Fourth Meditation theory of error in the *Discourse*, albeit in much less detail. In the discussion of the *ad hoc* objection in the first section of this chapter, we saw that Descartes’ method of doubt presupposes his theory of judgment. Since Descartes’ theory of judgment is tied to his theory of error in the Fourth Meditation in the way that we have seen, if Descartes’ method of doubt is in the *Discourse*, we might expect his theory of error to appear in the *Discourse* as well. In fact, in Part II of the *Discourse*, Descartes gestures at his theory of error in the context of a discussion of his method of doubt. Regarding his method of doubt, Descartes says:

²⁹ This is not to say that such refraining will always be easy—Descartes acknowledges at the end of the First Meditation that it is quite difficult to doubt the existence of material objects (AT VII 22-23; CSM II 15).

Regarding the opinions to which I had hitherto given credence, I thought that I could not do better than undertake to get rid of them, all at one go, in order to replace them afterwards with better ones, or with the same ones once I had squared them with the standards of reason. (AT VI 13-14; CSM I 117)

It is in this context that Descartes discusses his “true method of attaining the knowledge of everything within [his] mental capabilities” (AT VI 17; CSM I 119). In the first rule of this method for attaining knowledge, Descartes anticipates the theory of error that he elaborates on in the Fourth Meditation:

The first was never to accept anything as true if I did not have evident knowledge of its truth: that is, carefully to avoid precipitate conclusions and preconceptions, and to include nothing more in my judgements than what presented itself to my mind so clearly and so distinctly that I had no occasion to doubt it. (AT VI 18; CSM I 120)

Here, Descartes says that we may avoid error if we only make judgments about things we clearly and distinctly perceive. But although the substance of the theory of error is the same, in the *Discourse*, unlike in the Fourth Meditation, Descartes does not cast his theory of error in the framework of a discussion of God’s nature.

IV. Activity and passivity of the mind

In this section I will focus on Descartes’ distinction between activity and passivity. I will begin by showing that Descartes employs a distinction between activity and passivity³⁰ in the *Regulae* and tracing his use of this distinction through to the *Meditations* and his correspondence of that time. We will see that in his works after the *Regulae*, the distinction becomes central to demarcating the faculties of the will and the intellect. I will

³⁰ In my discussion of the distinction between activity and passivity, I include Descartes’ usages of the Latin nouns “*actio*” and “*passio*,” Latin verbs “*ago*” and “*patior*,” the French nouns “*action*” and “*passion*,” and all of their grammatical variants.

then develop an interpretation of what Descartes means by the notions of activity and passivity.

Development of the distinction

A notion of passivity first appears in Descartes' discussion of sense perception in Rule 12. Descartes says that sense perception is "merely passive" "in so far as our external senses are all parts of the body" (AT X 412; CSM I 40) and uses the example of wax to illustrate his point:

Sense-perception occurs in the same way in which wax takes on an impression from a seal. It should not be thought that I have a mere analogy in mind here: we must think of the external shape of the sentient body as being really changed by the object in exactly the same way as the shape of the surface of the wax is altered by the seal. (AT X 412; CSM I 40)

Here Descartes' focus is not on the passivity of the mind but instead on the passivity of the body. Descartes holds that as the wax takes on the shape of the seal, when we perceive something through our senses, our body is physically altered by the action of the perceived object. The part of the body involved in sensory perception—the eye, the ears, and the tongue—takes on a new shape through the perceiving—by the sound, the smell, and the flavor (AT X 413; CSM I 40).

In the *Regulae*, Descartes also takes the notion of passivity (and its counterpart, activity) to apply to the mind. He says later in his discussion of Rule 12:

The power through which we know things in the strict sense is purely spiritual...It is one single power, whether it receives figures from the 'common' sense at the same time as does the corporeal imagination, or applies itself to those which are preserved in the memory, or forms new ones which so preoccupy the imagination that it is often in no position to receive ideas from the 'common' sense at the same time, or transmit them to the power responsible for motion in accordance with a purely corporeal mode of operation. In all these functions the cognitive power is sometimes passive, sometimes active [*interdum patitur, interdum agit*]; sometimes

resembling the seal, sometimes the wax....According to its different functions, then, the same power is called either pure intellect, or imagination, or memory, or sense-perception. (AT X 415-416; CSM I 42)

It is important to note that the focus of this passage is to emphasize the unity of the mind.

Descartes characterizes certain functions of the mind as passive and others as active, but they are all manifestations of the same “one single power.” But by the time of the

Meditations, Descartes uses activity and passivity to distinguish his two main faculties of the mind, the intellect and the will, from one another. In his letter to Regius of May 1641, he explains:

Where you say ‘Willing and understanding differ only as different ways of acting in regard to different objects,’ I would prefer ‘They differ only as the activity and passivity of one and the same substance’ [*differunt tantum ut actio et passio ejusdem substantiae*]. For strictly speaking, understanding is the passivity of the mind and willing is its activity [*intellectio enim proprie mentis passio est, et volitio ejus actio*]; but because we cannot will anything without understanding what we will, and we scarcely ever understand something without at the same time willing something, we do not easily distinguish in this manner passivity from activity. (AT III 372; CSMK 182).

Thus, the distinction between activity and passivity of the mind has become central for Descartes in distinguishing between the operations of the will and the operations of the intellect. The will is responsible for all the active processes of the mind and the intellect for all passive processes. Descartes seems to temper the distinction between understanding and willing at the end of the passage, but I think he does this to bring out that the two powers work in concert with one another.

The role of the distinction in demarcating the two faculties is corroborated in a letter possibly to Mesland, written on May 2, 1644, three years after the first edition of the *Meditations* had been published. In this letter, Descartes clarifies the distinction

between passivity and activity in relation to the example of the wax that he initially presented in the *Regulae*:

I regard the difference between the soul and its ideas as the same as that between a piece of wax and the various shapes it can take. Just as it is not an activity but a passivity in the wax to take various shapes, so, it seems to me, it is a passivity in the soul to receive one or another idea, and only its volitions are activities. (AT IV 113-114; CSMK 232).

Here, Descartes' key example of mental passivity is sensory perception, which he also discusses in the Sixth Meditation.

I am suggesting that these texts show a development in Descartes' thought regarding the passivity/activity distinction. In the *Regulae*, Descartes employs the distinction but emphasizes the unity of the mind. By the time of the *Meditations*, however, this distinction is central to demarcating Descartes' two mental faculties, the intellect and the will.

Understanding the distinction

Now that we see the development of the distinction into a criterion that distinguishes the will from the intellect, the question naturally arises—how should we understand this distinction? There is an intuitive sense of what the terms mean: we actively do something when we ourselves do it; we passively do something when it happens to us. In a discussion of Descartes on the will's freedom, Harry Frankfurt sums up what I'm characterizing as this intuitive understanding in the following way:

All of the movements of my will – for instance, my choices and decisions – are movements that I make. None is a mere impersonal occurrence, in which my will moves without my moving it. None of my choices or decisions merely happens. Its occurrence is my activity, and I can no more be a passive bystander with respect to my own choices and decisions than I can be passive with respect to any of my own actions. It is possible for me to be passive when my arm raises, but I cannot be passive when I raise

it. Now every willing is necessarily an action; unlike the movements of an arm, it is only as actions that volitions can occur. Thus, activity is of the essence of the will. Volition precludes passivity by its very nature.³¹

I think that Descartes' notions of activity and passivity for the most part align with this intuitive sense.³² To construct an interpretation of the distinction I will begin with an interpretation of the notion of passivity, and support it with Descartes' examples. I will then use that interpretation as a springboard to understanding what Descartes means by activity.

From Descartes' examples of passivity, we see that passivity involves receiving something (shape, in the case of bodies, and ideas, in the case of the mind), because the passive object is being acted on.³³ As we saw in the passages from the *Regulae*, sense perception, when considered in terms of our bodies, is "merely passive" because our bodies are acted on by the objects of perception. As wax is acted on by a seal and thereby takes on its impression, our bodies in sense perception take on the shape of the object we are perceiving (AT X 412; CSM I 140, also AT X 415; CSM I 42).

This understanding of passivity also underlies Descartes' examples of the passivity of the *mind*. In all of Descartes' examples of mental passivity, the mind is receiving something, whether it is "figures," "ideas of sensible objects," or "ideas" more generally. In Rule 12, I think Descartes conceives of "receiv[ing] figures from the 'common' sense" as one of the passive functions of the cognitive power (AT XI 415; CSM I 42). He is explicit about this in the passage we saw from his letter to Mesland of

³¹ Frankfurt 1999, 79.

³² Appropriately clarified, that is. In the next section, I will discuss one way in which the notion of activity may be entangled for some with a distinct notion, the notion of what is up to us.

³³ Susan James gives a similar understanding of passivity: she says, "to qualify as passive, a kind of thought must presuppose that the soul is acted on in a certain way, either by the body or by the soul itself" (James 1997, 94). This understanding of passivity, of course, is not unique to Descartes but is consistent with a long historical tradition.

May 2, 1644. He says, again using the wax example, “Just as it is not an activity but a passivity in the wax to take various shapes, so, it seems to me, it is a passivity in the soul to receive one or another idea” (AT IV 113; CSMK 232). He then elaborates on what acts on the mind:

[The soul] receives its ideas partly from objects which come into contact with the senses, partly from impressions in the brain, and partly from prior dispositions of the soul and from movements of the will. (AT IV 114; CSMK 232)

We see here that material objects, the body, and the mind itself act on the mind and thereby produce ideas in it.

In the Sixth Meditation, Descartes discusses sense perception in particular, and this is the only place Descartes uses the term “passive” (*passiva*) in the *Meditations*.³⁴

Now there is in me a passive [*passiva*] faculty of sensory perception, that is, a faculty for receiving and recognizing the ideas of sensible objects; but I could not make use of it unless there was also an active [*activa*] faculty, either in me or in something else, which produced or brought about these ideas. (AT VII 79; CSM II 55)

Descartes here seems to tie the passivity of sense perception and its identity as the faculty that receives the ideas of sensible objects. Thus, his characterization aligns with his other examples of passivity of mind.

I have argued that for Descartes, mental passivity involves the mind being acted on (either by material objects, the body or the mind itself). Due to being acted upon, it receives various kinds of ideas. I propose that mental activity, as the flip side of mental passivity, involves not being acted upon, but acting. This may look tautological until we flesh out what this might mean: in acting, rather than receiving something, the mind contributes something from itself that it did not receive from something else. The

³⁴ A word search for the relevant terms in the online version of AT (Descartes 2001) reveals this.

formulations of action and passion that Descartes provides in the *Passions of the Soul*, support my characterizations of his notions. There he elaborates:

[The thoughts] I call [the soul's] actions are all of our volitions, because we find by experience that they come directly from the 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; SV 28; CSM I 335)

The will, as the active faculty, contributes mental states—volitions—that come directly from the mind and seem to depend only on it, and thus, are states that it did not receive from something else. Although the *Passions of the Soul* was published eight years after the *Meditations*, I think his conception of activity and passivity at the time of the *Meditations* aligns with this formulation.

Understanding activity in this way helps to unify and make sense of Descartes' examples of mental activity. In the next section, I will show that error and judgment, for Descartes, result from mental activity.

V. Error and judgment as activity

In this section, I will argue that understanding mental activity as I have presented it provides us with another way of thinking about the development of Descartes' theory of judgment. In the *Meditations*, error and judgment are both attributed to the will because they result from mental activity, and the will is the active faculty. I will begin by showing that there is continuity in Descartes' theory of error that is easily overlooked because of the differences in his terminology and project: error both in the *Regulae* and in the *Meditations* results from mental activity. I will then show how judgment likewise results from mental activity.

Error as activity

As we saw in Section II of this chapter, error in the *Regulae* is always a result of a particular mental process by which we form our beliefs: we err only when we ourselves compose in some way the things we believe. In other words, error always requires mental activity. Descartes' distinction between composite natures that we experience as composite and those that we ourselves compose helps illustrate the point. When we have knowledge of composite natures because we experience them, Descartes holds, recall:

The intellect can never be deceived by any experience if it considers precisely only the thing presented to it, according to whether it has it either in itself or in an image, and furthermore, does not judge that the imagination faithfully represents the objects of the senses, or that the senses take on the true shapes of things, or finally, that external things are not always such as they appear to be. (AT X 423)

As long as the intellect restricts itself to only what experience presents to it, we never err. It is when the intellect judges that the imagination faithfully represents the objects of the senses, that the senses take on the true shapes of things, and that external things are always such as they appear to be, that we err. In such cases, the intellect is contributing something to the thought that it does not receive from experience. In other words, the intellect is—we are—active in such cases. I think this is the force of Descartes' locution “we *ourselves* compose [*nos ipsi componimus*]” (AT X 422, my emphasis) the composite natures.

Understanding error in the *Regulae* as activity illuminates why necessary deduction is the only form of composition that does not produce error.³⁵ As we saw, Descartes holds that as long as the intellect conjoins only things that have a necessary

³⁵ That we can carry out, that is. See note 26, above.

connection, error will not result. In necessary deduction, the intellect is not contributing something from itself that is not already in the simple natures themselves. In contrast, when the intellect conjoins things do not have a necessary connection, it is contributing something from itself—namely the connection, as there is not one that follows from the nature of the things themselves.

As in the *Regulae*, error in the *Meditations* also requires mental activity. First, in the Fourth Meditation, Descartes says that as long as the mind is passive—as long as it simply receives ideas—we never err:

All that the intellect does is enable me to perceive the ideas which are subjects for possible judgments; and regarded strictly in this light, it turns out to contain no error in the proper sense of that term. (AT VII 56; CSM II 39)

Ideas, what we receive when the mind is passive, are not the kind of thing that can ever be false. Descartes expresses the same sentiment in his Third Meditation discussion of error:

The chief and most common mistake which is to be found here consists in my judging that the ideas which are in me resemble, or conform to, things located outside me. Of course, if I considered just the ideas themselves simply as modes of my thought, without referring them to anything else, they could scarcely give me any material for error. (AT VII 37; CSM II 26)

Ideas in themselves do not lead us to error. It is only when we add something to an idea—for instance, when we refer them to external objects—that we can err.

Thus, it is only when we are active that the possibility for error arises. Descartes sums up his explanation of error in the following way:

The scope of the will is wider than that of the intellect; but instead of restricting it within the same limits, *I extend its use to matters which I do not understand*. (AT VII 58; CSM II 40, my emphasis)

Note that Descartes' summary brings out the activity involved when we err. Error occurs from our contribution, or use—we extend the will beyond the bounds of the intellect.

According to the theodicean explanation, Descartes makes error (erroneous judgment) an operation of the will in order to vindicate God of the mistakes we make. But Descartes conceived of error, in effect, as a function of the will even before he had any theodicean concerns. What I mean is this: Descartes conceives of error in the *Regulae*, as he does in the *Meditations*, as resulting from mental activity. But only post-*Regulae* does he develop his two-faculty psychology according to which the will is the activity of the mind and the intellect is its passivity. Thus, it is not until the *Meditations* that error is a function of the will. Since Descartes conceives of error as resulting from activity even before vindicating God is a concern, the theodicy of the Fourth Meditation, I suggest, need not have motivated Descartes to attribute error to the will.

Judgment as activity

We can understand judgment, like error, as resulting from mental activity. According to Descartes, judgment requires more than what the intellect perceives, since the intellect simply provides the subject matter for judgment: recall his statement that “all that the intellect does is enable me to perceive the ideas which are subjects for possible judgments” (AT VII 56; CSM II 39). We form a judgment only when we contribute a mental attitude to the subject matter we have received. Descartes mentions affirmation and denial in the Fourth Meditation but in the *Principles* adds assertion, denial, and doubt to the list of mental attitudes (AT VIIIA 18; CSM I 204). We do not receive the mental attitude from anything else, unlike the ideas we receive in perception; the mind itself

contributes the mental attitude. Since judgment requires mental activity, and the will is the active faculty, Descartes attributes judgment to the will.

At this point, one might worry that characterizing judgment as resulting from activity is misleading, since in an important class of cases—cases of clear and distinct perception—the will looks passive in judgment.³⁶ John Cottingham characterizes our assent in cases of clear and distinct perception “as [the] passive and involuntary response to the truth,”³⁷ and Hiram Caton says, “when clear ideas supervene in the understanding the will is passive toward them; the will submits by assenting, as it must according to the necessity of its nature.”³⁸

I think this worry arises because the notions of activity and that of the will as the active faculty might be entangled with a distinct notion, that of the will as what is “up to us.” I have argued that, for Descartes, the will is active insofar as it contributes something that it did not receive from something else—in the case of judgment, mental attitudes like assent or denial. But activity, one might think, has the connotation of something being up to us in a robust sense—that we have full control over what we do, and that nothing but ourselves cause us to do what we do. Judgment in cases of clear and distinct perception is not up to us in this robust sense: clear and distinct perception irresistibly compels us to judge in accordance with it. But this is no objection to the activity of judgment, since as I have argued, Descartes does not conceive of activity as being up to us in this robust

³⁶ Louis Loeb has raised this worry in conversation.

