

# The Passions of the Soul

René Descartes

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[Brackets] enclose editorial explanations. Small ·dots· enclose material that has been added, but can be read as though it were part of the original text. Occasional •bullets, and also indenting of passages that are not quotations, are meant as aids to grasping the structure of a sentence or a thought. Every four-point ellipsis . . . . indicates the omission of a brief passage that seems to present more difficulty than it is worth. Longer omissions are reported between brackets in normal-sized type.—The division of the work into 212 articles, and their headings, are Descartes's. When an article starts with 'This. . .' or 'Therefore. . .' or the like, it follows on not from its heading but from the end of the preceding article; see for example articles 138–9 and 165–6.—Many articles start with 'It must be observed' or 'Next we should take notice' or the like; these throat-clearings are dropped from the present version.—Part 2 starts on page 17, Part 3 on page 43. The full table of contents is at the end.

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## Glossary

**animal spirits:** This stuff was supposed to be even more finely divided than air, able to move extremely fast, seep into tiny crevices, and affect the environment *within* the nerves (article 12). Apparently some people thought of spirits as so rarefied as to be almost mind-like(!), and thus suitable to mediate between mind and body; but Descartes is innocent of this absurdity. Its most famous occurrence is in Donne's superb lines: 'As our blood labours to beget / Spirits as like souls as it can, / Because such fingers need to knit / The subtle knot that makes us man. . . .'

**beast:** This translates Descartes's *bête* which always means 'nonhuman animal' or 'lower animal'. His word *animal* doesn't necessarily exclude humans.

**bitter:** Descartes thinks that a passion of yours will be especially bitter if you are the whole cause of it (articles 63, 197, 191). This is odd; but there seems to be no alternative to the translation of *amère* as 'bitter'.

**brings it about that:** This work uses two basic forms for speaking of things' making other things happen:

(a) x makes y do A

(b) x brings it about that y does A.

On dozens of occasions Descartes uses (b) instead of (a), and may sometimes be sheering away from explicitly crediting x with *making* y do something, *acting causally* on y, especially where x or y is the soul—see for example articles 41–44. This version uses the (b) form whenever there's a chance that it has that significance.

**contemn:** This is a standard English verb meaning 'have contempt for'. It translates Descartes's verb *mépriser*.

**contempt:** This translates Descartes's noun *mépris*. It and

the related verb must be understood in a weaker sense than 'contempt' now has: to have 'contempt' for something was to write it off as negligible—e.g. a hero could be said to have 'contempt for the pain of his wounds'. See articles 54, 149 and 207.

**de volonté:** In articles 79–81, 84, 107 and 121 Descartes speaks of joining oneself *de volonté* with something else. This could mean joining oneself voluntarily, by volition, but it seems clear that Descartes is reserving this odd phrase for a special purpose. You join yourself *de volonté* with the person you love if you *will yourself into a state in which you feel as though* you and that person are the two parts of a whole. See especially article 80.

**evil:** This means merely 'something bad'. In French the adjectives for 'good' and 'bad' can also be used as nouns; in English we can do this with 'good' ('friendship is a good'), but not with bad ('pain is a bad'), and it is customary in English to use 'evil' for this purpose (e.g. 'pain is an evil', and 'the problem of evil' meaning 'the problem posed by the existence of bad states of affairs'). Don't load the word with all the force it has in English when used as an adjective. For the cognate adjective, this version always uses 'bad'.

**fortune:** It seems inevitable that this word be used to translate the French *fortune*; but almost every occurrence of it will read better if you silently replace it by 'luck'.

**hatred:** The inevitable translation of *haine*, though you'll notice that Descartes seems to use it more widely, because often less fiercely, than we do.

**idea:** In this version 'idea' always translates Descartes's *idée*. Throughout most of his works *idées* are mental, but in this

one they are always images in the brain. Articles 75, 103, 106, 120, 136, 149.

**jealousy:** This rendering of *jalousie* involves a sense that the English word used to have but now mostly doesn't, a sense in which, for example, a man might be said to be 'jealous of his reputation'. This is clear in article 167.

**our, we:** When this version has Descartes speaking of what 'we do', that is sometimes strictly correct, but often it slightly mistranslates something that literally speaks of what 'one does'. It is normal idiomatic French to use *on* = 'one' much oftener than we can use 'one' in English without sounding stilted (Fats Waller: 'One never knows, do one?'). This version doesn't mark the difference between places where 'we' translates *nous* and ones where it mistranslates *on*.

**rarefied:** In early modern times, 'rare' and the French *rare* meant the opposite of 'dense', and was usually understood to mean 'very finely divided'. In articles 9 and 10, Descartes is evidently assuming that when heat makes blood or animal spirits expand it does this by rarefying them.

**regret:** As used in articles 67 and 209, this translation of the French *regret* carries a French rather than an English meaning. In French, to regret something can be to miss it, look back with longing at the time when you had it, perhaps to mourn it. *Je regrette ma jeunesse* doesn't mean I am sorry about things that I did when young; it means that I am sad about the loss of my youth.

**remorse:** The inevitable translation of *remords*, though the meanings are slightly different. Articles 60 and 177 both show that for Descartes *remords* essentially involves

uncertainty about whether one has acted wrongly, which our 'remorse' doesn't.

**shrinking reluctance:** The topic here is a state of shrinking reluctance to risk something or, near the end of article 187, to endure something. The clumsy phrase is adopted, without enthusiasm, as the best translation of Descartes's *lâcheté*, the conventional meaning of which—namely 'cowardice'—seems never to be right in the present work.