³⁷ Cottingham 2002, 359, note 43. John Cottingham, though, does allow for activity in the process of inquiry: the full quote is “assent as passive and involuntary response to the truth occurs within a context of active inquiry whose conditions of operation are subject to voluntary control.”

³⁸ Caton 1975, 94.

sense. Even though we are caused, indeed compelled, by clear and distinct perception—the mental attitude we contribute comes from us, and we are thus active in judging.³⁹

VI. Conclusion

I have argued that the commonly held explanation of Descartes' theory of judgment does not recognize significant philosophical commitments that might have figured into the development of Descartes' view that judgment is an operation of the will. Yet I want to end with a caveat: I want to emphasize that my argument does not deny that Descartes situates his discussion of judgment in a theodicy or that the theory of judgment, as Descartes presents it, plays a role in the theodicy of the Fourth Meditation. I am suggesting, however, that it is not the pressures of the theodicy *per se* that lead to Descartes' theory of judgment of the *Meditations*. Instead, I have suggested that Descartes' views on error and activity are important factors in the development of the resulting theory of judgment. Of course, Descartes' theory of error in the *Meditations* is intertwined with his theodicean project, but it can be thought of as having an emphasis distinct from that of the theodicean project. This conceptual separation of the theory of error from the theodicy is important because in the *Regulae*, Descartes holds a theory of error but has no theodicean aims.

³⁹ The notion of activity, as I have characterized it, may then be akin to the Stoic notion of something depending on us. Susanne Bobzien argues that the concept of that which depends on us for some Stoics doesn't require any indeterminist freedom to do otherwise. Instead, what makes things depend on us is that they result from an act of assent, which depends on us not in the sense of being undetermined, but in the sense of being caused by the nature of the mind (Bobzien 1998, 276-290).

Chapter 2

Human Freedom in the Fourth Meditation

Introduction

Throughout his corpus, Descartes asserts in no uncertain terms that human beings are free.¹ The nature of this freedom, however, is notoriously unclear. The elusiveness of Descartes' conception of human freedom² begins with the definition he provides in the Fourth Meditation of the "the will or freedom of choice [*voluntas, sive arbitrii libertas*]," which:

Simply consists in our ability to do or not to do something (that is, to affirm or deny, to pursue or avoid); or rather, it consists simply in the fact that when the intellect puts something forward for affirmation or denial or for pursuit or avoidance, we move in such a manner that we feel that we are determined to it by no external force. (AT VII 57)³

This passage poses multiple problems of translation and interpretation, which I will discuss later. For now, let us note simply that, as many commentators have suggested,⁴ Descartes seems to introduce two distinct, and potentially conflicting, notions of

¹ For example, in the *Meditations* (1641), he says, "I cannot complain that the will or freedom of choice which I received from God is not sufficiently extensive or perfect, since I know by experience that it is not restricted in any way" (AT VII 56; CSM II 39); in the *Principles* (1644), "that there is freedom in our will...is so evident that it must be counted among the first and most common notions that are innate in us" (AT VIII A 19; CSM I 205); and in *The Passions of the Soul* (1649), "the will is by its nature free in such a way that it can never be constrained" (AT XI 359; SV 41; CSM I 343).

² From this point on, I will refer to 'human freedom' simply as 'freedom', unless otherwise specified.

³ My translation of the second clause of the definition differs from Cottingham's in CSM II. See more on the differences in note 14, below.

⁴ The interpretive tradition follows Gilson 1913 and Kenny 1972. For example, see Beyssade 1994, Schmaltz 1996, Menn 1998, Alanen 2003, Kaufman 2003, and Ragland 2006a.

freedom: liberty of indifference with the first clause, and liberty of spontaneity, with the second. Liberty of indifference is a two-way power that is undetermined, whereas liberty of spontaneity is compatible with determinism. A challenge that thus emerges from Descartes' definition is to understand the relation between the two notions of freedom and to figure out which notion expresses his considered position (if either).

Possibly because the definition seems to refer to two notions of freedom that differ regarding their compatibility with determinism,⁵ commentators have focused on understanding how Descartes conceives of freedom's relation to determinism. They have variously argued that Descartes was a compatibilist;⁶ that he was an incompatibilist;⁷ and more specifically, that he was a libertarian.⁸

Yet in addition to the definition, in the Fourth Meditation Descartes introduces several important features of freedom that seem mysterious if we approach them from the perspective of understanding Descartes' view on the relationship between freedom and determinism. In the so-called "great light" passage (AT VII 58-59; CSM II 41), Descartes asserts that agents are free even when they cannot but judge in accordance with clear and distinct perception:

I could not but judge that what I understood so clearly was true; but this was not because I was compelled [*coactus*] so to judge by any external force, but because a great light in the intellect was followed by a great inclination in the will, and thus the spontaneity and freedom of my belief was all the greater in proportion to my lack of indifference. (AT VII 58-59; CSM II 41)

⁵ Another possible reason is that many philosophers of the early modern period seem to frame their discussions of freedom in this way. See Sleight et. al. 1998 for discussion of Descartes, Hobbes, Spinoza, Malebranche, Locke and Leibniz on determinism and human freedom.

⁶ Curley 1975, 165-166; Loeb 1981, 143-149; Cottingham 1986, 149-151; and Hatfield 2003, 192-196.

⁷ Newman 2008, 346-351.

⁸ Ragland, 2006a and 2006b.

Furthermore, freedom, he specifies, bears a relation to the inclination of the will. And, he says, “indifference” is “the lowest grade of freedom” (AT VII 58; CSM II 40).

To make sense of these features of freedom in particular and Descartes’ conception of freedom in the Fourth Meditation in general, I suggest an alternative approach: to begin with Descartes’ conception of the human will.⁹ In this chapter, I discuss three aspects of the will—its indifference (a state of the will), its unlimited scope, and its tendency towards the good and the true. I show that these aspects of the will shape Descartes’ conception of freedom, and that we cannot fully make sense of his conception of freedom without understanding his conception of the will.

Although commentators have not focused on the connections between Descartes’ conception of the will and his conception of freedom, that there are such connections should come as no real surprise, since Descartes identifies the will with freedom, and interchanges the terms ‘will’ (*voluntas*), ‘faculty of choosing,’ (*facultas eligendi*),¹⁰ and ‘freedom of choice’ (*arbitrii libertas*).¹¹

My exploration of Descartes’ conception of the will yields an interpretation of the Fourth Meditation definition: the definition, I argue, asserts that freedom consists in our power to determine ourselves. Yet interpreting freedom as consisting in this power cannot account for the other features of freedom Descartes presents in the Fourth Meditation. I argue that Descartes needs another condition and that there is one available to him: freedom is proportional to the ease of self-determination. This condition,

⁹ From this point on, I will refer to ‘human will’ simply as ‘will’, unless otherwise specified.

¹⁰ Descartes’ use of the Latin ‘*facultas eligendi*’ is insufficient to answer the question of whether he holds that the will has the two-way power of choice at issue—‘*eligere*’ may also be translated ‘to elect.’ Michelle Beyssade notes in support of this point that Duc de Luynes, in his French translation of the *Meditations*, translated ‘*facultas eligendi*’ as ‘*puissance d’élire*’ (‘power to elect’ or ‘power to embrace’) (Beyssade 1994, 196-197).

¹¹ ‘*Arbitrii libertas*’ may also be translated ‘freedom of judgment’ or ‘freedom of decision.’

combined with the conception of the will I have laid out, provides a unified account of Descartes' characterization of freedom in the Fourth Meditation.

I. The Challenges

I begin by fleshing out in further detail the main challenges for understanding Descartes' conception of freedom in the Fourth Meditation. Two central challenges arise from Descartes' definition of the will or freedom of choice. The first challenge is to identify the extensions of the two clauses of the definition. Most commentators take the clauses to map onto positions that would have been familiar to Descartes.¹² In the first clause of the definition, Descartes says:

[The will or freedom of choice] simply consists in our ability to do or not to do something (that is, to affirm or deny, to pursue or avoid). (AT VII 57; CSM II 40)

Commentators have associated this first clause with liberty of indifference, which understands freedom as consisting in a two-way power that is undetermined. Suárez gives a classic formulation of this conception of freedom in his *Metaphysical Disputations*: "A free cause is one which, given that all the things required for acting have been posited, is able to act and able not to act."¹³

The second clause of the definition differs from the first:

Or rather, it consists simply in the fact that when the intellect puts something forward for affirmation or denial or for pursuit or avoidance, we move in such a manner that we feel that we are determined to it by no external force. (AT VII 57)¹⁴

¹² See note 4, above.

¹³ Suárez 1994, 314.

¹⁴ John Cottingham translates this passage: "or rather, it consists simply in the fact that when the intellect puts something forward for affirmation or denial or for pursuit or avoidance, our inclinations are such that we do not feel we are determined by any external force" (CSM II 40). The Latin is "in eo tantum, quod ad

Commentators have identified this second clause with liberty of spontaneity, which involves the absence of coercion or constraint, but also the idea that the agent is contributing to her own activity in some way.¹⁵

The two clauses of the definition do indeed resemble the notions of liberty of indifference and liberty of spontaneity. Yet each of the clauses slightly diverges from the notion of freedom with which it has been associated. In contrast with liberty of indifference, the first clause can be understood in a way that is *consistent* with determinism, provided that we understand what it means to have a two-way power with a hypothetical analysis. Joseph Keim Campbell, for instance, suggests that the proper way to understand the ability to do or not do invoked in the first clause is with the following general form: a person S has the ability to do or not do if and only if “S could have done otherwise,” where this simply means that “S would have done otherwise if X,” where X is some condition or set of conditions.¹⁶

id quod nobis ab intellectu proponitur affirmandum vel negandum, sive prosequendum vel fugiendum, ita feramur, ut a nulla vi externa nos ad id determinari sentiamus.”

There are two significant differences between my translation and Cottingham’s. First, I translate ‘feramur’ with its active sense, following Michelle Beyssade (Beyssade 1994, 202), as “we move or go” rather than Cottingham’s “our inclinations,” which seems to draw on the passive sense of ‘feramur’—“we are carried.” This brings out what I mention is the second aspect of liberty of spontaneity, the idea that the agent is contributing to her activity. Second, my translation of “ut a nulla vi externa nos ad id determinari sentiamus” literally as ‘we feel that we are determined to it by no external force’ suggests that we feel the absence of external force, whereas Cottingham’s translation (“we do not feel”) suggests a lack of awareness or knowledge of any such force. I will show the import of this difference in Section V of this chapter.

¹⁵ Commentators have variously focused on one or another of these aspects of liberty of spontaneity. For instance, Tad Schmaltz focuses on the absence of coercion: he characterizes liberty of spontaneity as simply “the absence of coercion” (Schmaltz 1996, 208). He is in good company: Hume characterizes liberty of spontaneity as “that which is oppos’d to violence” (Treatise, II.iii.2). In contrast, Anthony Kenny focuses on the agent’s contribution: liberty of spontaneity is “liberty defined in terms of wanting,” (Kenny 1972, 17). Vere Chappell captures both of these components—he says, “an action is spontaneous if it is performed by its agent entirely on his own, without being forced or helped or affected by any external factor, or by anything other than his very self” (Chappell 1994, 180).

¹⁶ Joseph Keim Campbell takes the specific form of the hypothetical analysis to be: “S could have done otherwise only if (1) S would have done otherwise if S had different reasons and (2) S would have had different reasons if certain aspects of the past had been different” (Campbell 1999, 194).

The second clause specifies that the will, or freedom of choice, consists in acting with the *feeling* of the absence of external force rather than the absence of external force itself. But liberty of spontaneity requires the absence of external force itself. Descartes' formulation of the second clause leaves open the possibility that our actions may in fact be externally determined although we feel that they are not.

A further question arises from the Fourth Meditation definition—the significance of the 'or rather' (*vel potius*) that joins the two clauses. If we accept that the two clauses refer to two distinct notions of freedom, it is unclear how we should understand the relationship between the two. Some have suggested that 'or rather' should be taken to withdraw completely what precedes it, where what precedes it has been taken to be liberty of indifference—and, thus, that freedom consists in liberty of spontaneity alone.¹⁷ Others understand 'or rather' as further developing or clarifying what precedes it—and, thus, that the second clause should be understood as a further development of liberty of indifference.¹⁸

In addition to the definition, Descartes presents other features of freedom in the Fourth Meditation that need to be accounted for in any interpretation. I will focus on three central seemingly disconnected features of freedom. First, Descartes holds not only that agents are free even when they cannot but judge in accordance with clear and distinct perception, but that they are *most* free in such a case.¹⁹ As we saw in the great light passage, Descartes asserts of the *cogito* that he could not but judge that it was true and yet

¹⁷ See Beyssade 1994, 206, and Kenny 1972, 18 for discussion of this issue.

¹⁸ C. P. Ragland, for example, says "'or rather' means 'in other (better) words'" (Ragland 2006a, 390).

¹⁹ We can infer this from Descartes' view that freedom is inversely proportional to indifference, but Descartes makes this point explicitly in the Sixth Replies: "indifference does not belong to the essence of human freedom, since not only are we free when ignorance of what is right makes us indifferent, but we are also free—indeed at our freest—when a clear perception impels us to pursue some object" (AT VII 433; CSM II 292, my emphasis).

“the spontaneity and freedom of [his] belief was all the greater in proportion to [his] lack of indifference” (AT VII 58-59; CSM II 41). Thus, an adequate interpretation must explain not only why freedom is compatible with the inability to judge contrary to what is clearly and distinctly perceived, but why these cases are paradigmatic cases of freedom.

Second, Descartes holds that freedom is proportional to the inclination of the will:

The more I incline in one direction – either because I clearly understand that reasons of truth and goodness point that way, or because God so disposes my inmost thoughts – the more freely I choose that way. Neither divine grace nor natural knowledge ever diminishes freedom; on the contrary, they increase and strengthen it. (AT VII 57-58)

An adequate interpretation must explain why freedom, for Descartes, is not an all-or-nothing matter, but comes in degrees and is proportional to the inclination of the will.

Lastly, Descartes holds that “indifference” is “the lowest grade of freedom”:

The indifference I feel when there is no reason pushing me in one direction rather than another is the lowest grade of freedom; it is evidence not of any perfection of freedom, but rather of a defect in knowledge or a kind of negation. (AT VII 58; CSM II 40)

An adequate interpretation must explain what this indifference is and how the freedom in cases of indifference is a defect or negation. This indifference is an aspect of the will distinct from the notion of liberty of indifference I have discussed. Thus to understand Descartes’ claim that indifference is the lowest grade of freedom, we need to understand his conception of indifference as a state of the will. I now turn to this feature of the will.

II. Indifference as a state of the will

Descartes introduces an idiosyncratic²⁰ notion of indifference (*indifferentia*) in his Fourth Meditation discussion of freedom. This notion has not been discussed much in the

²⁰ Descartes provides a possible clue as to the origins of his usage—in his letter, possibly to Mesland, written February 9, 1645, he refers to the Stoic notion of *adiaphora* (“ἀδιαφορά”), and identifies his notion

secondary literature,²¹ but I will spend some time exploring it since it plays an important role in Descartes' conception of freedom, or so I will argue. Descartes explicitly clarifies this notion of indifference in a later letter to Mesland (February 9, 1645):

I would like you to notice that 'indifference' in this context seems to me strictly to mean that state of the will when it is not impelled one way rather than another by any perception of truth or goodness. (AT IV 173; CSMK 244-245)

The notion of indifference on which I am focusing here is distinct from the notion of liberty of indifference I discussed above: liberty of indifference is a conception of freedom, whereas indifference, as Descartes uses it in the Fourth Meditation, is a "state of the will."

Whether the will is in this state or not is tied to whether or not we clearly and distinctly perceive something as true or good. Descartes holds that we are never indifferent when we clearly and distinctly perceive something as true or good. In other words, clear and distinct perception precludes indifference:

If I always saw clearly what was true and good, I should never have to deliberate about the right judgement or choice; in that case, although I should be wholly free, it would be impossible for me ever to be in a state of indifference. (AT VII 57-58; CSM II 40)

of indifference with it (AT IV 174; CSMK 245). Since 'adiaphora' is commonly translated as 'indifferent,' it is plausible that Descartes is adapting the Stoic notion for his own purposes. Sextus Empiricus characterizes indifference thus: "They say that that which is indifferent is spoken of in three ways. In one sense, it is that neither towards which nor away from which an impulse arises, for instance, the question of whether the number of stars or the number of hairs on one's head is even. In another sense it is that towards or away from which an impulse arises, but not more towards this rather than that, for example, two indistinguishable four-drachma coins, whenever one has to choose one of them. For an impulse to choosing one of them does indeed arise, but no more towards this one than that one. In the third sense they say that "indifferent" is what contributes neither to happiness nor unhappiness, as health or wealth. For that which is sometimes used well and sometimes badly is, they say, indifferent" (Inwood and Gerson 1997, 389). The Stoics' first two senses of indifference seem to have analogs in Descartes' notion of indifference—the cases of when we have no reasons to go one way rather than another, and when the reasons on both sides are balanced, as I will show.