**thought:** This translates Descartes's *pensée*, but remember that he uses this word to cover mental events of all kinds, not merely ones that you and I would call 'thoughtful'.

**vice:** This translates Descartes's noun *vice* which simply means 'bad behaviour (of whatever kind)'. Don't load it with the extra meaning it tends to carry today. The cognate adjective *vicieux* is translated throughout by 'unvirtuous'; our sense of that word may a bit weak for what Descartes means, but not by as much as our sense of 'vicious' would be too strong.

**will:** When this occurs as a verb, it translates *vouloir*, which ordinarily means 'want'. This version speaks of our 'willing' something in contexts where Descartes is clearly thinking of this as something we *do*, as an *act* of the will, a *volition*. You'll get the idea if you try replacing 'will' by 'want' in articles 18 and 19.

**wonder:** This may be a slightly too weak translation for Descartes's *admiration*, but it's hard to know what else to use. You'll see from article 53, and from the opening of article 56, that 'admiration' is a flatly wrong translation.

**Some of the material in this Glossary is taken from the Lexicon in Stephen Voss's wonderfully full and informative edition of this work (Hackett Publishing Co., 1989).**

## Part III: Specific Passions

### 149. Esteem and contempt

After having explained the six basic passions—which are, as it were, the genera of which all the others are species—I shall briefly describe the special features of each of the others, keeping to the same order as before. The first two are esteem and contempt [see Glossary]. Usually these terms signify only an opinion about a thing's worth—just an opinion, with no passion involved. Still, such opinions often generate passions for which we have no particular names, and I don't see why these terms shouldn't be applied to these passions. Esteem for *x*, regarded as a passion, is the soul's inclination to represent to itself *x*'s value, this inclination being caused by a special movement of the spirits that are guided into the brain in such a way that they strengthen the impressions relating to *x*'s value. The passion of contempt is the soul's inclination to consider the baseness or insignificance of the object it contemns, and is caused by a movement of the spirits that strengthens the idea of this insignificance.

### 150. These passions are merely two kinds of wonder

So these two passions are merely species of wonder. For when we don't wonder at the greatness or the insignificance of an object, making no more and no less of it than reason tells us to, then our esteem or contempt for it is dispassionate. And although esteem is often aroused in us by love, and contempt by hatred, this isn't universal—it's just the special case where our inclination to consider a thing's greatness or insignificance comes from our having more or less affection for it. [What Descartes wrote here means '... where our having more or less inclination to consider...'; a slip, corrected in the present version.]

### 151. We can esteem or contemn ourselves

These two passions can relate to all sorts of objects; but they are most conspicuous when we relate them to ourselves, i.e. when it is our own merit that we esteem or contemn. The movement of the spirits that causes them in this case makes itself felt so strongly that the person in question shows in his facial expression, his gestures, how he walks, that he has an unusually better or worse opinion of himself.

### 152. What can cause us to esteem ourselves

One of the principal parts of wisdom is to know how and why anyone ought to esteem or contemn himself, so I shall try to give here my view about this. I see only one thing in us that could entitle us to esteem ourselves, namely the exercise of our free will and our command of our volitions. For we can be rightly praised or blamed only for actions that depend on this free will; it makes us *like God* in a way, by making us masters of ourselves, provided we don't lose the rights it gives us through shrinking reluctance [see Glossary].

### 153. What generosity consists in

So I think that true generosity, which brings it about that a person's self-esteem is as great as it legitimately can be, consists only in **(i)** his knowing •that nothing truly belongs to him except this free control of his volitions, and •that his good or bad use of this freedom is the only valid reason for him to be praised or blamed; and **(ii)** his feeling within himself a firm and constant resolution to use his freedom well—i.e. never to lack the will to undertake and carry out

whatever he judges to be best. To do that is to follow virtue perfectly.

#### 154. Generosity keeps us from contemning others

Those who have **(i)** this knowledge and **(ii)** this feeling about themselves find it easy to believe that any other person can have the same knowledge and feeling about himself, because there's nothing in this that depends on anyone else. That's why such people never condemn anyone. Although they often see others acting wrongly in ways that show up their weakness, they are more inclined to excuse than to blame them—more inclined to regard these actions as due to lack of knowledge than as due to lack of a virtuous will. Just as they—i.e. generous people—don't rate themselves much below those who have greater wealth or honour, or even those who have more intelligence, knowledge or beauty, or surpass them in some other perfections, they correspondingly don't have much more esteem for themselves than for those whom they surpass, because all these things strike them as very unimportant in comparison with a virtuous will. That is the only thing they esteem themselves for, and they suppose that everyone else does—or at least *could*—have it too.

#### 155. What humility as a virtue consists in

Thus the most generous people are usually also the humblest. We have humility as a virtue when, by reflecting on the infirmity of our nature and on the wrongs we may have done or could yet do (wrongs that are no less serious than other people's), we •don't rate ourselves higher than anyone else and •think that since others have free will just as we do, they may use it just as well as we use ours.

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

Those who are generous in this way are naturally led to do great things while not undertaking anything that they don't feel capable of doing. And because they don't rate anything higher than •doing good to others and contemning [see Glossary] their own self-interest, they are always perfectly courteous, gracious and obliging to everyone. And along with this they have complete command over their passions, especially

- over desires, jealousy and envy; because the only things they think to be worth pursuing depend solely on themselves;
- over hatred of other people, because they have esteem for everyone;
- over fear, because their confidence in their own virtue reassures them; and finally
- over anger, because **(i)** they don't put much value on anything that depends on others, and so **(ii)** they never give their enemies the advantage of knowing that they are injured by them. [How **(i)** relates to **(ii)** is as obscure in the French as in this translation.]

#### 157. Vanity

Anyone who gets a good opinion of himself for any reason other than the one mentioned in article 152, whatever the reason might be, doesn't have true generosity but only a vanity that is always very far from virtue; and the less justification he has for esteeming himself highly, the greater the distance from virtue. The *least* justified is the person who is vain for no reason at all—i.e. not because he thinks he has some merit for which he should be appreciated. This person doesn't think that merit comes into it at all; he imagines that

glory is something you *grab*, and that those who claim the most glory *have* the most glory. This vice is so unreasonable and absurd that I would have trouble believing that anyone lets himself fall into it, if it weren't for the phenomenon of undeserved praise. In fact, flattery is everywhere so common that no man is such a poor specimen that he never sees himself esteemed for things that aren't praiseworthy or even for things that are blameworthy. This creates an opportunity for the most ignorant and most stupid people fall into this sort of vanity.

#### **158. Vanity's effects are opposite to those of generosity**

The volition we feel within ourselves always to make good use of our free will results, as I have said, in generosity. Self-esteem based on anything else—*anything* else—is a highly blameworthy vanity, which is so different from true generosity that it has quite the opposite effects. For all other goods—such as intelligence, beauty, riches, and honours—are usually esteemed so highly because so few people have them, and most of them are intrinsically incapable of being had by many people; and that brings it about that vain people try to pull everyone else down, and being slaves to their desires they have souls that are constantly agitated by hatred, envy, jealousy, or anger.

#### **159. Unvirtuous humility**

For someone to be abject, or unvirtuously humble, is chiefly for these things to be true of him:

- he has a feeling of weakness or indecision;
- he can't help doing things that he knows he'll be sorry about later on (as though he lacked the full use of his free will);

- he believes that he can't survive unaided or do without many things whose acquisition depends on others.

So this humility is directly opposed to generosity, and it often happens that the most abject people are the most arrogant and haughty, just as the most generous are the most modest and humble. But whereas those who have a strong and generous spirit don't change their mood to suit the prosperity or adversity that comes their way, those with a weak and abject spirit are guided by chance alone, and are puffed up by prosperity as much as they are humbled by adversity. Indeed, we often see them shamefully abase themselves around those from whom they expect some advantage or fear some evil, while *at the same time* they insolently lord it over those from whom they don't hope or fear anything.

#### **160. How the spirits move in these passions**

It's easy to grasp that vanity and abjectness are not only vices but also passions, because their commotion is quite apparent in the demeanour of those who are suddenly elated or depressed by some new happening. But it may be questioned whether generosity and humility, which are virtues, can also be passions: their movements are less apparent, and virtue seems to be less in key with passion than vice is. Still, if a movement of the spirits strengthens a thought that has bad foundations, I don't see what's to stop it from also strengthening one that is well-founded. And because vanity and generosity both consist simply in our good opinion of ourselves—differing only in that this opinion is unjustified in one case and justified in the other—I think we can relate them to a single passion that is

- aroused by a movement composed of the movements of •wonder, •joy, and •love (self-love and the love we have for what is making us think well of ourselves).

And humility, whether virtuous or unvirtuous, is

aroused by a movement composed of the movements of •wonder, •sadness, and •self-love mingled with hatred for the faults that give rise to self-contempt.

The only difference I observe between these two composite-movements comes from their component of wonder. The movement of wonder has two varieties: **(i)** an initial vigorous surge of movement that comes from surprise, followed by variations in the force of the movement from then on; and **(ii)** a continuing uniform movement of the spirits in the brain. Of these varieties, **(i)** is found mostly in vanity and abjectness. That's because vice usually comes from ignorance, and those who know themselves least are the most liable to become vain or excessively humble: they are surprised by anything new that happens to them and, attributing this novelty to themselves, they wonder at themselves, and either esteem or condemn themselves depending on whether they think that what is happening to them is to their advantage or not. But often one thing that makes them vain is followed by another that makes them humble, which is why their passion involves a variable movement of the spirits. On the other hand, variety **(ii)** is more prominent in generosity and virtuous humility than in the unvirtuous pair. That's because there is no incompatibility between generosity and humility of the virtuous kind, nor anything else that might alter them; which brings it about that their movements are firm, constant and always very similar to each other. These movements don't come from surprise, because those who esteem themselves in this way are already thoroughly in touch with the causes of their self-esteem. Still, it can be said that those causes (our power to use our free will, which leads us to value ourselves, and our infirmities, which lead us not to over-rate ourselves) are so marvellous that each time we consider them they are a source of wonder.

### 161. How generosity can be acquired

What are commonly called 'virtues' are habits of the soul that dispose it to have certain thoughts: though they aren't thoughts, these habits can produce thoughts and be produced by them. These thoughts can be produced by the soul alone; but they are often strengthened by some movement of the spirits, in which case they are •actions of virtue and •passions of the soul.

[In what follows, Descartes connects the 'gen' in *générosité* with origins (as in the English 'generation', 'genesis', 'genetic' and so on). And the source of the word 'magnanimity' (and the similar corresponding French word) is a Greek word meaning 'greatness of soul'.]