²¹ Kaufman 2003 is a notable exception.

Alternatively, in any case in which we do not clearly and distinctly perceive something as true or good, we are indifferent:

This indifference does not merely apply to cases where the intellect is wholly ignorant, but extends in general to every case where the intellect does not have sufficiently clear knowledge at the time when the will deliberates. (AT VII 59; CSM II 41)

Thus, we see that indifference and the absence of clear and distinct perception go hand-in-hand.

Descartes explicitly includes several different kinds of cases in which we do not clearly and distinctly perceive something as true or good. These cases vary in regards to the number and strength of our reasons for choice. Descartes can account for this variation: he suggests in a later letter (dated May 2, 1644), possibly to Mesland, that indifference comes in degrees and is inversely proportional to the number of reasons that push us in one direction rather than another.²²

I beg you observe that I did not say that a person was indifferent only if he lacked knowledge, but rather, that he is more indifferent the fewer reasons he knows which push him to choose one side rather than another. (AT IV 115)

Here, and in the previously quoted passage, he implies that the case in which we have no reasons to go one way rather than another is a case of indifference—when we are “wholly ignorant” and when we “lack knowledge.” Furthermore, cases in which we have reasons on both sides that are balanced presumably also count as cases of indifference: they would seem to be the natural interpretation of one of Descartes’ characterizations of

²² Thus, on this characterization it would seem that we are equally indifferent whether we have no reasons to go one way rather than another or whether the reasons are perfectly balanced.

indifference in the Fourth Meditation—“the indifference I feel when no reason impels me in one direction rather than another” (AT VII 58).²³

Descartes also includes cases from the other end of the range in another characterization of indifference—cases in which we have multiple reasons that point one way. Descartes’ inclusion of these cases may seem surprising to us, since they diverge from our intuitive understanding of indifference. He explains why even these count as cases of indifference:

For although probable conjectures may pull me in one direction, the mere knowledge that they are simply conjectures, and not certain and indubitable reasons [*non...certae atque indubitabiles rationes*], is itself quite enough to push my assent the other way. (AT VII 59; CSM II 41)²⁴

Thus, indifference, for Descartes, covers cases in which we have no reasons to go one way rather than another; cases in which the reasons on both sides are balanced; and cases in which the reasons point one way but are not certain and indubitable. The analysis of indifference I have presented explains why Descartes characterizes indifference as “evidence...of a defect in knowledge or a kind of negation” (AT VII 58; CSM II 40): all of these cases are ones in which we lack clear and distinct perception.

At this point, it is worth comparing Descartes’ conception of the indifference of the human will and his conception of divine indifference. Both the indifference of the human will and the indifference of the divine will consist in the will’s not being impelled one way rather than another by any perception of truth or goodness. Yet human indifference and divine difference also differ significantly: human indifference is a defect

²³ Roger Ariew et. al. (Ariew et. al. 2003, 106-107) understand the indifference of the will solely this way, as a “balance of reasons.” Vere Chappell (Chappell 1994, 181) and Dan Kaufman, following Chappell (Kaufman 2003, 395), accept an additional condition under which the will is indifferent—when an agent has no reasons to go one way.

²⁴ This passage immediately follows the second quoted passage on p. 38, above.

since we are indifferent only when we lack clear and distinct perception, whereas divine indifference is essential to the divine will and a perfection. It is important to show how the indifference of the human will and that of the divine will differ, since holding that human indifference and divine indifference are the same could lead one to mistakenly hold that the freedom that follows is likewise the same. In other words, one might then mistakenly hold that the freedom the human will has when indifferent is a God-like undetermined two-way power of choice. I will argue in the next section that this is not what Descartes holds.

The divine will is essentially indifferent because of two aspects of the divine nature: its omnipotence and the lack of distinction between the divine will and the divine intellect. Descartes holds that “the supreme indifference to be found in God is the supreme indication of his omnipotence” (AT VII 432; CSM II 292). God is not determined by anything outside of himself to will as he does:

It is self-contradictory to suppose that the will of God was not indifferent from eternity with respect to everything which has happened or will ever happen; for it is impossible to imagine that anything is thought of in the divine intellect as good or true, or worthy of belief or action or omission, prior to the decision of the divine will to make it so. I am not speaking here of temporal priority: I mean that there is not even any priority of order, or nature, or of ‘rationally determined reason’ as they call it, such that God’s idea of the good impelled him to choose one thing rather than another. (AT VII 431-432; CSM II 291)

Since God’s omnipotence means, for Descartes, that God himself determines the good and the true, nothing outside himself can impel him to choose one way rather than another. Second, for God, unlike for humans, there is no distinction between the will and the understanding: “in God willing and knowing are a single thing in such a way that by the very fact of willing something he knows it and it is only for this reason that such a thing is true” (AT I 149; CSMK 24). In this way, God’s nature contrasts starkly with

ours—Descartes holds that the human will and the human intellect are two distinct faculties with two distinct natures and functions.²⁵ But in God, because willing and knowing are identical, it is by God’s willing it so that something is true or good. Thus, it can never be the case that God wills something *because* it is true or good, and therefore, the divine will is essentially indifferent.

A second point of difference between human indifference and divine indifference has to do with the nature of indifference itself. Human indifference, I have argued, comes in degrees, and is inversely proportional to the number and the strength of the reasons we have to go one way. We are, by this understanding, most indifferent when we happen to have no reasons to go one way rather than another.²⁶ This, however, is just one end of the spectrum of indifference. Divine indifference, in contrast, always entails that God has no reasons to go one way rather than another, since because of the divine nature there *cannot be* any reasons that impel God one way rather than another.

III. The unlimited scope of the will

I now turn to a second feature of the human will that plays an important role in Descartes’ conception of freedom—the unlimited scope of the will. I seek to show that it is because the scope of the will is unlimited that we can act without the determination of reason—that is, whenever any of the conditions of indifference I’ve outlined in the previous section have been met.

²⁵ As I discussed in Chapter 1, Descartes holds that the intellect and the will are fundamentally different: “understanding is the passivity of the mind and willing is its activity” (AT III 372; CSMK 182).

²⁶ Descartes may hold that we are equally indifferent when the reasons on both sides are balanced. See note 22, above.

In the Fourth Meditation, Descartes distinguishes his two mental faculties, the intellect and the will, in terms of their scope. The intellect, he says, is “extremely slight and finite,” whereas the will “I know by experience...is not restricted in any way [*sane nullis illam limitibus circumscribi experior*]” (AT VII 57; CSM II 39). This disparity in the scope of the faculties is central to Descartes’ vindication of God for our mistakes in judgment. Descartes holds, of course, that error results when we misuse the will and extend it beyond what we clearly and distinctly perceive (AT VII 58; CSM II 41). But the will’s scope need not be *unlimited* for Descartes’ explanation of error and vindication of God to hold; the scope of the will need simply be *greater* than that of the intellect.

I will argue that Descartes holds that the will’s scope is unlimited because it is in this way that humans bear the image and likeness of God: our will is analogous to God’s will because its scope is unlimited, like God’s. It is important to get clear on the significance of Descartes’ analogy between God and humans, since the analogy has played a key role in recent interpretations of Descartes as a libertarian: these interpretations suggest that humans bear the image and likeness of God by possessing an undetermined two-way power.²⁷ Thus, by providing an alternative understanding of the analogy—in terms of the will’s unlimited scope—I undercut a significant motivation for interpreting Descartes as holding that human freedom consists in such an undetermined two-way power.

Descartes presents this analogy between the human will and the divine will immediately prior to his definition in the Fourth Meditation: “it is above all in virtue of

²⁷ Lilli Alanen, for example, implies that the analogy should be understood in terms of the human will’s “power to do otherwise that is in some sense undetermined” (Alanen 2003, 231) and C. P. Ragland identifies a libertarian two-way power as what is common to the human will and the divine will (Ragland 2006a). See also Ragland 2006b.

the will that I understand myself to bear in some way the image and likeness of God” (AT VII 57; CSM II 40). This is because the divine will “does not seem any greater than mine when viewed formally and precisely in itself [*in se formaliter et praeise spectata*]” (AT VII 57). It is unclear how we are to understand the phrase “will viewed formally and precisely in itself,” and thus the analogy between the divine will and the human will.

In two later texts, however, Descartes suggests that it is because of the unlimited scope of the will that we bear the divine image. In the *Principles*, Descartes reiterates his explanation of error of the Fourth Meditation and explains in what sense the will is infinite:

The scope of the will is wider than the intellect, and this is the cause of error. Moreover, the perception of the intellect extends only to the few objects presented to it, and is always extremely limited. The will, on the other hand, can in a certain sense be called infinite, since we observe without exception that its scope extends to anything that can possibly be an object of any other will—even the immeasurable will of God. (AT VIIIA 18; CSM I 204)

Here, Descartes explicitly connects the intellect’s finitude and the will’s infinitude with their scopes.²⁸ The intellect’s scope is “extremely limited” in the sense that the intellect extends only to what we actually perceive. In contrast, the will’s scope is infinite in a certain sense: it extends beyond what we actually will to any possible object of any will. Notice the scope of the faculties differ in two respects. First, the intellect’s scope is limited to the actual, whereas the will’s scope extends to possible objects. Second, the

²⁸ *Pace* Martial Gueroult, who suggests that Descartes has three different conceptions of the infinity of the human will: 1) “the capacity to apply oneself actually to all possible objects,” 2) “infinite aspiration toward something else that man does not have” and 3) “absoluteness: the absolute decisive power of yes or no, which is an indivisible ‘freedom of free will...which consists only in that we can do a given thing or not do it, that is, in that we can affirm or deny it’” (Gueroult 1984, 232). As I discuss, I think that Descartes has a single conception of the infinity of the human will, which I understand similarly to Gueroult’s 1). As for his other suggestions, 2) can be understood in terms of 1) and 3) is not a conception that Descartes introduces in the Fourth Meditation. Gueroult does not give an argument for 3), which I take to be akin to liberty of indifference.

intellect's scope is limited to what *we* perceive, whereas the will's scope extends beyond us to any possible object of *any* will—including God's.

Descartes makes similar remarks in a letter to Mersenne, dated December 25, 1639:

The desire that everyone has to possess every perfection he can conceive of, and consequently all the perfections which we believe to be in God, is due to the fact that God has given us a will which has no limits [*Dieu nous a donné une volonté qui n'a point de bornes*]. It is principally because of this will within us that we can say we are created in his image. (AT II 628; CSMK 141-142)

Since desire is an operation of the will,²⁹ Descartes here connects the will's lack of limits to our ability to will anything we can conceive. And it is in virtue of this unlimited will that we bear the image of God.

At this point, I would like to head off a possible objection to Descartes' view that we can will anything we can conceive. Descartes does not mean that we can *achieve* anything we can conceive. Thus it is not an objection to Descartes' view that we cannot simply, by mental fiat, make some conceivable state of affairs come to pass—for example, that we cannot jump over the moon. Rather, we must recall that Descartes conceives of there being many kinds of willing, or what he calls “modes.”³⁰ He presents some of these modes of the will in the Fourth Meditation: affirmation, denial, pursuit, and avoidance. He adds to this list in the *Principles*: desire, aversion, assertion, and doubt (AT VII 17; CSM I 204). For the will to have unlimited scope means simply that for any

²⁹ At this point in his thinking anyway. In the *Principles*, he classifies desire as a mode of willing (AT VIIIA 17; CSM I 204). By the time of *The Passions of the Soul*, Descartes includes desire in his list of primitive passions. See Chapter 3, Section 1, for discussion of Descartes' conception of the primitive passion of desire.

³⁰ It is an interesting question what makes Descartes' various kinds of willing a unified class. Rosenthal 1986 discusses several commonalities between what he calls cognitive and conative attitudes. My discussion in chapter 1 of mental activity provides a different line of thinking: they are all contributions of the mind that come directly from it and seem to depend only on it.

conceivable thing, it is the possible object of at least one mode of willing, not every mode of willing. That we jump over the moon could be the object of several modes of willing—desire, aversion, denial, and doubt, for instance.

It may seem that there is a disanalogy here—the human will is limited by what we can conceive but the divine will is not. There is no disanalogy—the finitude of our minds should be understood in terms of the intellect, rather than the will. Descartes says that “[God’s] power is beyond our grasp. In general we can assert that God can do everything that is within our grasp but not that he cannot do what is beyond our grasp. It would be rash to think that our imagination reaches as far as his power” (AT I 146; CSMK 23). He thus affirms that conceivability is not tied to the will, but rather, stems from the cognitive faculties—here, the imagination. Thus, this fact that we can only will what we can conceive does not show that the will is limited, but rather, that the intellect is, as the faculty that presents ideas to the will.³¹

The unlimited scope of the will allows us to assent to or pursue things that we do not clearly and distinctly perceive as true or good—that is, it allows us to choose when the will is indifferent. Descartes thus conceives of the will differently from those who hold that if the intellect doesn’t provide any reasons to go one way rather than another, the will cannot simply choose.³² Gassendi raises an objection of this sort in the Fifth Objections:

³¹ And this, Descartes holds, gives us “no cause for complaint” (AT VII 60; CSM II 42), since it follows from our nature as created, finite creatures.

³² See, for example, Aquinas, who holds that “an appetitive power is a passive power that is naturally moved by what is apprehended” (Freddoso, ST Ia.80.2c) and “it is in this way that the intellect is prior to the will—as a mover is prior to what is moved, and as what is active is prior to what is passive. For it is the good as intellectually understood that moves the will” (Freddoso, ST Ia.82.3, ad2).

When you suppose that you have not yet come upon any persuasive reason in favour of one alternative rather than the other, this is indeed a possible supposition. But you ought simultaneously to suppose that in that case no judgement will follow, and that your will will always be indifferent and will not decide to make a definite judgment until the intellect comes upon some plausible argument which favours one side more than another. (AT VII 316; CSM II 220)

Gassendi objects that Descartes is wrong to suggest that the will can judge when we have either no reasons to go one way rather than another or when the reasons on both sides are balanced. In his response to Gassendi, Descartes seems to indicate that he holds that “the will has the freedom to direct itself, without the determination of the intellect, towards one side or the other” (AT VII 378; CSM II 260).³³ This ability to act without the determination of the intellect constitutes a kind of freedom of choice, albeit a lesser kind, for Descartes. I will return to this point shortly.

IV. The will's tendency towards the good and the true

There is one last feature of the will I will discuss: Descartes' conception of the will as tending towards the good and the true. In the Sixth Replies, Descartes mentions this feature of the human will: “[man] finds that the nature of all goodness and truth is already determined by God, and his will cannot tend towards anything else” (AT VII 166; CSM II 117). By this, Descartes means that the will has a natural orientation towards the true and the good.³⁴ It does not tend towards things that have no appearance of truth or goodness. Furthermore, the will as given to us by God certainly does not tend towards falsity, for then God would be a deceiver (AT VIIIA 21; CSM I 207).

³³ Descartes adopts a rhetorical style in his replies to Gassendi on this issue, so he doesn't straightforwardly assert his own view. But it is clear from the context that this is his position.

³⁴ Although Descartes rejects appeal to final causes in his natural philosophy, he does help himself to teleological notions when describing human mental faculties, e.g. in the Sixth Meditation he describes the “proper purpose of the sensory perceptions given me by nature” (AT VII 83; CSM II 57). For more on teleology in Descartes' account of the senses and natural philosophy more generally, see Simmons 2001.

The will's orientation towards the true and the good does not mean that it is only when we clearly and distinctly perceive something as true or good that the will is inclined to it. Descartes holds in the Fourth Meditation that the will inclines to various degrees in response to the clarity and distinctness of the perception the intellect presents to it. In *The Passions of the Soul*, Descartes develops this idea: "the will is inclined only to things which have some appearance of goodness" (AT XI 464; SV 117). He here implicitly distinguishes between things being true or good and things merely seeming true or good in some way. The will may be inclined towards things that seem to be true or good even though they are not true or good—for instance, confused and obscure perceptions of various sorts, including the passions of the soul.