Despite the fact that

there seems to be no other virtue to which good birth contributes as much as it does to the virtue that leads a person to value himself at his true worth, and it's easy to believe that the souls that God puts into our bodies are not all equally noble and strong (which is why I have called this virtue 'generosity', following common usage, rather than 'magnanimity' . . . )

nevertheless

a good upbringing is a great help in correcting birth-defects; and someone who often gives thought to •the nature of free will, and to •the many advantages that come from a firm resolution to use it well, and to •how vain and useless are the cares that trouble ambitious people, can arouse in himself the passion of generosity and then move on to acquire the virtue.

Since this virtue is a kind of key to all the other virtues and a general remedy for every disorder of the passions, it seems to me that this consideration about how to acquire it deserves serious attention.

**162. Veneration**

Veneration or respect is the soul's inclination not only to have esteem for the object that it reveres but also to submit to it, anxiously trying to gain its approval. Thus, we have veneration only for free causes that we think could do us good or evil, without our knowing which they will do. For causes from which we expect only good, we have love and devotion rather than simple veneration; and for ones from which we expect only evil, we have hatred. And if we don't judge the cause of this good or evil to be free, we don't submit to it in an attempt to gain its approval. When the pagans had veneration for woods, springs, or mountains, what they revered, strictly speaking, wasn't these dead things but the divinities that they thought presided over them. The movement of the spirits that produces this passion is composed of the movement that produces wonder and the movement that produces anxiety (about which I shall speak later).

**163. Scorn**

What I call 'scorn' is our soul's inclination to condemn a free cause, thinking that although it is by nature capable of doing good or evil, it is so far beneath us that it can't help or harm us. The movement of the spirits that arouses scorn is composed of the movements that produce wonder and confidence or boldness.

**164. The function of these two passions**

Whether someone's veneration or scorn is used well or badly depends on whether he has generosity or weak-spirited abjectness. The nobler and more generous his soul is, the inclined he is to render to each person his due; thus, he

not only has a very deep humility before God, but he is also not reluctant to render to each person all the honour and respect due to him according to his position and authority in the world; and the only things he contemns are vices. In contrast with that, abject and weak people are liable to sin by excess, sometimes in revering and fearing things that deserve nothing but contempt, and sometimes in haughtily scorning things that are most deserving of reverence. They often switch quickly from extreme impiety to superstition, and then from superstition back again to impiety, so that there's no vice or disorder of the mind that they aren't capable of.

**165. Hope and anxiety**

Hope is a disposition of the soul to be convinced that what it desires will happen, and it is caused by a particular movement of the spirits, namely the movements of joy and of desire mixed together. And anxiety is a different disposition of the soul, which convinces it that what it desires won't happen. These two passions, although they are opposites, can occur together, namely when we make room in our thoughts for reasons for regarding the fulfilment of the desire as easy, and at the same time reasons that make it seem difficult.

**166. Confidence and despair**

And neither of these passions ever accompanies desire without leaving some room for the other. For when hope is so strong that it entirely drives out anxiety, its nature changes and it is called 'confidence' or 'assurance'. And when we are sure that what we desire will come about, then although we still *want* it to come about we're no longer agitated by the *passion of desire*, which made us await the outcome with concern. Similarly on the other side: when anxiety is



so extreme that it leaves no room for hope, it changes into despair; and this despair by representing the thing desired as impossible entirely extinguishes desire, which applies only to things that are possible.

### 167. Jealousy

Jealousy [see Glossary] is a kind of anxiety having to do with our desire to keep possession of some good. It results less from the strength of the reasons that make us think we may lose the good, as from the high esteem in which we hold it. This causes us to examine the slightest grounds for doubt, and to regard them as very considerable reasons.

### 168. What can make this passion honourable

Because one should be more concerned to preserve goods that are very great than goods that are less so, jealousy can be right and honourable on certain occasions. For example, a captain defending a very important fortress has a right to be jealous of it, i.e. to be suspicious regarding all the ways by which it might be taken by surprise; and a virtuous woman is not blamed for being jealous of her honour, i.e. for taking care not only to behave well but also to avoid even the slightest cause for scandal.

### 169. What can make jealousy blameworthy

But a miser's jealousy concerning his hoard—that is, his devouring it with his eyes, and wanting it always near him for fear of its being stolen—is laughed at, for money isn't worth that sort of trouble. And we condemn a man who is jealous of his wife, because this shows that •he doesn't love her as he should and that •he has a bad opinion of himself or of her. I say that he doesn't love her as he should because

if he truly loved her he would have no inclination to distrust her. Properly speaking, what he loves is not *her* but only the good he imagines to consist in his having sole possession of her. And he wouldn't be scared of losing this good if he didn't think himself to be unworthy of it or his wife to be unfaithful. I should add that this passion involves suspicion and distrust; if someone tries to avoid an evil about which he rightly feels anxious, that is not jealousy.

### 170. Indecision

Indecision is also a kind of anxiety. Keeping the soul balanced. . . .between several actions open to it, indecision causes it not to perform any of them, and thus gives it time to deliberate before committing itself. [Descartes wrote *temps pour choisir* = 'time to choose', but that was presumably a slip.] There is certainly some good in that. But indecision is extremely bad when it goes on for too long, getting us to deliberate when we should be acting. It can happen that someone who has to choose among several things that appear equally good is uncertain and undecided while feeling no anxiety at all; so why do I say that the passion of indecision is 'a kind of anxiety'? Because this latter sort of indecision isn't a passion: it comes from the material that the indecision is about, and not from any commotion of the spirits. It's not a passion unless the uncertainty is increased by the person's anxiety about choosing wrongly. But in some people this anxiety is so common and so strong that often, even when there's nothing for them to *choose* but only a single thing to be taken or left, their anxiety holds them back and makes them pause uselessly to search for other options. [Descartes seems not to notice that if there is one thing to be taken or left then there is need for a choice.] In this case an excess of indecision results from too great a desire to do well, and from a weakness of the

intellect, which contains only a lot of confused notions and none that are lively and clear. That's why the remedy against this kind of excess is •to get the habit of forming certain and determinate judgments about everything that comes before us, and •to believe that whenever we do what we judge to be best we are doing our duty, even if the judgment was a poor one.

### 171. Courage and boldness

Courage, when it is a passion and not a character-trait or natural inclination, is a certain energy or agitation that disposes the soul to apply itself energetically to do what it wants to do, whatever that may be. Boldness is a kind of courage that disposes the soul to carry out the most dangerous tasks.

### 172. Emulation

Emulation is also a kind of courage, but in another sense. Courage can be regarded as a genus that divides into

- (1) as many species as it has different objects, and into
- (2) as many species as it has causes.

Boldness is one of the (1) species, and emulation is one of the (2) species. Emulation is nothing but an energy that disposes the soul to tackle things in which it hopes to be able to succeed because it sees others succeed in them; so it is a species of courage the external cause of which is the example or model that the person is emulating. I specify *external* cause because there must always also be an internal cause, that consists in the body's being so disposed that desire and hope have more power to send a lot of blood to the heart than anxiety or despair have to stop it.

### 173. How boldness depends on hope

The object of boldness is some difficulty that usually results in anxiety or even despair, so that it's in the most dangerous and desperate affairs that boldness and courage mostly come into play. Yet there's a need for us to hope—or even to be sure—that we'll attain the goal, so that we'll tackle vigorously the difficulties we encounter. 'But', you'll say, 'you have spoken of despair and of sureness in a single episode of boldness, but one can't be assured of something *while* being desperate about it.' Indeed, there is despair about the object and sureness about the end, and the end is different from the object. [The Decii, mentioned in the next sentence, were three heroes of ancient Rome—members of the same family—who died in battle in the same way, decades apart.] Thus, when the Decii threw themselves against the enemy and ran to certain death, the •object of their boldness was the difficulty of preserving their lives during this action, and about this they felt only **despair** because they were certain to die. But their •goal was to inspire their soldiers by their example and cause them to win the victory, and they had some **hope** of achieving that; or else they had a further goal of gaining glory after their death, and they were **sure** of this.

### 174. Shrinking reluctance and fear

Shrinking reluctance [see Glossary] is directly opposed to courage. It is a listlessness or coldness that prevents the soul from bringing itself to do the things it would do if it were free from this passion. And fear or terror, which is opposed to boldness, is not only a coldness but also a disturbance and astonishment of the soul that takes away its power to resist the evils that it thinks are near.

**175. The function of shrinking reluctance**

Although I can't convince myself that nature has given us any passion that is never virtuous and has no good or praiseworthy function, I still find it hard to guess what purpose these two passions—shrinking reluctance and fear—might serve. So far as I can see, the only good use for shrinking reluctance is when it frees us from making efforts that plausible reasons might have moved us to make if this passion hadn't been aroused by other reasons—more certain ones—making us judge the efforts to be useless. In those cases, besides freeing the soul from such efforts, it is also does the body some service by slowing the movement of the spirits and thereby preventing us from wasting our energy. But shrinking reluctance is usually very harmful because it diverts the will from useful actions. Because it results simply from our having insufficient hope or desire, we need only increase these two passions within us in order to correct it.

**176. The function of fear**

As for fear or terror, I don't see that it can ever be praiseworthy or useful. So it's not a particular passion, but merely an excess of shrinking reluctance, wonder and anxiety—an excess that is always unvirtuous, just as boldness is an excess of courage that is always good (provided the end proposed is good). Because the principal cause of fear is surprise, there's no better way to avoid it than to think ahead and prepare oneself for any eventuality that one might fear.

**177. Remorse**

Remorse [see Glossary] of conscience is a kind of sadness that comes from our doubt about whether something we are doing

or have done is good; and this doubt is an essential feature of it. If we were quite sure that what we are doing is bad we wouldn't be doing it, because the will is carried only to objects that have some semblance of goodness. And if we were certain that what we have already done was bad, we would have repentance over it and not simply remorse. The function of remorse is to make us inquire whether the object of our doubt is good or not, and to prevent us from doing it again as long as we aren't certain that it is good. But because remorse presupposes evil, it would be better never to have had reason to feel it; and we can prevent it in the same way that we can free ourselves from indecision.

**178. Derision**

Ridicule or derision is a kind of joy mixed with hatred [see Glossary], which results from our perceiving some small misfortune in a person who we think deserves it: we hate this misfortune, but enjoy seeing it come to someone who deserves it. When this comes upon us unexpectedly, the surprise of wonder causes us to burst into laughter, in accordance with what I said in article 126 about the nature of laughter. But the misfortune must be small; if it is great, we can't believe that the person who has it deserves it, unless we were born mean or hate him very much.

**179. Why the most imperfect people are usually the most given to derision**

Those who have an obvious defect—e.g. who are lame, blind in one eye, or hunch-backed—or who have received some public insult are especially inclined to derision. Wanting to see everyone else in as much disgrace as they are, they're very pleased by the misfortunes of others and regard them as deserving them.