Descartes holds, further, that we cannot choose the false or the bad as such.³⁵

Now that we know that all our errors depend on the will [*voluntate*], it may seem surprising that we should ever go wrong, since there is no one who wants to go wrong [*quia nemo est velit falli*]. But there is a great difference between choosing to go wrong [*velle falli*] and choosing to give one's assent [*velle assentiri*] in matters where, as it happens, error is to be found. And although there is in fact no one who expressly wishes to go wrong [*expresse velit falli*], there is scarcely anyone who does not often wish to give his assent [*velit...assentiri*] to something which, though he does not know it, contains some error. Indeed, precisely because of their eagerness to find the truth, people who do not know the right method of finding it often pass judgement on things of which they lack perception, and this is why they fall into error. (AT VIIIA 20-21; CSM I 206-207)³⁶

We can only choose the false or the bad when we do not clearly and distinctly perceive it to be false or bad, and we see it in some sense as true or good.

³⁵ Pace the interesting case made by Stocker 1979.

³⁶ The Latin forms of the verb *volo*, translated alternately by John Cottingham as "wants," "choosing," and "wishes," indicate that Descartes has in mind operations of the will. This is why Descartes sees a tension between error depending on the will and our "wanting" to go wrong.

One might worry that the will's determination to judge in accordance with clear and distinct perception constitutes a restriction on or limitation of the will, and Descartes says, as we saw in the previous section, "I know by experience that [the will] is not restricted in any way" (AT VII 57; CSM II 39). Understanding this determination in the context of the will's tendency towards the true and the good provides a likely solution: the will's tendency towards the true and the good is part of its nature and a perfection of the will. When the will cannot but judge in accordance with clear and distinct perception, it is, in fact, operating properly—in accordance with its natural tendency towards the true and the good. It is not a restriction on the will to act in accordance with its nature.

V. Cartesian Freedom in the Fourth Meditation

I have argued that because of a perfection of the will—its unlimited scope—the will has the ability to act even when it is indifferent, that is, even when we do not clearly and distinctly perceive something as good or true. But, as Descartes makes clear to Gassendi in the Fifth Replies, this ability is also a consequence of the nature of the intellect. If "the intellect were ever to determine the will to embrace what is false," then "the intellect [would be] apprehending falsity under the guise of truth," which would be a "total contradiction (AT VII 378; CSM II 260). Instead, as Descartes clarifies earlier in the Fifth Replies, the will determines itself in cases of indifference: "if [the will] is determined by itself, then it can after all be directed towards an object which the intellect does not impel it towards—which you denied, and which is the sole point in dispute" (AT VII 378; CSM II 260). As we saw, Descartes seems to hold, furthermore, that "the will

has the freedom to direct itself, without the determination of the intellect, towards one side or the other” (AT VII 378; CSM II 260).

The Fourth Meditation Definition

I think this interchange with Gassendi—together with our understanding of Descartes’ conception of the will—helps illuminate the definition of the will with which we began.

Recall the Fourth Meditation definition:

[The will, or freedom of choice] simply consists in our ability to do or not to do something (that is, to affirm or deny, to pursue or avoid); or rather, it consists simply in the fact that when the intellect puts something forward for affirmation or denial or for pursuit or avoidance, we move in such a manner that we feel that we are determined to it by no external force. (AT VII 57)

In the first clause of the definition, Descartes, I posit, is referring to the same power of the will to determine itself that he mentions in his response to Gassendi. Yet the will’s power to determine itself is not liberty of indifference, a two-way power that is undetermined. Descartes makes this clear in a letter dated May 2, 1644, possibly to Mesland, in which he clarifies his view from the Fourth Meditation that “if we see very clearly that a thing is good for us, it is very difficult—and, *on my view, impossible*, as long as one continues in the same thought—to stop the course of our desire” (AT IV 116; CSMK 233, my emphasis) but also maintains that the will has “a real and positive power to determine [itself]” (AT IV 116; CSMK 234).³⁷ If the will has the power to determine itself even when we cannot but judge in accordance with clear and distinct perception,

³⁷ Descartes’ full response is: “Ainsi, puisque vous ne mettez pas la liberté dans l’indifférence précisément, mais dans une puissance réelle et positive de se déterminer, il n’y a de différence entre nos opinions que pour le nom; car j’avoue que cette puissance est en la volonté” (AT IV 116).

this power cannot be liberty of indifference, for in cases of clear and distinct perception, we lack the option to not assent and we aren't undetermined.

In that letter of 1644, Descartes suggests that the will *always* has this power to determine itself—both when it is indifferent and when it is not:

I do not see that it makes any difference to that power whether it is accompanied by indifference, which you agree is an imperfection, or whether it is not so accompanied, when there is nothing in the intellect except light, as in the case of the blessed, who are confirmed in grace. (AT IV 116; CSMK 234)

But what is this power of the will to determine itself, if not an undetermined two-way power of choice? It is the power of the will to generate volitions—cognitive and conative attitudes.³⁸ It is the ability, as Descartes says, to affirm or deny, to pursue or avoid. The will always has this ability, regardless of whether it is indifferent or not. When we are indifferent, the will's power to determine itself is two-way: we can either assent or not assent. When we perceive something clearly and distinctly, the will's power to determine itself is one-way, as it cannot not assent. In both cases, however, the will has the ability to determine itself—that is, to generate volitions.

Descartes' affirmation that the will always has the power to generate mental states proper to it might strike some as trivial—especially if characterized simply as the view that the will always has the power to will.³⁹ Among his contemporaries, however, this view is controversial.⁴⁰ Gassendi, as we saw, denies it. He says that in cases of indifference, the will lacks such a power, and in his objections, he corrects Descartes: in

³⁸ I think this power is connected to Descartes' conception of the will as the active faculty, which I discuss in Section IV of Chapter 1.

³⁹ Or vacuous, as Bernard Williams characterizes it: "by the mere possession of a free will, man is not given the ability to do anything at all, except will" (Williams 2005, 160).

⁴⁰ And among members of the Scholastic tradition, which serves as his backdrop. See note 32, above.

cases of indifference, Descartes ought to say that the will cannot affirm or deny—that the will cannot will when the intellect doesn’t determine it in one direction (AT VII 316; CSM II 220). This underscores the point that the dispute should be understood in terms of the will’s relationship to the intellect. The issue is whether the will can only will when determined by the intellect; it is not about determinism full stop,⁴¹ but about the determination of the intellect. I think Descartes also has these concerns in mind in the Fourth Meditation, as the central case for Descartes in the Fourth Meditation is that of indifference. It is crucial that the will have the ability to will in conditions of indifference—the success of Descartes’ explanation of error and vindication of God hang on it.

This interpretation of the first clause of the definition is supported by the context within which Descartes presents the definition. Descartes has just discussed the cognitive faculties—the intellect, memory and imagination—and characterizes them as “extremely weak and limited” (AT VII 57; CSM II 40). The will, or freedom of choice, in contrast:

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

⁴¹ Although Descartes affirms that the freedom we possess when the will is indifferent is incompatible with determination by the intellect, I don’t think he takes a view, at least in the *Meditations*, on whether or not we are causally determined in those cases. By the time of his letter to Princess Elisabeth of January 1646, he seems to hold that all of our free actions have been determined by God (AT IV 352-354; CSMK 282). Vere Chappell characterizes Descartes as being a compatibilist regarding the relationship between freedom and determinism in several ways: “We can now address the question of Descartes’s compatibilism, the logical consistency of his position that volitions are free with each of his claims regarding their determination by causes. Since he explicitly makes each of these claims—that volitions are caused by God, by the minds in which they occur, and by clear perceptions—while remaining committed to the freedom of every volition, it follows that Descartes is a compatibilist with respect to each of these relationships” (Chappell 1994, 188).

number of items, nevertheless, it does not seem any greater than mine when viewed formally and precisely in itself. (AT VII 57)

I have argued (in Section III) that it is in virtue of the unlimited scope of the will that humans to bear the image and likeness of God. And, as I have argued, the freedom humans have because of the will's unlimited scope is the ability to choose even when the will is indifferent. Thus, when Descartes immediately follows this passage with the definition, we ought to take him as referring to that general ability that includes the case of indifference: the power of the will to determine itself.

Let's turn to the second clause of the definition. Recall that the problem for identifying the clause as referring to liberty of spontaneity was that Descartes' formulation diverges from traditional formulations of liberty of spontaneity: Descartes highlights our acting with *the feeling* that we are determined by no external force, rather than the actual absence of external force. The interpretation of the first clause I have presented helps us understand the second: we feel that we are determined by no external force because the will always determines itself. Even when an external force determines us—God, by “a divinely produced disposition of my inmost thoughts” (AT VII 58; CSM II 40)—we determine ourselves in the sense that we form a volition in response to the supernatural light.

But Descartes also subscribes to liberty of spontaneity in a traditional sense: he holds that freedom requires the absence of external compulsion or constraint. When God determines us, he does so without compulsion or constraint—divine grace, like the clear understanding of reasons of truth and goodness, inclines the will and increases and strengthens our freedom (AT VII 58; CSM II 40). We are not forced to choose in this case: we choose in accordance with our inclination. Compulsion and freedom are

compatible only when the compulsion is internal to the mind. In the great light passage, Descartes specifies that the compulsion that leads us to judge is not external: “I could not but judge that something which I understood so clearly was true; but this was not because I was compelled so to judge by any external force” (AT VII 59; CSM II 41). It is unlikely, however, that Descartes holds that freedom *consists in* this absence of external compulsion or constraint. In the 1644 letter I mentioned earlier, Descartes clarifies that liberty of spontaneity isn’t freedom at all:

As for animals that lack reason it is obvious that they are not free, since they do not have this positive power to determine themselves; what they have is pure negation, namely the power of not being forced or constrained. (AT IV 117; CSM II 234)

Thus, although freedom requires the absence of external compulsion or constraint, for Descartes, freedom cannot consist in such absence.

Now that we see what Descartes means with the two clauses of the definition, we can see why he connects them with ‘or rather’: the second clause elaborates upon the first. After he has asserted that the will (or freedom of choice) consists in the power of the will to determine itself, he clarifies that in all cases—whether they are cases of inclination or indifference of the will, and whether the inclination arises from a source internal to the mind or external to it—we feel that nothing external to us determines us because the will determines itself.

This interpretation of the definition makes sense of what immediately follows it:

For, in order to be free, there is no need for me to be able to go both ways⁴² [*Necque enim opus est me in utramque partem ferri posse, ut sim liber*]; on the contrary, the more I incline [*propendeo*] in one direction – either because I clearly understand the reasons of truth and goodness point

⁴² In contrast with Cottingham’s “there is no need for me to be inclined both ways,” I translate ‘feramur’ with its active sense. See note 14, above.

that way, or because of a divinely produced disposition of my inmost thoughts – the freer is my choice. Neither divine grace nor natural knowledge ever diminishes freedom; on the contrary, they increase and strengthen it. But the indifference I feel when there is no reason pushing me in one direction rather than another is the lowest grade of freedom; it is evidence not of any perfection of freedom, but rather of a defect in knowledge or a kind of negation. (AT VII 57-58)

Descartes, we see, goes on to discuss all the cases I have mentioned: cases of internal inclination, external determination, and indifference. All of these cases are ones in which we act freely, because the will determines itself.

Thus, I interpret Descartes as holding that freedom consists in our power to determine ourselves. This power of self-determination is not incompatibilist, but rather is compatible with certain forms of determination, internal and external: determination by the intellect (cases of clear and distinct perception) and by God (his inclining our inmost thoughts).

Accounting for the other features of freedom

One might think that in providing a definition, Descartes is providing necessary and sufficient conditions for freedom. Yet, the definition cannot fully account for the features of freedom I presented earlier. Conceiving of freedom as *consisting in* the power of self-determination does not explain why we are freest even when we cannot but judge in accordance with clear and distinct perception; why freedom is proportional to the will's inclination; or why indifference is the lowest grade of freedom.

I think that Descartes has an account available to him that explains and unifies these seemingly disparate features of freedom: freedom is proportional to the ease of determining ourselves. Although he does not explicitly spell out this condition in the Fourth Meditation, but instead presents it in his later letter, likely to Mesland, of February

9, 1645,⁴³ there is good reason to use it to understand Descartes' Fourth Meditation account of freedom, as I will show. In this letter he distinguishes between the freedom we have before the will acts and the freedom while acting.⁴⁴ In both cases, freedom may be thought of as proportional to the ease of determining ourselves. Before we act, he says:

A greater freedom consists in a greater facility in determining oneself [*majori facilitate se determinandi*]...if we follow the course which appears to have the most reasons in its favour, we determine ourselves more easily. (AT IV 174; CSMK 245)⁴⁵

Moreover, while we are acting:

Freedom considered in the acts of the will at the moment when they are elicited...consists simply in ease of operation; and at that point freedom, spontaneity and voluntariness are the same thing [*consistit in sola operandi facilitate; atque tunc liberum, spontaneum, et voluntarium plane idem sunt*]. It was in this sense that I wrote that I moved towards

⁴³ This letter is notorious among commentators because in it, Descartes seems to affirm that the will has a "positive faculty" to act contrary to clear and distinct perception. This seems quite problematic for the prospects of his epistemological project of the *Meditations*: the psychological irresistibility of occurrent clear and distinct perceptions is supposed to serve as an introspective mark of their clarity and distinctness and thereby distinguish them from sense perceptions. If we can judge contrary to clear and distinct perception even when we are perceiving it, it would seem that we no longer have a clear method of arriving at the truth and avoiding error.

Tad Schmaltz takes this letter to indicate a change in Descartes' conception of freedom from the view he presents in the *Meditations* (Schmaltz 2008). I think Descartes' affirmation of this positive faculty can be defused to a certain extent. His affirmation includes a proviso: "it is always open to us to hold back from pursuing a clearly known good, or from admitting a clearly perceived truth, *provided we consider it a good thing to demonstrate the freedom of our will by so doing*" (AT IV 173; CSMK 245, my emphasis). With this proviso, Descartes modifies the case from one in which we are perceiving something clearly and distinctly to one in which the will is indifferent. Recall that Descartes says in the Fourth Meditation that the will is inclined in one direction when "I clearly understand that the reasons of truth and goodness point that way" (CSM II, 40; AT VII, 58). But if I consider it a good thing to demonstrate the freedom of the will by acting in the other direction, I now have a reason of goodness that points in the opposite direction. And, as I have argued, Descartes holds that we have the freedom to go either way in cases of indifference.

⁴⁴ Descartes employs the Scholastic terminology of his correspondent and distinguishes between the freedom considered acts of the will "either before they are elicited, or after they are elicited" (AT VII 173; CSMK 245). Elicited acts, according to the Scholastics, are acts performed by the will (as opposed to "commanded" acts, acts performed by the intellect or the body caused by the will's choice). Aquinas makes the distinction between elicited and commanded acts in *Summa Theologica* book II.1, question 6, article 4. Anthony Kenny interprets Descartes' usage of Scholastic terminology in the same way, as "before the will's act, and liberty during the act" (Kenny 1972, 29).

⁴⁵ In this passage, Descartes also affirms that greater freedom consists in "a greater use of the positive power which we have of following the worse although we see the better" (AT IV 174; CSMK 245). I take this conception of greater freedom to be irrelevant for understanding Descartes' conception of freedom in the Fourth Meditation, since there he maintains consistently that freedom is proportional to how clearly we see the good (and the true). Whether this is evidence of a genuine change in view I cannot take up here.

something all the more freely when there were more reasons driving me towards it; for it is certain that in that case our will moves itself with greater facility and force. (AT IV 174-175; CSMK 246).

Although this is a later letter, Descartes here connects freedom as the ease of operation (the will's determining itself) back to his Fourth Meditation account of freedom. Recall that a central feature of freedom in the Fourth Meditation is that freedom is proportional to the inclination of the will:

The more I incline in one direction—either because I clearly understand the reasons of truth and goodness point that way, or because God so disposes my inmost thoughts—the more freely I choose that way. (AT VII 57-58)

In the letter of 1645, then, Descartes is referring back to this feature of freedom. Thus, I suggest, we can read Descartes' clarification from the letter of 1645—that freedom is proportional to the ease of the will's determining itself— back into the Fourth Meditation discussion of freedom.

When we do so, and connect it to the features of the will that I have discussed, we see why Cartesian freedom has the features it does. I will begin with the feature of freedom that Descartes referenced in the letter: the more we incline in one direction, the freer our choice. Descartes holds that freedom's proportionality to the inclination of the will is tied to the will's nature to tend toward the true and the good. Descartes makes this connection explicitly in the Sixth Replies:

As for man, since he finds that the nature of goodness and truth is already determined by God, and his will cannot tend toward anything else, it is evident that he will embrace what is good and true all the more willingly [*libentius*], and hence more freely [*liberius*], in proportion as he sees it more clearly. (AT VII 432; CSM II 292)

Since our wills tend towards the true and the good, our ability to determine ourselves is tied to reason. When we clearly and distinctly perceive something as true or good, our

wills incline the most. Thus, it is easier for the will to assent to the true and pursue the good the more clearly and distinctly we perceive it.