**180. The function of teasing**

When a person criticizes vices by making them look ridiculous, without laughing at them or showing any hatred for those who have them, that's a gentle teasing that isn't a passion but rather a useful trait of a good man. It shows •the cheerfulness of his temperament and •the tranquillity of his soul, which are both signs of virtue. . . .

**181. The function of laughter in teasing**

It isn't bad-mannered to laugh when we hear someone else's teasing; indeed it may be churlish *not* to laugh. But when someone is teasing, it is more fitting for him to refrain from laughing, so as not to seem surprised by what he is saying or impressed by his wit in thinking it up. His teasing will have more effect on the hearers if he keeps a straight face.

**182. Envy**

What we usually call 'envy' is a vice—a natural perversity that certain people have, making them annoyed when they see good coming to others. But I'm using 'envy' here to signify a passion, and indeed a passion that isn't always unvirtuous. So: the passion of envy is a kind of sadness mingled with hatred, arising from seeing good coming to people one •thinks are unworthy of it. This •thought can be justified only in regard to goods due to fortune. What about the advantages—of the soul or even of the body—that we possess from birth? God gave us those before we were capable of doing any evil, so we are certainly worthy of them!

**183. How envy can be just or unjust**

But sometimes fortune gives advantages to someone who is really unworthy of them, and then envy stirs in us only

because, having a natural love of fairness, we are upset at the unfairness of the distribution of these goods. This envy expresses a zeal that may be excusable, especially when the good we envy in the other person is one that he may convert into an evil—e.g. if it is some duty or office in the exercise of which he may behave badly. When we want that same good for ourselves and are blocked from having it because it belongs to others who are less worthy of it, this makes the passion more violent: but it is still excusable, provided its element of hatred relates solely to the bad distribution of the desired good and not to the people who possess it or distribute it. But few people can rise to that standard. Few people are so just and so generous that they don't hate anyone who gets in ahead of them in the acquisition of a good that can't be shared by many and that they had wanted for themselves, even if the person who acquired the good is as worthy of it as they are, or even more so. What is usually most envied is glory. It's true that x's having glory doesn't prevent y from aspiring to it, but it makes actually getting it harder for y—and more expensive!

**184. Why envious people are apt to have leaden complexions**

No other vice damages human happiness as much as envy does. It's not just that those tainted with envy make themselves unhappy; they also do all they can to spoil the pleasure of others. And they usually have a leaden complexion—that is, one that is pale, a mixture of yellow and black, as though bruised. . . . This agrees very well with what I said in articles 103 and 105 about the movements of the blood in sadness and in hatred. For

- hatred brings it about that bile—both the yellow bile from the lower part of the liver, and the black bile from the spleen—spreads out from the heart through the arteries into all the veins. And
- sadness brings it about that the blood in the veins becomes less hot and flows more slowly than usual—which is enough to make the colour livid.

But we mustn't think that everyone in whom we see this colour is inclined to envy; several different factors can cause the bile (whether yellow or black) to flow in the veins. Nor should we think that every envious person has this colour: •envy doesn't send bile into the veins in a large enough quantity to change the colour of the complexion unless •it is very intense and long-lasting.

### **185. Pity**

Pity is a kind of sadness mingled with love or with good will towards those whom we see suffering some misfortune that we think they don't deserve. . . .

### **186. Those who are most given to pity**

Those who feel very weak and very open to the adversities of fortune seem to be more inclined to this passion than others, because they think of others' misfortunes as possibly happening to themselves. Thus they are moved to pity more by their love for themselves than by love for others.

### **187. How the most generous people are affected by this passion**

Nevertheless, those who are the most generous and who are most strong-minded in •not being anxious about evil coming

to them and •regarding themselves as beyond the power of fortune, are not without compassion when they see the infirmities of other men and hear their complaints. For generosity [see article 154] involves having good will towards everyone. But the sadness of this pity is not bitter [see Glossary]: like the sadness caused by tragic actions represented on the stage, it is more external and sense-related than in the interior of the soul; while the soul has the satisfaction of thinking that it is doing its duty in feeling compassion for the afflicted. And it has another special feature: whereas the man in the street has compassion for those who complain because he thinks their misfortunes are very distressing, the pity of •the greatest men is directed mainly at the weakness of those whom they see complaining. For •they think that nothing that happens could be as great an evil as the shrinking reluctance of those who can't steadily *take* it. And although •they hate vices, they don't on that account hate those who have them; for those people all they have is pity.

### **188. Those who aren't affected by pity**

What sorts of people don't have pity for anyone? Only •malicious and envious minds that naturally hate everyone, and •ones who are so brutish—and made so blind by good fortune or desperate by bad—that they don't think any more misfortune could befall them.

### **189. Why this passion moves us to tears**

A final point about pity: we weep very easily in this passion because love in sending a lot of blood to the heart makes many vapours flow from the eyes, and the cold of the sadness makes these vapours move more slowly and so change into tears, in accordance with what I said in article 131.