This is why clear and distinct perception does not undermine our freedom, and why we are freest in this case: the will determines itself most easily. In the case of the *cogito*, and presumably in other cases of clear and distinct perception, our assent to the true follows straightforwardly from our perceiving it clearly and distinctly. Recall from the great light passage:

I could not but judge that what I understood so clearly was true...because a great light in the intellect was followed by a great inclination in the will, and thus the spontaneity and freedom of my belief was all the greater in proportion to my lack of indifference. (AT VII 58-59)

Further, if we happened to be the kind of creatures that always perceived the good and the true clearly and distinctly, our wills would likewise determine themselves easily— “[we] should never have to deliberate about the right judgment or choice,” yet we would be “wholly free” (AT VII 58; CSM II 40).⁴⁶

Lastly, we see why indifference is the lowest grade of freedom. Indifference, I have argued, is evidence of a defect or a lack of knowledge because it is that state of the will when we do not clearly and distinctly perceive something to be true or good. But because of the will’s unlimited scope, the will has the freedom to move, without the determination of the intellect, toward one side or the other. Unlike Spinoza’s man, who “placed in such an equilibrium (*viz.* who perceives nothing but thirst and hunger, and

⁴⁶ Descartes here provides a possible way of filling in what the ease of the will’s determining itself amounts to: ease of operation bears an inverse relation to the deliberation required. The will operates most easily when the reasons are so clear that we need not deliberate at all about what to do.

such food and drink as are equally distant from him) will perish of hunger and thirst,”⁴⁷ Descartes’ agent will not: she can simply eat (or drink).

Yet Descartes can appreciate Spinoza’s assessment of the case in the following way: he can agree that in cases of indifference, choosing to go one way rather than another is more difficult. The difficulty, as Descartes can understand it, varies proportionally to the indifference of the will. When we have no reasons to go one way or another, going one way or the other is quite difficult because of the lack of reasons—my choice is completely arbitrary. The choice seems similarly difficult when the reasons on both sides are balanced. In those cases where we do have reasons to go one way rather than another, but our reasons are merely probable conjectures, the choice may be easier than the cases in which we have no reasons or balanced reasons, but there is still some measure of difficulty because of the psychological mechanism Descartes mentions—“our assent is pushed the other way.”

One might worry that the account I have attributed to Descartes is not true to experience: those cases in which the account claims choosing is most difficult—cases in which we have no reason to go one way or another—the choice does not seem difficult at all. If I am confronted, like Buridan’s ass, with two apples that are identical in every way, the choice is easy: I simply go for one of the two.

Although throughout this chapter, in line with Descartes’ discussion of the Fourth Meditation, I have assimilated action to belief, Descartes’ main concern in the Fourth Meditation is to account for belief, rather than action,⁴⁸ and as a characterization of

⁴⁷ Spinoza 1985, 490.

⁴⁸ In light of Mersenne’s worries of the Fourth Objections, Descartes adds in the Synopsis to the *Meditations* that he wants to restrict his discussion of the Fourth Meditation only to “the error that occurs in

belief, his account is more plausible. As I take Descartes to suggest, ease of believing is indeed proportional to the reasons we have, since belief is responsive to evidence of truth. In those cases in which we clearly see the reasons pointing in one way, believing is easy, and it is more difficult to believe something the fewer reasons we have for it.⁴⁹

VI. Conclusion

According to the interpretation I have provided, Descartes does not approach the problem of free will as many have thought: as beginning with the question of whether or how human freedom is possible in a world that is causally determined (although his view does have implications for this question, as I have shown). Rather, as I have characterized him, Descartes starts from an account of human will and provides answers to questions that are interesting in their own right, including: Can we choose the bad or the false as such? What is the nature of our power of choice when the reasons for choosing one way or another aren't determining? Are our assentings to propositions free even when the evidence is so overwhelming that we cannot but do so? I have argued that understanding Descartes' answers to these questions and his associated conception of the human will is essential to providing a comprehensive and unified interpretation of his conception of freedom in the Fourth Meditation.

distinguishing truth from falsehood" and not "matters pertaining to faith or to the conduct of life" (AT VII 15; CSM II 11).

⁴⁹ This may generate another worry for Descartes' account—whether we can, in fact, believe something when we have absolutely no reasons to believe it. Perhaps Descartes has in mind things that we believe due to habit or blind impulse, beliefs that we find we have but on closer inspection, see that we have no reasons for them.

Chapter 3

The Relationship between the Will and the Passions of the Soul

Introduction

Descartes holds that the passions of the soul, the class of mental states that roughly corresponds to the current-day category of emotions,¹ bear some relationship to the will. For example, Descartes explains that the “use” (*usage*) of the passions of the soul “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; SV 51-52; CSM I 349). The relationship between the passions of the soul and the will is bi-directional, as we will see: the passions of the soul affect the will and the will can in some sense affect the passions of the soul. In this chapter, I focus on working out Descartes’ conception of this relationship.

Descartes presents his theory of the passions of the soul in his last published work, *The Passions of the Soul*,² in which he develops the views he discussed primarily with Elisabeth in their earlier stages. The passions of the soul, according to Descartes’ taxonomy of thought, belong to the intellect, and thus are perceptions (as opposed to

¹ One immediately apparent way in which the passions differ from the current-day category of emotions is that desire is one of Descartes’ primitive passions but is not a type of emotion (although on some theories of emotions, emotions may be composed in part of desires). For an in-depth study on the evolution of emotions as a psychological category and discussion of the relation between passions and emotions, see Dixon 2003.

² From this point on, I refer to Descartes’ work *The Passions of the Soul* as ‘*Passions*.’

volitions, which belong to the will).³ Thus they are a subset of Descartes' more general category of passion:

[The thoughts] I call [the soul's] actions are all of our volitions, because we find by experience that they come directly from the 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; SV 28; CSM I 335)

The passions of the soul⁴ are perceptions caused by the body⁵ that “we refer to the soul [*que nous rapportons à notre âme*]” (AT XI 347; SV 32; CSM I 337)⁶—that is, Descartes says, they are those perceptions “whose effects are felt as in the soul itself, and of which no proximate cause to which they may be referred is commonly known” (AT XI 347; SV 32; CSM I 337).⁷ This contrasts with perceptions caused by the body that we refer to external objects, such as color and size, and perceptions caused by the body that we refer to our body, such as pleasure, pain, hunger, and thirst.⁸ As members of the general class of perceptions caused by the body, the passions are confused and obscure.⁹ Yet they are also “all in their nature good” (AT XI 485; SV 132; CSM I 403), Descartes says—that is,

³ *Principles* I.32 (AT VIII A 17; CSM I 204)

⁴ From this point on, I refer to the passions of the soul simply as ‘the passions.’

⁵ More specifically, the passions are caused by some movement of the animal spirits (AT XI 349; SV 34; CSM I 339).

⁶ There is some question about what exactly Descartes means when he says of various kinds of perceptions that “we refer them to [*nous les rapportons à*]” something. Stephen Voss suggests the following gloss: “we ‘refer’ our perception to an object just in case we spontaneously judge that the action causing our perception is within that object” (SV 30, note 23). I will not address this issue further in this chapter.

⁷ Descartes officially defines the passions as “des perceptions, ou des sentiments, ou des émotions de l’âme, qu’on rapporte particulièrement à elle, et qui sont causées, entretenues et fortifiées par quelque mouvement des esprits” (AT XI 349)—“those perceptions, sensations, or emotions of the soul which we refer particularly to it, and which are caused, maintained, and strengthened by some movement of the spirits” (CSM I 339).

⁸ See Articles 22-25 (AT XI 345-348; SV 30-32; CSM I 336-338) on the differences among the kinds of perceptions caused by the body.

⁹ *Principles* IV.190 (AT VIII A 317; CSM I 281)

they are generally useful to the preservation of the mind-body composite. There are six “primitive” passions,¹⁰ which are simple and not composed of any other passions: wonder, love, hatred, desire, joy, and sadness. All of the rest of the passions are either species or combinations of these six.¹¹

I begin the chapter by providing an account of the effects on the will of the passions as a class. In so doing, I unpack Descartes’ conception of the use or function of the passions. I argue that a unitary interpretation of the use of the passions is insufficient: the use of the passions does not consist in each of the passions carrying out a certain function on its own. Instead, I pursue a bifurcated approach, which understands Descartes as conceiving of the use of the passions as having two parts, structured by the kind of volition involved. According to this approach, the passions both dispose and incite the will to form volitions to act and also strengthen useful thoughts, by which they influence the will in forming volitions related to judgment. The passions work together in a coordinated way to carry out the first function, whereas the passions individually carry out the second function.

For all that I will have said in the first section, one might wonder why Descartes holds that we need any kind of power or control over the passions. In the second section, I outline several ways in which Descartes conceives of the passions as problematic. I end this chapter with a discussion of Descartes’ view on how we can control the passions. I

¹⁰ Descartes differs with his predecessors both regarding the number and the identity of the primitive passions. Aquinas, for instance, holds that there are eleven basic passions. Moreover, wonder (*admiration*), which I will discuss further in Section 1.2 is an original contribution to the list.

¹¹ *Passions*, Article 69 (AT XI 380; SV 56; CSM I 353)

explore three ways Descartes prescribes: habituation, indirect means of control, and the regulation of desire.

I. How the passions affect the will

The key to understanding how the passions affect the will lies in Descartes' conception of the passions' use or function (*usage*).¹² Descartes holds that each individual passion has some particular good use. In his discussions of cowardice and fear, he gives a formulation of this view:

Although I cannot convince myself that nature has given men any Passion which is always unvirtuous and has no good and praiseworthy use [*usage*], I nevertheless have a lot of trouble divining what these two may be good for. (AT XI 462; SV 116; CSM I 392)¹³

Different passions vary in their good uses, and some of the passions have a particular use that directly affects the will—for example, hatred “incites the soul to will to be separated from the objects that are presented to it as harmful” (AT XI 387; SV 62; CSM I 356).

But Descartes also seems to hold that the passions as a class also bear a relationship to the will:¹⁴

The use [*l'usage*] of all the passions consists in this alone: they dispose the soul to will¹⁵ [*vouloir*] the things nature tells us are useful and to persist in this volition, just as the same agitation of spirits that usually causes them

¹² As Daisie Radner notes, ‘*usage*’ is derived from the Latin ‘*usus*,’ which means use or employment (Radner 2003, 179). CSM translates ‘*usage*’ as “function,” whereas SV translates it as “use.” I use ‘function’ and ‘use’ interchangeably.

¹³ Descartes ends up finding a good use for cowardice and concludes that since fear has no good use, it is not a passion proper but simply the excess of a combination of passions.

¹⁴ Descartes also expresses this view in Article 40 (AT XI 359; SV40-41; CSM I 343).

¹⁵ Robert Stoothoff in CSM translates ‘*vouloir*’ in Article 40 and here in Article 52 as “want”. This is confusing because in English, the terms ‘want’ and ‘desire’ are used interchangeably, but ‘*vouloir*’ is an operation of the will, and thus an action, whereas desire is a passion—one of Descartes’ six primitive passions. I follow Stephen Voss in SV in translating ‘*vouloir*’ as ‘will.’

disposes the body to movements conducive to the execution of those things. (AT XI 372; SV 51-52; CSM I 349)

My primary objective in this section is to present an account of the passions' effects on the will, which surprisingly receive only cursory treatment in the literature on the passions.¹⁶

1.1. Unitary approaches to the use of the passions

The few accounts that attempt to flesh out the passions' effects on the will take a "unitary" approach, in which they assume that each of the passions affects the will in one and the same way. This approach has much appeal, as it provides a simple and unified explanation of the passions' function. I will present two versions of a unitary approach and discuss what I take to be the main problems with them, which I will argue provide us with reason to pursue an alternative approach.

Representation accounts

One way of understanding the passions' effects on the will is as due to their nature as representational states. The passions, one version of the "representation" account goes, "move the will to pursue or to shun objects *in virtue of* being representations of those objects as good or evil."¹⁷ Since Descartes explicitly identifies what is represented to us

¹⁶ Most commentators go into very little detail, if any, about Descartes' view that the passions have an effect on the will. Anthony Levi, for instance, leaves it at "the principal effect of the passions is to stimulate the actions of the soul" (Levi 1964, 270). One notable exception is Greenberg 2007, which I will discuss in the next section.

¹⁷ Hoffman 1991, 163, my emphasis. Gary Hatfield makes a similar point: "as modes of intellect that represent the good, the bad, or the important, they naturally move the will, which means that they have an appetitive effect on the will" (Hatfield 2007, 11).

as “good from our point of view” with “being suitable to us” (AT XI 374; SV 53; CSM I 350), a refinement of this kind of account understands that “the passions’ power to influence the will resides in their representing things as suitable or unsuitable to our nature.”¹⁸

The main problem with this interpretation is that if the passions affect the will in virtue of representing what is suitable or unsuitable to our nature, then all sensations would have this effect on the will, since, as Descartes tells in the Sixth Meditation, all sensations are representations of this sort. The implication of this view is that not only the passions but also internal sensations of pain and pleasure, the “natural appetites” of hunger and thirst, and sensory perceptions such as color or light should move the will to pursue or avoid objects. On the face of it, this account does seem to work for the natural appetites—intuitively, hunger and thirst do seem to move us to pursue what causes them.

But the implication for internal sensations and sensory perceptions is problematic. The problem for internal sensations is textual. In the context of discussing the generation of action, Descartes specifies that pain and pleasure play an informational role: “the soul is immediately informed of things that harm the body only by the sensation it has of pain...so also the soul is immediately informed of things useful to the body only by some sort of titillation” (AT XI 430; SV 92; CSM I 377). As I will discuss in Section I.2, Descartes holds that the internal sensations of pleasure and pain work in a coordinated way with five of the primitive passions to affect the will. Yet in this coordination, they do not play any motivational role, but solely serve to inform the mind of things that harm

¹⁸ Hoffman 1991, 163.

and benefit it. The problem for sensory perceptions, on the other hand, is philosophical. The representation account, as applied to sensory perceptions like color and light, looks implausible, as color and light do not generally have any effect on the will.

A further problem with representation accounts is that they fail to incorporate Descartes' view that desire is essential to producing action.¹⁹ If passions move the will to pursue things simply in virtue of being representations of the good or evil of those things, then it would seem that every passion by itself could incline the will to form volitions that result in action. But Descartes conceives of desire as the only primitive passion that directly influences the will to form volitions to act.²⁰ Descartes defines desire as:

An agitation of the soul, caused by the spirits, which disposes it to will²¹ [*vouloir*] for the future the things it represents to itself to be suitable. Thus we desire not only the presence of absent good but also the preservation of the present, and in addition the absence of evil, both what we already have and what we believe we might receive in time to come. (AT XI 392; SV 66; CSM I 358)

¹⁹ I use 'action' here and throughout the chapter, unless otherwise specified, in its colloquial sense, which involves bodily movement. This contrasts with Descartes' technical use of 'action' as referring to any volition, whether or not it results in bodily movement. I will discuss this technical use later in the chapter.

²⁰ Love and hatred, according to Descartes, individually directly influence the will, but not to form volitions to act. Descartes has a curiously idiosyncratic view of the function of love and hatred, which he presents in Articles 79 and 80 (AT XI 387; SV 62; CSM I 356). 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; SV 62; CSM I 356). Descartes clarifies that for the soul to join itself "in volition" with something is for us to consider ourselves as "joined 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; SV 62; CSM I 356). Correspondingly, hatred causes us to consider ourselves "alone as a whole, entirely separated from the thing for which we have the aversion" (AT XI 387; SV 62; CSM I 356). It is important for my purposes here to note that the direct effects of love and hatred are limited to our thoughts—they have no direct influence on action. It is only when love and hatred occur along with desire that action results. I discuss this further in Section I.2 of this chapter.

²¹ Robert Stoothoff translates '*vouloir*' in this passage as "wish." I follow SV in taking 'will' to be a better translation for the sake of consistency (see note 15 above). But there is a more substantive reason as well: 'wish,' at least in English, has the connotation of hoping for something, but hope, according to Descartes is a passion—specifically a species of desire. Descartes certainly would not define desire with a passion that is a species of it.

The other passions individually cannot influence the will for form volitions to act:

Descartes says that joy, sadness, hate, and love “can incline us to any action *only* through the mediation of the Desire they excite” (AT XI 436; SV 97; CSM I 379, my emphasis).²²

The strengthening account

Another version of the unitary approach points not to the representational nature of the passions to understand their effects on the will but argues that Descartes holds that the passions affect the will through a unique mechanism.²³ This “strengthening” account focuses on Descartes’ description of the “utility of the passions” and postulates that Descartes here specifies the particular mechanism by which the passions affect the will:

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; SV 59; CSM I 354)

It is by strengthening thoughts that the passions make those thoughts salient, focus the mind’s attention on them, and thereby motivate agents to will what is useful to the mind-body composite.²⁴

The greatest strength of this account is that it identifies a feature of the passions as a class that distinguishes them from other mental states, and it suggests that this feature is the mechanism through which they affect the will. Unlike representing the useful and the harmful (the focus of the representation account), strengthening thoughts is not a feature

²² Descartes also expresses the necessity of desire for action in *Passions*, Article 143: “[Joy, Sadness, Hate, and Love] excite Desire in us, by whose mediation they regulate our behavior” (AT XI 436; SV 97; CSM I 379).

²³ In fact, Sean Greenberg questions whether the passions are representational states at all. I cannot go into the details of this aspect of the account here. See Greenberg 2007.

²⁴ Greenberg 2007, 722-726.

of any other class of mental states. Thus, this account does not have any difficulty demarcating the passions (and their function) from other kinds of sensations. This strength of the account, however, may also be a weakness. If it is only in virtue of strengthening thoughts that the passions serve to incline the will, and only passions strengthen thoughts, then, on this account, other mental states that we intuitively think of as affecting the will have no such effect. Internal sensations of pain and pleasure, since they do not strengthen thoughts, would not affect the will; yet it seems that pain and pleasure in fact do.²⁵

Furthermore, the strengthening account, like representation accounts, does not acknowledge Descartes' view that desire is necessary for action. Again, since an adequate interpretation of the passions' effects on the will must capture the importance of the role of desire in producing action, the strengthening account is insufficient.

Lastly, the ability of the passions to strengthen thoughts does not seem to be directly involved in the will's forming volitions *to act*. The instances in which Descartes explicitly mentions any of the primitive passions strengthening thoughts are situations in which a volition to act need not, and likely will not, result. Descartes' main example is the primitive passion of wonder. Wonder is unique among the primitive passions in its particular object—wonder does not have good or evil as its object but only knowledge of the thing wondered at. Consequently, wonder does not seem involved in the will's forming volitions to act, but only volitions related to knowledge. Wonder's lack of

²⁵ This may also be a problem for the coordination account I develop in the next section in that, according to my account, pain and pleasure do not by themselves affect the will. On the coordination account, however, pain and pleasure do play an important role in prompting the sequence of passions that ultimately affect the will.

involvement in the will's forming volitions to act is highlighted by its underlying physiology. The movements of the animal spirits in wonder, unlike their movements in the other primitive passions, actually prevent us from acting in order to facilitate the consideration of an object: the movement of the animal spirits flow from the brain "into the muscles for keeping the sense organs in the same position they are in" (AT XI 380; SV 57; CSM I 353). In another example, Descartes says desire is "entirely employed in strengthening the idea of the desired object" (AT XI 417; SV 82; CSM I 370) in the brain when we imagine that it is impossible to do something to acquire the object. But per hypothesis, because we think that the object is unattainable, we will not be inclined to form a volition to pursue the desired object. In fact, in this case, when desire strengthens the thought of the desired object, "it leaves the rest of the body languishing" (AT XI 417; SV 82; CSM I 370).

1.2 A bifurcated approach

The main versions of the unitary approach, I have argued, are problematic—both textually and philosophically—as interpretations of the passions' use. In this section, I will develop what I will call a "bifurcated" approach: I will show that the passions' use should be understood as having two aspects, depending on the kind of volition that the passion leads the will to form.

Descartes distinguishes two kinds of volitions, or "actions":

The first are actions of the soul which have their terminus in the soul itself, as when we will to love God or in general to apply our thought to

some object that is not material. The others are actions which have their terminus in our body, as when, from the mere fact that we have the volition to take a walk, it follows that our legs move and we walk. (AT XI 343; SV 28; CSM I 335)²⁶

Descartes here uses ‘action’ in a technical sense to refer to all volitions.²⁷ I will argue that Descartes has two different mechanisms by which the passions influence the will to form volitions, depending on whether the volition has its terminus in the soul or in the body—more specifically, whether the volition is related to judgments or to actions (in the non-technical sense).²⁸

I will begin by presenting the “coordination”²⁹ account of most of the passions’ effect on the will. In this account we will see that five of the primitive passions—love, hatred, desire, joy, and sadness—work in a coordinated way with sensations to “incite” and “dispose” the will to contribute to actions useful to the mind-body composite. In the coordination among these passions, desire plays the primary role in influencing the will. I will then go on to discuss the second aspect of the passions’ use: to strengthen thoughts that are useful to preserve in the soul. The sixth primitive passion of wonder will be prominent in this discussion—I will explain why it does not play an explicit role in the

²⁶ I use Stephen Voss’s neutral translation of the original French, “actions de l’âme qui se terminent en l’âme même” (AT XI 343). He notes that the meaning of this phrase is not “come to an end,” but rather “have as an end, have their issue” (SV 28, note 20).

²⁷ I elaborate on Descartes’ conceptions of activity and passivity in Chapter 1.

²⁸ Volitions involved in judgment are a subclass of volitions that have their terminus in the soul alone.

²⁹ I take this term from Desmond Clarke, who points out that Descartes holds that there is “naturally instituted coordination between our sensations, the passions they generate, and the relevant behavioural response” (Clarke 2006, 133). I, however, do not agree with his central premise, that standard account of Cartesian dualism (that human beings are composed of two distinct substances (material and immaterial) and the latter is a necessary and sufficient condition for (most) mental events) should be reconsidered—at least as a theory of the explanation of the human mind (Clarke 2006, 1).

coordination account and highlight its role in disposing the will to form volitions related to judgment.³⁰

The coordination account

We saw earlier that Descartes holds that the passions' use is to "dispose the soul to will the things nature tells are useful and to persist in this volition" (AT XI 372; SV 51-52; CSM I 349). He seems to simply reiterate this conception of the passions' use later in the *Passions*:

According to the institution of Nature, [Love, Hatred, Desire, Joy, and Sadness] all have reference to the body, and are given to the soul only insofar as it is joined with [the body], so that their natural use [*leur usage naturel*] 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; SV 92; CSM I 376)

In this passage, however, in contrast with the earlier passage, Descartes is concerned only with those volitions that result in bodily movement.³¹ Descartes clarifies explicitly both in the title and the body of the article that he is concerned with the use of the passions "insofar as they have reference to the body [*en tant qu'elles se rapportent au corps*]" (AT XI 429; SV 91; CSM I 376).³² Volitions that have their terminus in our body serve to preserve the body or render it more perfect in some way.

³⁰ I focus on the primitive passions in my account, since, as I have mentioned, all of the other passions are species or combinations of these six, and presumably the basic account can be modified appropriately for the others.

³¹ Paul Hoffman also makes this point (Hoffman 1991, 165). Descartes uses 'action' in this restricted sense also in Article 143, as he identifies 'action' not with 'volonté,' as he does when explaining the two kinds of volitions in the passage above, but with 'moeurs,' translated by both CSM and SV as "behavior" (AT XI 436; SV 96; CSM I 379).

³² This is in contrast with the use of the passions "insofar as they have reference to the soul" (AT XI 432; SV 93; CSM I 377).

Descartes then goes on to explain how the passions incite the soul to consent and contribute to beneficial actions:

And in this context, Sadness and Joy are the first two that are employed. For the soul is immediately informed of things that harm the body only by the sensation it has of pain, which produces in it first the passion of Sadness, next Hatred of what causes the pain, and in the third place the Desire to get rid of it. So also the soul is immediately informed of things useful to the body only by some sort of titillation, which, exciting Joy in it, next arouses love of what one believes to be its cause, and finally the desire to acquire what can make one continue having this Joy or enjoy one like it later on again. This shows that all five of them are very useful with respect to the body. (AT XI 430; SV 92; CSM I 377)

It is important to reiterate what I mentioned briefly in the discussion of representation accounts: the passions, in addition to working with one another, also work together with the sensations of pain and pleasure, which have the function of informing us of what is useful or harmful to mind-body composite. Here Descartes relies on what he explained in the Sixth Meditation:

The proper purpose of the sensory perceptions given to me by nature is simply to inform the mind of what is beneficial or harmful to the composite of which the mind is a part; and to this extent they are sufficiently clear and distinct. (AT VII 83; CSM II 57)³³

³³ Descartes classifies the passions explicitly as a kind of sensation. See *Principles* IV.189-190 (AT VIIIA 315-318; 279-281) and *Passions* I.27 (AT XI 349; SV 33-34; CSM I 338-339). Thus, some commentators have taken the Sixth Meditation explanation of the function of sensations to apply to *all* sensations—not only the internal sensations of pain and pleasure, sensory perceptions such as color and light, and the natural appetites of thirst and hunger (Descartes' focus in the Sixth Meditation), but also the passions. Stephen Voss, for example, argues that the Sixth Meditation account of the purpose of sensations should be extended to the passions: "The goodness of the passions is a consequence of the perfection of their author. According to the Sixth Meditation, the perceptions we refer to external objects [sensory perceptions] or to our body [internal sensations] are given to us by God "to inform the mind of what is beneficial or harmful for the composite of which the mind is a part; to this extent they are sufficiently clear and distinct" (AT VII 84; CSM II 57). *Mutatis mutandis*, the same is true of the perceptions we refer to the soul alone—the passions of the soul" (SV 133, note 46). See also Alquié 1973, 1100, note 1 for another expression of this view.

According to the account I am presenting in this chapter, the passions' function is not the same as those of internal sensations, sensory perceptions, and the natural appetites—to inform us of what is useful

Descartes explains that the sensations of pain and pleasure initiate sequences of passions³⁴ that work together to affect the will. In particular, the sensation of pain produces sadness in the soul, then hatred of what causes the pain, and then the desire to get rid of it; alternatively, the sensation of pleasure produces joy in the soul, love of what one thinks is the cause, and then the desire to acquire it. Descartes does not explain in this article why the passions occur in the particular order they do, but earlier in the *Passions*, his explanation for why joy ordinarily follows pleasure (and sadness ordinarily follows pain) reveals that the order results from what joy is (and what sadness is). Pleasure produces a brain impression that represents to the soul the body's sound condition and strength as a good belonging to the mind-body union (AT XI 399; SV 71; CSM I 362). Since joy "consists the enjoyment the soul has of the good which the impressions represent to it as its own" (AT XI 396; SV 69; CSM I 360), joy ordinarily follows pleasure. Analogous reasoning for the body's damaged condition and weakness explains why sadness ordinarily follows pain.

Desire plays the key role in the coordination since, as we saw, it has the particular function of directly influencing the will to form volitions to act. Aversion, traditionally a passion distinct from desire, is for Descartes just another way of conceiving desire—"it is always the same movement that inclines us to the search for the good and at the same time to the avoidance of the evil that opposes it" (AT XI 393; SV 66; CSM I 359)—since seeking good, he claims, is also avoiding evil. So desire plays the central role in

or harmful to the mind-body composite. Instead, the passions' function is to affect the will, in the ways I describe.

³⁴ Amy Schmitter calls this kind of phenomenon "trains of passions" (Schmitter 2006, §5).

influencing the will to form volitions both to pursue what is useful and to avoid what is harmful.

Of course, joy and love (and sadness and hatred) can occur in the soul independently of desire and independently of one another. Moreover, some of these passions independently can affect the will: Descartes says that love “incites [the soul] join itself in volition to the objects that appear to be suitable to it” (AT XI 387; SV 62; CSM I 356) whereas as mentioned earlier, hatred “incites the soul to will to be separated from the objects that are presented to it as harmful” (AT XI 387; SV 62; CSM I 356). But according to the account I am developing here, in order for the passions to influence the will to form volitions that result in bodily movement, they must work in coordination with one another, and desire is necessary for directly influencing the will to form volitions to pursue what is useful and avoid what is harmful.

At this point, one might question the plausibility of this interpretation, as it seems to imply that Descartes holds that we are not moved to act unless this particular sequence of sensations and passions occurs. The worry is that there are situations in which we seem to be moved to act without any pain or pleasure involved, as in Descartes’ own examples of the coward, who is moved simply by fear to run away, and the courageous individual, who is moved simply by boldness to stay and fight (AT XI 359; SV 41; CSM I 343). There are several ways in which Descartes could respond. First, he could say that the coordination account depicts the typical case, but not every case of action. He acknowledges that there are situations in which the passions do not operate precisely in the way the coordination account suggests:

Though this use of the passions is the most natural one they can have...it is nevertheless not always good, inasmuch as there are many things

harmful to the body that cause no Sadness at the beginning, or even give Joy, and others that are useful to it though they are distressing at first. (AT XI 431; SV 93; CSM I 377)

Cases in which harmful things do not produce sadness perhaps are malfunctions of the mechanisms of nature, and as Stephen Voss suggests, similar to the dropsy case of the Sixth Meditation.³⁵ Secondly, Descartes seems to think that in our untutored thinking about the passions, we may be mistaken about the identity of passions. For example, we often conflate pleasure and pain with joy and sadness: “titillation of the senses is so closely followed by Joy, and pain by Sadness, that most men do not distinguish them” (AT XI 399; SV 71; CSM I 361). Thus, although it may seem to us that pain and pleasure are not involved when we act, they may in fact be, and we are not separating out pleasure from our feeling of joy and pain from our feeling of sadness.

In regard to the particular examples of fear and boldness, though, Descartes has the resources to provide a more robust defense. He conceives of fear and boldness as species of desire,³⁶ which, as we have seen, is the component of the coordination account that directly moves the will to form volitions to pursue what is useful or avoid what is harmful. According to Descartes, boldness “disposes the soul to the execution of things that are most dangerous” (AT XI 460; SV 113; CSM I 390), whereas fear “takes away [the soul’s] power to resist the evils it thinks are near” (AT XI 462; SV 115; CSM I 392). Thus, it is plausible that in these examples, Descartes is providing a shorthand

³⁵ SV 93, note 62. Descartes might be able to give an analogous response to why this malfunction does not undercut God’s goodness. I discuss Descartes’ vindicating explanation in Section III.1 of this chapter.

³⁶ Fear and boldness are variants of desire in which we also take into consideration whether the likelihood of obtaining what we desire is great or small. When there is difficulty in the choice of means or the execution, boldness results, and fear is its opposite. See Articles 57-59 (AT XI 374-376; SV 53-54; CSM I 350-351) and Articles 171-174 (AT XI 460-462; SV 113-115; CSM I 390-391).

characterization that leaves out the earlier passions in the sequence. He could provide a variant of the coordination account that would have fear and boldness, as species of desire, carry out the function of desire and serve to directly influence the will to form volitions.

Strengthening useful thoughts

According to the coordination account, then, five of the six primitive passions work in coordination with sensations and one another to influence the will to form volitions that result in bodily movement. But as I discussed earlier, volitions are of two kinds—those related to bodily movement and those that “have their terminus in the soul itself.” One large subclass of this second kind of volition is passions involved in judgment. In this section, I will show that the passions individually affect the will’s formation of volitions involved in judgment by strengthening and preserving useful thoughts.

Wonder, the sixth primitive passion, is particularly useful in disposing the will to form those volitions involved in judgment.³⁷ As there has been very little discussion of wonder in the secondary literature on the passions,³⁸ I will spend some time exploring Descartes’ conception of wonder and its functions.

Descartes defines wonder as “a certain surprise of the soul which makes it tend to consider attentively those objects which seem to it rare and extraordinary” (AT XI 380; SV 56; CSM I 353). Wonder’s object—what seems rare and extraordinary—is particular

³⁷ As I discussed in the first chapter, Descartes holds that the operation of the will is necessary for us to make judgments—in the Fourth Meditation, he highlights affirmation and denial as volitions involved in judgments.

³⁸ Two notable exceptions are Kambouchner 1997 and Brown 2006.

to it. The object of all of the other primitive passions is what appears good or evil—that is, what appears useful or harmful to the mind-body composite.³⁹ Because things seem rare and extraordinary to us before we ever perceive them to be good or evil, Descartes calls wonder “the first of all the passions” (AT XI 373; SV 52; CSM I 350).⁴⁰

Wonder has several functions. First, it allows us to notice what appears rare because it is new to us or different from what we have experienced (AT XI 384; SV 59; CSM I 354-355). Wonder also makes us pay attention to the rare object, as Descartes indicates in his definition of wonder. But wonder is not only useful for making us notice something and keeping our attention focused on it, wonder is also useful in later stages of information processing—Descartes points out that wonder has the particular function of “making us learn and retain in our memory things we have previously been ignorant of” (AT XI 384; SV 59; CSM I 354).

Unlike the five primitive passions discussed in the previous section, wonder has no relation to volitions that result in bodily movement. By making us notice things and attend to them, wonder affects the will’s formation of volitions related to judgment. The distinction I am making here between volitions that result in bodily movement and those involved in judgment does not map onto the distinction between the practical and the theoretical—wonder can help us make both practical and theoretical judgments, and even gain practical and theoretical knowledge. Not only does wonder “[dispose] us to the

³⁹ Recall that Descartes explicitly identifies what is represented to us as “good from our point of view” with “being suitable to us” (AT XI 374; SV 53; CSM I 350).