**190. Self-satisfaction**

The satisfaction of those who steadily pursue virtue is a •disposition of their soul that is called ‘tranquillity’ and ‘peace of mind’. But the renewed satisfaction we gain when we have just done something we think to be good is a •passion—a kind of joy that I regard as the sweetest of all joys, because its cause depends only on ourselves. But when this cause is not just, i.e. when the actions that we are so satisfied with are trivial or even unvirtuous, the satisfaction is absurd and serves only to produce a kind of vanity and absurd arrogance. This is especially noticeable in bigoted and superstitious people who think they are devout. These are people who—under the cover of frequently going to church, reciting many prayers, wearing their hair short, fasting, and giving alms—think they are entirely perfect and imagine they are such close friends of God that they couldn’t do anything to displease him. They suppose that anything their passion tells them to do is commendable zeal, although it sometimes tells them to perform the greatest crimes that men can commit, such as betraying cities, killing rulers, and exterminating whole peoples just because they don’t accept their opinions.

**191. Repentance**

Repentance is directly opposed to self-satisfaction. It is a kind of sadness that comes from our believing that we have done something bad; and it is very bitter because its cause comes from ourselves alone. But this doesn’t prevent repentance from being very useful when the action we repent of is truly bad and we know this for certain, because then our repentance prompts us to do better on another occasion. But it often happens that a weak-minded person repents of something he has done without knowing for sure that it was

bad; he persuades himself that it was bad simply because he is *afraid* that it was; if he had done the opposite, the same fear would kick in and he would repent in the same way. This is an imperfection deserving of pity, and the remedies against this fault are the same as those that serve to get rid of indecision.

**192. Approval**

Approval, properly speaking, is a desire to see good come to someone for whom we have good will; but I am here using ‘approval’ in a narrower sense, to mean this good will when it is aroused in us by some good action of the person in question (we’re naturally inclined to love those who do things we judge to be good even if *we* get no benefit from them). Approval in this sense is a kind of love, not of desire, though it is always accompanied by the desire to see good come to the one of whom we approve. And it is usually combined with pity, because the reverses that we see unfortunate people suffer make us reflect all the more on their merits. [Descartes gives us no help in seeing what that last sentence has to do with the rest of the article.]

**193. Gratitude**

Gratitude is also a kind of love aroused in us by some action of the person to whom we are grateful—an action by which we think he has done us some good or at least intended to do so. So it has the same content as approval, with the extra feature that it is based on an action that affects us and that we desire to reciprocate. That’s why it has much more strength than mere approval, especially in the souls of those who are to any degree noble and generous.

**194. Ingratitude**

Ingratitude isn't a passion, because nature has not placed in us any movement of the spirits that produces it. It is simply the direct opposite of gratitude; and because gratitude is always a virtue and one of the principal bonds of human society, ingratitude is not a passion but a vice. . . . This vice belongs only to

- brutish, foolishly arrogant people who think that all things are their due, or to
- stupid people who never reflect on the benefits they receive, or to
- weak and abject people who sense their infirmity and need, crawl to others for help, and after they have been given it hate their benefactors.

•Why does such a person x hate the person y who has helped him? Because he lacks the will to return the favour or despairs of his ability to do so; and thinks that everyone—including y—is as grasping as he is, and that no-one does good without the hope of recompense; so he thinks he has deceived y (because x knows that y is not going to get any reward for helping x).

**195. Indignation**

Indignation is a kind of hatred or aversion that we naturally have towards those who do some evil, whatever it may be. Although often mingled with envy or pity, it has an object that is wholly different from the objects of those two passions. For we are indignant only towards those who do good or evil to people who don't deserve it, but we envy those who receive this good and we pity those who receive this evil. . . .

**196. Why indignation is sometimes joined to pity, and sometimes to derision**

To do evil is also in some way to receive evil; and therefore some people combine pity to their indignation, and others derision, depending on whether they bear good-will or ill-will towards those whom they see acting wrongly. So the laughter of Democritus and the tears of Heraclitus could have come from the same cause. [It was said in ancient times that Democritus laughed at human folly, which reduced Heraclitus to tears.]

**197. Indignation is often accompanied by wonder and isn't incompatible with joy**

Indignation is also often accompanied by wonder. We usually assume that everything will be done as we think it ought to be, i.e. done in the way we consider good. So when it happens otherwise we are surprised, and we wonder at it. And indignation isn't incompatible with joy, though it is more usually combined with sadness. For when we are indignant over a bad deed that can't harm us, and we take into consideration that we wouldn't be willing to act in such a way, this gives us some pleasure—which is perhaps one of the causes of the laughter that sometimes accompanies this passion.

**198. The function of indignation**

Indignation shows up much more in people who want to *appear* virtuous than in ones who really *are*. Those who love virtue can't see the vices of others without some aversion, but they become impassioned only about the greatest and most extraordinary vices.

- To be highly indignant about trivial matters is to be difficult and peevish;

- To be indignant about matters for which no-one can be blamed is to be unjust;
- To direct one's indignation not only to the actions of human beings but also to the works of God or of nature is impertinent and absurd.

The last of those is what is done by those who—constantly discontented with their condition and their fortune—venture to find fault with how the world is governed and with the secrets of Providence.

### 199. Anger

Anger is also a kind of hatred or aversion that we have towards those who have done (or tried to do) harm not just to *someone* but to *us* in particular. Thus it contains everything that indignation contains as well as an extra feature: anger is based on an action that affects us and for which we have a desire to avenge ourselves. This desire nearly always accompanies anger, which is directly opposed to •gratitude, as •indignation is to •approval. But anger is incomparably more violent than these other three passions, because the desire to ward off harmful things and to avenge oneself is the most compelling of all •desires•. It is desire which in combination with self-love makes anger involve as much agitation of the blood as courage and boldness can cause; and hatred brings it about that this agitation mainly affects the bilious blood coming from the spleen and the small veins of the liver. This blood enters into the heart and there, because of its abundance and the nature of the bile it is mixed with, it arouses a sharper and more burning heat than any that could be aroused by love or joy.