⁴⁰ Deborah Brown explains, “[wonder] is the first passion because it occurs before we know whether an object is beneficial or harmful to us and is therefore presupposed by every other passion that attaches some value to an object” (Brown 2006, 146).

acquisition of the sciences” (AT XI 385; SV 60; CSM I 355), but it is also relevant to a certain kind of knowledge that is instrumental to changing our behavior.⁴¹ Because wonder helps provide both knowledge of the world and knowledge of ourselves, which we need in order to pursue what is beneficial to the mind-body composite, wonder’s use is prior to the coordination account.

Descartes explains how wonder carries out its various functions:

Now it is easy to understand from what has been said above that the utility of all the passions consists only in [*l'utilité de toutes les passions ne consiste qu'en*] 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; SV 59; CSM I 354)

This passage, from Article 74, which is entitled “wherein all the passions are serviceable and wherein they are harmful,” interrupts Descartes’ discussion of wonder, which spans Articles 70 through 78. As this passage occurs in the middle of Descartes’ discussion of wonder, I take Descartes in this text to be explaining primarily how wonder affects the will in forming volitions related to judgment, and then generalizing to all of the passions. It is important to note that here Descartes is not making the claim that the only utility of the passions is their strengthening useful thoughts, as the strengthening account would have us believe. Instead, “the utility of all the passions consists only in their strengthening thoughts” because strengthening useful thoughts is the only function that

⁴¹ The passion of *générosité* is a species of wonder, and consists “partly in [one’s] understanding that there is nothing which truly belongs to him but the free control of his volitions, and no reason why he ought to be praised or blamed except that he uses it well or badly” (AT XI 446; SV 104; CSM I 384). The cultivation of *générosité* is one main way Descartes thinks that we can affect our behavior and master the passions. I discuss *générosité* further in Section III.3. See Shapiro 1999 for an in-depth discussion of *générosité*.

all of the passions share in common.⁴² As we saw in the previous section, wonder does not play any part in disposing the will to form volitions related to action.

Descartes does not spell out how it is that the passions' strengthening thoughts inclines the soul to form volitions related to judgment. One possible way of understanding the connection is in terms of the clarity of perceptions. Descartes defines clarity in the *Principles*:

I call a perception 'clear' when it is present and accessible to the attentive mind – just as we say that we see something clearly when it is present to the eye's gaze and stimulates it with a sufficient degree of strength and accessibility. (AT VIIIA 22; CSM I 207)

When wonder strengthens a thought of what is rare and the other passions strengthen a thought of good or evil, the thought *seems* clear to us. The strengthening effect of the passions makes the mind notice the thought, dwell on it, and preserves it in the mind. Because a passion makes the thought strong and present to the mind, as clear thoughts are in and of themselves, the will is particularly inclined to supply a mental attitude and make a judgment about it.

Descartes does not specify what particular thoughts the passions serve to strengthen—he says only that the passions strengthen thoughts that it is good for the soul to preserve. Presumably, thoughts regarding what is good, evil, and rare are good for the soul to preserve so that we can make judgments about them—judgments that both contribute to our knowledge of the world and ourselves and better help us navigate the

⁴² Thanks to Tad Schmaltz for this suggestion.

world around us. Descartes mentions both the understanding and the senses as sources of such thoughts.⁴³

II. Interlude: how the passions are problematic

I have argued that the passions affect the will in two ways. First, in coordination with one another and pain and pleasure, five of the primitive passions dispose the will to those actions that are conducive to the well being of the mind-body composite. Second, the passions individually help us pay attention and notice things that are useful to us, and thereby dispose the will to form volitions involved in judgment and play a role in our acquisition of new knowledge of things.

Descartes holds not only that the passions are instrumentally valuable in these ways, but also that some of them are intrinsically valuable—that there is something valuable in the experience of some of the passions in themselves. At the end of the *Passions* he summarizes:

As for those [pleasures] that are common to [the soul] and the body, they depend entirely on the Passions, so that the men they can move the most are capable of tasting the most sweetness in this life. (AT XI 488; SV 134-135; CSM I 404)

Here Descartes characterizes the passions generally as tied to the pleasures of the mind-body composite. We see this conception of the passions' goodness even more clearly in his descriptions of particular passions—for instance, joy:

⁴³ For instance, he says, “Now even though something which has been unknown to us may be newly present to our understanding or our senses, we do not on that account retain it in our memory unless the idea we have of it is strengthened in our brain by some passion, or alternatively by the application of our understanding, which our will fixes in a particular [state of] attention and reflection. And the other passions can serve to make one notice things which appear good or evil, but we just have wonder for ones which appear rare only” (AT XI 384; SV 59; CSM I 355).

Joy is a delightful excitation of the soul, wherein consists the enjoyment it has of the good which the impressions of the brain represent to it as its own. I say that it is in this excitation that the enjoyment of good consists, because in reality the soul receives no other fruit from all the goods it possesses. (AT XI 396; SV 69; CSM I 360)

As I have portrayed them thus far, then, the passions seem to be entirely for our benefit.

But Descartes also conceives of the passions as something we need to have power over: he claims, “there is no soul so weak that it cannot, when well guided, acquire an absolute power over its passions” (AT XI 368; SV 47; CSM I 347). In this section, I will outline two ways in which Descartes conceives of the passions as problematic, and thereby motivate Descartes’ view that we need to control them.

First, although Descartes holds that for something to qualify as a passion, it has to have some good and praiseworthy use, the excess of a passion (or a combination of passions) always negatively affects us. The negative effects manifest themselves differently, depending on the function of the particular passion. For example, an excess of wonder “eradicate[s] or pervert[s] the use of reason,” (AT XI 385; SV 59-60; CSM I 355). Alternatively, fear, “takes away [the soul’s] power to resist the evils it thinks are near” (AT XI 462; SV 115; CSM I 392).

Second, and more significantly, Descartes holds that the passions can lead us astray. One way they do this is by misdirecting our attention. In the Fourth Meditation, Descartes suggests that proper use of our attention is an important part of the process of obtaining knowledge:

I shall unquestionably reach the truth, if only I give sufficient attention to all the things which I perfectly understand, and separate these from all the other cases where my apprehension is more confused and obscure. (AT VII 62; CSM II 43)

The passions, however, can cause us to wrongly attend to things:

All the evil [the passions] can cause consists either in their strengthening and preserving those thoughts [it is good that the soul preserve and which could otherwise easily be effaced from it] more than necessary or in their strengthening and preserving others it is not good to dwell on. (AT XI 383; SV 59; CSM I 354)

The passions misdirect our attention in two ways—they can strengthen and preserve thoughts it is good for the soul to preserve to too great an extent, or they can strengthen and preserve thoughts it is not good for the soul to dwell on. Because of this misdirection of attention, we can easily make judgments when we ought not to do so.

Another way the passions lead us astray is by making goods and evils seem greater and more important to us than they are:

[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; SV 93; CSM I 377)

This view of the passions runs throughout Descartes' various discussions of the passions. In a September 1, 1645 letter to Elisabeth, Descartes says that "the source of all the evils and all the errors of life" (AT IV 284; LS 108; CSMK 263) is that pleasures that pertain to man often seem greater than they are. The passions can cause this: "often passion makes us believe that certain things are much better and more desirable than they are" (AT IV 284; LS 108; CSMK 264). Descartes goes on to generalize about all of the passions:

There are none which do not represent to us the good to which they tend more vividly than is merited and which do not make us imagine pleasures much greater before we possess them than we find them afterward, once we have them (AT IV 285; LS 108; CSMK 264).

Shortly after, in another letter to Elisabeth, dated September 15, 1645, he reiterates the statement from the *Passions* that "all our passions represent to us the goods they incite us to seek as much greater than they actually are" (AT IV 294-295; LS 113; CSMK 267).

By misrepresenting goods and evils, the passions over-motivate us and cause us to hastily pursue or avoid things.

III. What power does the will have over the passions?

Because the passions are problematic in these ways, Descartes holds that we need to control them. But since the passions are both intrinsically and instrumentally valuable, Descartes does not advocate *apatheia*, unlike the Stoics and their followers—he does not think that we ought to rid ourselves altogether of the passions.⁴⁴ Rather, the aim is to become “masters” of them and “manage” them (AT XI 488; SV 135; CSM I 404). In this section I will discuss three ways in which Descartes thinks we have some measure of power over the passions.

III.1 Habituation

Descartes holds that we cannot simply will the passions away or will to feel different passions. We lack this kind of direct control of the passions, in Descartes’ view, because of the naturally instituted correlations between mind and body. He summarizes his view about the mind-body correlations in his letter to Chanut, written on February 1, 1647:

The soul’s natural capacity for union with a body brings with it the possibility of an association between each of its thoughts and certain motions or conditions of this body so that when the same conditions recur in the body, they induce the soul to have the same thought; and conversely when the same thought recurs, it disposes the body to return to the same condition. (AT IV 604; CSMK 307)

⁴⁴ Descartes explicitly acknowledges this in a letter to Elisabeth, dated May 18, 1645: “I am not one of those cruel philosophers who want their sage to be insensible (AT IV 202; LS 87).”

God has set up these correlations for our benefit: in the Sixth Meditation Descartes characterizes them as “the best system that could be devised” (AT VII 88; CSM II 60) for sensations to carry out their purpose of informing us of what is useful or harmful to us. The system, he says, “is most especially and most frequently conducive to the preservation of the healthy man” (AT VII 87; CSM II 60). For instance, when the nerves in a person’s foot are agitated “in a violent and unusual manner,” the nervous system transmits a signal that produces the sensation of pain as occurring in the foot (AT VII 88; CSM II 60). Because of the correlation between the particular agitation of the nerves and the sensation of pain as occurring in the foot, we are efficiently informed that the cause of the pain is harmful to the foot and this prompts us to do something to get rid of it.

Although the system of mind-body correlations has been set up by nature, Descartes suggests that we can change them in some sense: “although each movement of the gland seems to have been joined by nature to each of our thoughts, one can nevertheless join them to others by habituation” (AT XI 368-369; SV 47; CSM I 348). He elaborates:

I have included among these remedies [for the misuses or excesses of the passions] the forethought and skill by which we can correct our constitutional deficiencies, in applying ourselves to separate within us the movements of the blood and the spirits from the thoughts to which they are usually joined. (AT XI 486; SV 133; CSM I 403)

Because of these statements, some have taken Descartes to hold that we can modify the naturally instituted mind-body correlations themselves. For instance, Lisa Shapiro says of

Descartes in these passages:⁴⁵ “ he is suggesting that we can re-institute at least some of the associations themselves. Insofar as he claims we can rehabilitate ourselves in this way, Descartes claims that the associations between mental and physical states are changeable.”⁴⁶ According to this interpretation, Descartes modifies his view in the *Passions* from that of the *Meditations*: mind-body correlations in the *Meditations* are fixed, but in the *Passions* they are modifiable.⁴⁷

Yet the texts are consistent with an alternative interpretation. We need not conclude that the connections between mind and body are being changed in habituation. Indeed, we have reason to avoid this conclusion, as the fixed nature of the correlations is central to both the Sixth Meditation explanation of the function of sensations, and Descartes’ vindication of God’s goodness in setting up the system of correlations. We are efficiently informed of pain as occurring in the foot because the particular agitation of the nerves is correlated with the particular sensation of pain as in the foot. Further, it is because mind-body correlations are fixed that God is not responsible for what Descartes calls “true errors of nature” (AT VII 85; CSM II 59), cases such as dropsy and phantom limb pain that seem to deceive us about the state of the mind-body composite. Regarding these deceptive cases, he says, “this deception of the senses is natural, because a given motion in the brain *must always* produce the same sensation in the mind” (AT VII 88; CSM II 61, my emphasis). Since God has instituted these connections for our good, they

⁴⁵ Along with Article 44: “each volition is naturally joined to some movement of the gland, but...by artifice or habituation one can join it to others” (AT XI 361; SV 42; CSM I 344),

⁴⁶ Shapiro 2003, 229. Among others, Ferdinand Alquié (Alquié 1973, 994, note 1), Paul Hoffman (Hoffman 1991), Geneviève Rodis-Lewis (SV xx-xxi), and Stephen Voss (SV 133, note 46) also advance this view.

⁴⁷ Lisa Shapiro notes this implication of the position she advocates (Shapiro 2006, 272).

generally accurately indicate to us facts about what is beneficial or harmful for us as mind-body composites. A mistake here and there is a tolerable byproduct of the law-like connections between mind and body: “it is much better that it should mislead on this occasion than that it should always mislead when the body is in good health” (AT VII 89; CSM II 61). If the correlations between mind and body are modifiable, however, this vindicating explanation seems to be in danger.

Gary Hatfield presents an alternative interpretation according to which the connections between mind and body are not being changed in habituation, but rather, the physical structure of the brain is.⁴⁸ He takes his cue from Descartes’ discussion of how the same cause can excite different passions in different individuals:

All brains are not disposed in the same manner, and the same movement of the gland which in some excites fear, in others makes the spirits enter the brain’s pores that guide part of them into the nerves that move the hands for self-defense, and part of them into those that agitate the blood and drive it toward the heart in the manner needed to produce spirits suitable to continue this defense and sustain the volition for it” (AT XI 358-359; SV 40; CSM I 343)

Hatfield points out that there are two possible interpretations of this passage: on one interpretation, the same type of brain state causes different bodily responses (fight vs. flight) and mental states (boldness vs. fear) in different individuals—that is, the brain-mind connections vary among individuals. On the other, “the differences between individuals pertain to the linkage between brain images or ‘impressions’ of a frightful object, such as a bear, and two subsequent brain states, one of which differs between

⁴⁸ Hatfield 2007, 21-28.

individuals and accounts for the differences in both behavior and passion.”⁴⁹ He fleshes out an account according to which an image of a frightful animal causes the passion of apprehension in both the bold and the fearful. In the bold, the passion of apprehension causes further brain states that cause the fight response and the passion of courage, whereas in the fearful, the passion of apprehension causes further brain states that cause the flight response and intensify the passion itself into feelings of fear and terror. According to this account, then, the changes between mind and body occur *indirectly* either through alterations between brain states or changes in linkages between mental states. The mind-body connections themselves never change.

Hatfield argues that all of Descartes’ examples of habituation “either directly imply or are consistent with” his account of indirect change.⁵⁰ Descartes’ main example of habituation is the case of learning a language. When we see a word, our perceiving of the word excites a movement in the pineal gland that nature has joined to the thought of the shape of the letters. But as we acquire the disposition to think of the meaning of the words, a new connection between mental states is forged: we associate the shape of the letters with the word’s meaning. In a different example, the change is in the connection between brain states:

When someone unexpectedly comes upon something very foul in food he is eating with relish, the surprise of this encounter can so change the disposition of the brain that he will no longer be able to see any such food afterwards without abhorrence, whereas previously he used to eat it with pleasure. (AT XI 369; SV 48; CSM I 348)

⁴⁹ Hatfield 2007, 22.

⁵⁰ Hatfield 2007, 26.

After encountering something foul, the brain image of the food is no longer associated with the brain state associated with the passion of pleasure but rather with the brain state associated with the passion of abhorrence.

This latter kind of habituation—modifying the connections between brain states—is not something we can intentionally implement, and thus, I think, not a fruitful means of controlling the passions.⁵¹ However, changing the associations between mental states, developing what Hatfield calls “mental habits,”⁵² does seem to me to be an important way in which Descartes thinks we can control the passions. I will turn now to these indirect means of controlling the passions.

III.2 Indirect means

In an article entitled, “What the power of the soul is with respect to the passions,”

Descartes specifies how we may indirectly excite passions:

Our passions cannot likewise⁵³ 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. Thus 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

⁵¹ Descartes’ other examples of this kind of habituation likewise seem to be changes that inadvertently happen to us: for instance, because a child has gotten a severe headache from the smell of roses or been badly frightened by a cat, “the idea of the Aversion he had then for the roses or the cat may remain imprinted in his brain to the end of life” (AT XI 429; SV 91; CSM I 376)

⁵² Hatfield 2007, 27.

⁵³ Descartes prefaces this passage with a discussion of how we cannot directly dilate our pupils simply by having the volition to do so, since nature hasn’t joined the movement of the gland associated with dilation with the volition to dilate our pupils, but rather the volition to look at distant objects (AT XI 362; SV 43; CSM I 344).

conquered, whereas one can expect only regret and shame from having fled, and similar things. (AT XI 363; SV 43; CSM I 345)

As I discussed earlier, we cannot simply will to be bold or will to not be afraid. Rather, in order to foster a particular passion within us, we need to apply ourselves to attend to the reasons normally associated with it. But applying oneself to attend to reasons is a function of the will: “our will fixes [our understanding] in a particular [state of] attention and reflection [*notre volonté détermine [notre entendement] à une attention et réflexion particulière*]” (AT XI 384; SV 59; CSM I 355).⁵⁴

Descartes elaborates further on these indirect means for controlling the passions toward the end of the *Passions*. There he provides a “general remedy for the passions” (AT XI 485; SV 132; CSM I 403) on those occasions for which we are not sufficiently prepared:

What I think I can set down here as the most general remedy for all the excesses of the Passions and the easiest to put into practice, is this: when one feels the blood stirred up like that, one should take warning, and recall everything presented to the imagination tends to deceive the soul, and to make the reasons for favoring the object of its Passions appear to it much stronger than they are and those for opposing it much weaker. (AT XI 487; SV 134; CSM I 403)

The soul “cannot completely control its passions” (AT XI 363; SV 44; CSM I 345) because of the physiological excitation that often accompanies the passion. Although we cannot prevent feeling the passions and their physiological accompaniments, we can control their effects by fixing our attention on other thoughts. Descartes points out that thinking about the passions’ effects on us is useful for this purpose—the thought that

⁵⁴ Also, “When we will to fix our attention to consider a single object for some time, this volition keeps the gland inclined to the same side during that time” (AT XI 361; SV 42; CSM I 344)

“everything presented to the imagination tends to deceive the soul” itself is a distracting thought that can help us control the passions.

Descartes continues his discussion of the “general remedy”:

And when the Passion favors only things whose execution admits of some delay, one must abstain from making any immediate judgment about them, and distract oneself by other thoughts until time and rest have completely calmed the excitation in the blood. (AT XI 487; SV 134; CSM I 403)

Because the passions are confused and obscure thoughts, we are not determined to form volitions in response to them. We can withhold judgment from the objects of the thoughts the passions strengthen and preserve. We do this in part by attending to other thoughts.

In practical matters, unlike for theoretical matters, however, we cannot always simply suspend judgment or refrain from acting. Descartes acknowledges this distinction between the practical and the theoretical in the *Discourse*. He says that, as opposed to in the search for knowledge:

Since in everyday life we must often act without delay, it is a most certain truth that when it is not in our power to discern the truest opinions, we must follow the most probable. Even when no opinions appear more probable than any others, we must still adopt some; and having done so we must then regard them not as doubtful, from a practical point of view, but as most true and certain. (AT VI 25; CSM I 123)

Since the passions are not clear and distinct perceptions, the will is indifferent in some sense in relation to them. They serve as merely probable reasons to pursue or avoid something. But sometimes they can supplant clear and distinct perceptions as reasons to pursue a course of action. In his September 15, 1645 letter to Elisabeth, Descartes says:

For since we cannot always be attentive to the same thing—even though we have been convinced of some truth by reason of some clear and evident perceptions—we will be able to be turned, afterward, to believing false appearances, if we do not, through a long and frequent meditation, imprint it sufficiently in our mind so that it turns into habit. (AT IV 295-296; LS 113; CSMK 267)

As the passions are a source of “false appearances” (AT IV 295; LS 113; CSMK 267), they misrepresent the goods and evils of the world and cause us to focus too much on thoughts that we ought not to consider. We must, through the action of the will, focus our attention on the right thoughts, in this case, those that “oppose” the reasons the passions represent. Thus, when we are short on time and cannot properly evaluate the reasons for and against a course of action, and we do not clearly and distinctly perceive the matter, Descartes suggests that we follow reasons that counter the considerations that the passions provide:

Finally, when [the Passion] incites one to actions requiring one to reach some resolution at once, the will must be inclined above all to take into consideration and to follow the reasons opposed to those the Passion represents, even though they appear less strong. (AT XI 487; SV 134; CSM I 403)

Thus, although the will cannot directly control the occurrence of passions within us, it can effectively counter the passions’ effects by redirecting our attention.

III.3 Regulation of desire

I want to discuss one last method Descartes prescribes for controlling the passions: regulating our desires. As I have argued, desire is central to Descartes’ account of how the passions influence the will to form volitions related to action. Accordingly, then, managing our desires is an important way of controlling our actions. Descartes makes this connection explicit:

Because these Passions [Love, Hatred, Joy, and Sadness] can incline us to any action only through the mediation of the Desire they excite, it is that Desire in particular which we should be concerned to regulate. (AT XI 436; SV 97; CSM I 379)

Descartes diagnoses the “error most commonly committed in connection with Desires” as “fail[ing] to distinguish sufficiently the things that depend entirely on us from those that do not depend on us” (AT XI 436; SV 97; CSM I 379).⁵⁵ Descartes’ concern with adequately distinguishing between things that depend only on us and do not depend on us is not new in the *Passions*—it forms the basis of the third maxim of his *morale par provision* of the *Discourse*: “to try always to master myself rather than fortune, and change my desires rather than the order of the world” (AT VI 25; CSM I 123-124). Descartes clarifies that for something to depend entirely on us simply means that it depends on our free will [*notre libre arbitre*]” (AT XI 436; SV 97; CSM I 379).⁵⁶ As I highlighted in Chapter 1, earlier in the *Passions*, Descartes connects volitions with what depends only on us, in contrast with perceptions, which depend on the objects that they represent. Thus, we are to separate out what involves our volitions from what does not.

Things that do not depend on us are problematic primarily because they distract us from what does depend on us: “in occupying our thought, they divert us from casting our affection upon other things whose acquisition does depend on us” (AT XI 437-438; SV 98; CSM I 380). Descartes prescribes two general remedies for these “vain desires” (AT XI 438; SV 98; CSM I 380). The first, *générosité*, is a species of the passion of Wonder that consists in:

⁵⁵ There are, of course, things that fail satisfy either condition: things that depend both on us and on others. Descartes says that for things that fall into this category, we ought to separate out what depends only us, so that we limit our desire to that (AT XI 439; SV 99; CSM I 380)

⁵⁶ Among others, Stephen Voss (SV 97, note 70) and Deborah Brown (Brown 2006, 171-176) note that this distinction is from the Stoics. Descartes himself seems to indicate that his inspiration is the Stoics in his discussion of the third maxim in the *Discourse* (AT VI 26; CSM I 124).

Partly in [our] understanding that there is nothing which truly belongs to [us] but this free control of [our] volitions, and no reason why [we] ought to be praised or blamed except that [we use] it well or badly; and partly in [our] feeling within [ourselves] a firm and constant resolution to use it well, that is, never to lack the volition to undertake and execute all the things [we judge] to be best—which is to follow virtue perfectly. (AT XI 446; SV 104; CSM I 384)

Générosité helps us regulate our desires because when we possess the passion, we have no problem making the distinction between what depends on us and what does not.

Furthermore, according to Descartes, we cease to value what does not depend on us. He says of those with *générosité*: “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; SV 104; CSM I 385).⁵⁷

The second remedy Descartes prescribes for our vain desires is “to distinguish Fate from Fortune” (AT XI 440; SV 100; CSM I 381). This requires that we reflect on divine providence (Fate, “as it were”), “and represent to ourselves that it is impossible that anything should happen otherwise than has been determined by this Providence from all eternity” (AT XI 438; SV 98; CSM I 380). Descartes holds the view that we only desire what we consider to be possible in some way (AT XI 438; SV 98; CSM I 380), so when we find out that something is impossible, we cease to desire it. Frequently, however, although things do not depend on us, we think they are possible because we think they depend on what Descartes deems “Fortune,” “which makes things happen or fail to happen at its pleasure” (AT XI 439; SV 99; CSM I 380). In not knowing all the causes of something, we believe that there is an open possibility that it might happen, and

⁵⁷ There is much more to say about *générosité*, Descartes’ related conception of virtue, and the role of the will, but I cannot address these topics here.

we unjustifiably desire it. We must, he holds, reject “this common opinion” about Fortune and understand providence’s true role in directing what occurs. Descartes concludes, “it is certain that when one applies oneself thus to distinguishing Fate from Fortune, one will easily accustom oneself to regulating one’s Desires in such a way that they can always give us complete satisfaction, since their fulfillment depends only on us (AT XI 440; SV 100; CSM I 381).

IV. Conclusion

This chapter has been devoted to understanding the relationship between the will and the passions. As I have argued, the passions influence the will in two ways: on the one hand, in coordination with one another and sensations, and, on the other, by strengthening thoughts. Their influence generally leads us to pursue things and make judgments that are beneficial to us. Yet the passions can misdirect our attention and lead us to pursue or avoid things too hastily, and thus we need to control them. Descartes assures us that we have resources to do so, many of which, as we have seen, relate to the will in some way.

Bibliography

- Alanen, Lilli. *Descartes's Concept of Mind*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003.
- Ariew, Roger, Dennis Des Chene et al. *Historical Dictionary of Descartes and Cartesian Philosophy*. Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 2003.
- Beck, L. J. *The Method of Descartes; a Study of the Regulae*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952.
- Beyssade, Michelle. "Descartes's Doctrine of Freedom: Differences Between the French and Latin Texts of the Fourth Meditation." In *Reason, Will, and Sensation: Studies in Descartes's Metaphysics*, edited by John Cottingham, 191-206. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Bobzien, Susanne. *Determinism and Freedom in Stoic Philosophy*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998.
- Brown, Deborah. *Descartes and the Passionate Mind*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- Campbell, Joseph Keim. "Descartes on Spontaneity, Indifference, and Alternatives." In *New Essays on the Rationalists*, edited by Rocco J. Gennaro and Charles Huenemann, 179-99. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Caton, Hiram. "Will and Reason in Descartes's Theory of Error," *The Journal of Philosophy* 72 (1975): 87-104.
- Chappell, Vere. "Descartes's Compatibilism." In *Reason, Will, and Sensation: Studies in Descartes's Metaphysics*, edited by John Cottingham, 177-90. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Clarke, Desmond M. *Descartes's Theory of Mind*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Cottingham, John. *Descartes*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1986.
- _____. "Descartes and the Voluntariness of Belief." *Monist* 85 (2002): 343-60.

Curley, E. M. *Descartes Against the Skeptics*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978.

_____. "Descartes, Spinoza, and the Ethics of Belief." In *Spinoza: Essays in Interpretation*, edited by Eugene and Maurice Mandelbaum Freeman, 159-89. La Salle: Open Court, 1975.

Della Rocca, Michael. "Judgment and Will." In *The Blackwell Guide to Descartes' Meditations*, edited by Stephen Gaukroger, Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2006.

Descartes, René. *Oeuvres Complètes de René Descartes*. Edited by André Gombay, assisted by Calvin Normore, Randal Keen and Rod Watkins. Toronto: Connaught Descartes Project, University of Toronto; Charlottesville: IntelLex Corporation, 2001.

_____. *Oeuvres Philosophiques de Descartes*. Edited by Ferdinand Alquié. Vol. III, Paris: Éditions Garnier Frères, 1973.

_____. *The Correspondence Between Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia and René Descartes*. Translated and Edited by Lisa Shapiro. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007.

_____. *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. Translated by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch, and Anthony Kenny. Vol. I-III, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.

_____. *The Passions of the Soul*. Translated by Stephen Voss. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1989.

Dixon, Thomas. *From Passions to Emotions: The Creation of a Secular Psychological Category*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Doyle, Bret J. Lalumia. "How (Not) to Study Descartes' *Regulae*." *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 17 (2009): 3-30.

Frankfurt, Harry G. "Concerning the Freedom and Limits of the Will." In *Necessity, Volition, and Love*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

Freddoso, Alfred J. "New English Translation of St. Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae* (*Summa Theologica*)." 2009.
<<http://www.nd.edu/%7Eafreddos/summa-translation/TOC-part1.htm>>.

Gaukroger, Stephen. *Descartes' System of Natural Philosophy*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Gilson, Etienne. *La Liberté chez Descartes et la Théologie*. Paris: F. Alcan, 1913.

Greenberg, Sean. "Descartes on the Passions: Function, Representation, and Motivation." *Nous* 41, no. 4 (2007): 714-34.

Gueroult, Martial. *Descartes' Philosophy Interpreted According to the Order of Reasons, Volume I*. Trans. Roger Ariew. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.

Hatfield, Gary. *Descartes and the Meditations*. New York: Routledge, 2003.

———. "The Passions of the Soul and Descartes's Machine Psychology." *Studies In History and Philosophy of Science Part A* 38, no. 1 (2007): 1-35.

Hoffman, Paul. "Three Dualist Theories of the Passions," *Philosophical Topics* 19.1 (1991): 153-200.

Hellenistic Philosophy: Introductory Readings, Second Edition. Translated by Brad Inwood, and L. P. Gerson. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997.

Hume, David. *A Treatise on Human Nature*. Edited by L. A. Selby-Bigge, and P. H. Nidditch. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978.

James, Susan. *Passion and Action: The Emotions in Seventeenth-Century Philosophy*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997.

Kambouchner, Denis. *L'homme des passions: Commentaires sur Descartes*. Vol. 1, Paris: Albin Michel, 1995.

Kaufman, Dan. "Infimus Gradus Libertatis? Descartes on Indifference and Divine Freedom." *Religious Studies* 39 (2003): 391-406.

Kenny, Anthony. "Descartes on the Will." In *Cartesian Studies*, edited by R. J. Butler, 1-31. New York: Barnes & Noble, 1972.

Kraus, Pamela A. "From Universal Mathematics to Universal Method: Descartes's Turn in Rule IV of the *Regulae*." *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 21 (1983): 159-74.

Levi, Anthony. *French Moralists: The Theory of the Passions 1585-1649*. London: Oxford University Press, 1964.

Loeb, Louis E. *From Descartes to Hume: Continental Metaphysics and the Development of Modern Philosophy*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1981.

Lovejoy, Arthur O. *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964.

- Marion, Jean-Luc. *Sur l'ontologie grise de Descartes*. Paris: J. Vrin, 1975.
- Matthews, Gary. "Descartes's Fourth Meditation as Theodicy." In *Contemporary Perspectives on Early Modern Philosophy: Essays in Honor of Vere Chappell*, edited by Paul Hoffman, David Owen, and Gideon Yaffe, 9-20. Buffalo: Broadview Press, 2008.
- Menn, Stephen Philip. *Descartes and Augustine*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- O'Neil, Brian E. "Cartesian Simple Natures." *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 10 (1972): 161-79.
- Newman, Lex. "Descartes on the Will in Judgment." In *Blackwell Companion to Descartes*, edited by Janet Broughton, and John Carriero, 334-51. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2008.
- Radner, Daisie. "The Function of the Passions." In *Passion and Virtue in Descartes*, edited by Byron Williston, and André Gombay, 175-87. Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2003.
- Ragland, C. P. "Alternative Possibilities in Descartes's Fourth Meditation." *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 14 (2006a): 379-400.
- . "Is Descartes a Libertarian?" *Oxford Studies in Early Modern Philosophy, Volume 3*. Eds. Daniel Garber, and Steven Nadler. Oxford: Oxford University Press (2006b): 57-90.
- Rosenthal, David M. "Will and the Theory of Judgment." In *Essays on Descartes' Meditations*, edited by Amélie Oksenberg Rorty, 405-34. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986.
- Schmaltz, Tad M. *Malebranche's Theory of the Soul: A Cartesian Interpretation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.
- . *Descartes on Causation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Schmitter, Amy Morgan, "17th and 18th Century Theories of Emotions", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Summer 2006 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2006/entries/emotions-17th18th/>>.
- Shapiro, Lisa. "Cartesian Generosity." *Acta Philosophica Fennica* 64 (1999): 249-75.
- . "Descartes' Passions of the Soul and the Union of Mind and Body." *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 85 (2003): 211-48.

- _____. "Descartes' Passions of the Soul." *Philosophical Compass* 1, no. 3 (2006): 268-78.
- Simmons, Alison. "Sensible Ends: Latent Teleology in Descartes' Account of Sensation." *The Journal of the History of Philosophy* 39 (2001): 49-75.
- Sleigh, Robert, Vere Chappell, and Michael Della Rocca. "Determinism and Human Freedom." In *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy Vol. 2*, edited by Daniel Garber, and Michael Ayers, 1195-278. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Spinoza, Benedictus de. *The Collected Works of Spinoza*. Translated by E. M. Curley. Vol. 1, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985.
- Stocker, Michael. "Desiring the Bad: An Essay in Moral Psychology." *The Journal of Philosophy* (1979): 738-53.
- Suarez, Francisco. *On Efficient Causality: Metaphysical Disputations 17, 18, and 19*. Translated by Alfred. J. Freddoso. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994.
- Van De Pitte, Frederick P. "Descartes' *Mathesis Universalis*." *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 61 (1979): 154-74.
- _____. "The Dating of Rule IV-B in Descartes's *Regulae ad directionem ingenii*." *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 29 (1991): 375-95.
- Weber, Jean-Paul. *La constitution du texte des "Regulae"*. Paris: Société d'éditions d'enseignement supérieur, 1964.
- Williams, Bernard. *Descartes: The Project of Pure Enquiry*. New York: Routledge, 2005.
- Wilson, Margaret Dauler. *Descartes*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978.