### 200. Why those who are flushed with anger less scary than those who are pale with anger

The external signs of anger differ according to different personal temperaments and the various other passions that compose it or are joined to it. Some people grow pale or tremble when they become angry, others become flushed or even weep. It's usually thought that the anger of those who grow pale is more to be feared than the anger of those who become flushed. The reason for this is that when someone won't or can't avenge himself except through looks and words, he employs all his heat and energy from the moment he is first aroused, and this makes him turn red; and sometimes his regret and self-pity over not being able to avenge himself makes him cry. On the other hand, those who hold back and decide to get a greater vengeance later on become sad at the thought of what the anger-making action has obliged them to do, and sometimes they are also anxious about the evils that may arise from the decision they have made—which immediately makes them pale and cold, and starts them trembling. But when later they come to take vengeance, they warm up all the more because they were cold to begin with, just as we observe that the most severe fevers are ones that began with a chill.

### 201. There are two sorts of anger: kind people are the most prone to the first

This shows us that we can distinguish two kinds of anger. **(a)** One flares up suddenly and is obvious from the outside, but it has little effect and can easily be calmed; **(b)** the other is less obvious at first, but gnaws more at the heart and has effects that are more dangerous. **(a)** Those filled with kindness and love are more prone to the first. It results not from a deep hatred but from an instant aversion that takes



them by surprise. It comes about in this way: these people tend to imagine that everything ought to happen in the way that they think best; so when that doesn't happen they wonder at it and take offence. Quite often they react in this way even though the matter doesn't affect them personally; that is because their great affection makes them concerned for •those they love in the same way as for •themselves. Thus, what others would be merely indignant about is for these people a subject of anger; and because their lovingness fills their heart with much heat and much blood, any intrusion of bile into the heart—however small it is—will cause a great commotion in this blood. (I'm talking about bile that is driven to the heart by the aversion that has suddenly come upon them.) But this commotion doesn't last, because the surprise loses strength, and as soon as they realize that the object of their anger oughtn't to disturb them so much, they repent of their anger.

**202. It's weak and servile souls that let themselves be carried away most by the second sort of anger**

The (b) other kind of anger, in which hatred and sadness predominate, is not so apparent at first except perhaps for the face's pallor. But its strength is gradually increased by the agitation that a burning desire for vengeance stirs up in the blood; and the blood, being mixed with the bile driven to the heart from the lower part of the liver and spleen, produces a very keen and piercing heat there. And just as it's the most generous souls who have the most gratitude, so it is those with the most vanity, the most abject and weak, who are most readily swept up into this kind of anger. The wrongs that arouse someone's anger appear greater in proportion as vanity increases his self-esteem and also in proportion to his valuation of the good things that those wrongs take away;

and that valuation will be high in proportion to how weak and abject the person's soul is. . . .

**203. Generosity serves as a remedy for anger's excesses**

Although anger is useful in energizing us to push back against wrongs, there is no passion whose excesses we should take more care to avoid. Such excesses confuse our judgment and often make us act wrongly in ways we'll later have to repent. Sometimes they even prevent us from pushing back against the wrongs as well as we could if we were calmer. But just as vanity more than anything else makes anger excessive, so I think that generosity is the best remedy for its excesses. Here is why. Generosity makes us •put a low value on all the good things that might be taken away, and to •put a high value on the liberty and absolute control over ourselves that we cease to have when we take offence at something that someone else does. Thus it brings it about that •if we are generous• we limit ourselves to contempt [see Glossary], or at the most to indignation, for the wrongs that others would ordinarily be offended by.

**204. Vainglory**

What I here call 'vainglory' is a kind of joy based on the person's love for himself and resulting from his expectation or hope of being praised others. So it's different from the inner satisfaction that comes from thinking one has done something good, because we are sometimes praised for things we don't think are good, and blamed for things we think are better. But that inner satisfaction and vainglory are both kinds of self-esteem, and also kinds of joy. For seeing that we are esteemed highly by others is a reason for esteeming ourselves.

**205. Shame**

Shame, on the other hand, is a kind of sadness based also on self-love, which comes from expecting to be blamed or being anxiously aware that one may be blamed. And it is also a kind of modesty, or humility and diffidence about oneself. When our self-esteem is so great that we can't imagine anyone contemning us, we can't easily be ashamed!

**206. The function of vainglory and shame**

Vainglory and shame have the same function: they move us to virtue, one through hope and the other through anxiety. For them to do that, all that's needed is to instruct our judgment regarding what truly deserves blame or praise, so that we won't be ashamed of our good actions or vain about our bad ones (as many people are). But it isn't good to rid oneself entirely of these passions, as the Cynics of ancient Greece used to do. The common people are indeed very bad judges; but we can't live without them, and it matters to us to have their good opinion, so we should often follow their opinions rather than our own regarding the external aspect of our actions.

**207. Impudence**

Impudence (or effrontery) is a kind of contempt [see Glossary] for shame and often for pride too; and it isn't a passion because there's no specific movement of our spirits that produces it. Rather, it is a vice that is opposed to whatever is good in shame and vainglory, just as ingratitude is opposed to gratitude and cruelty to pity. Effrontery results chiefly from the person's having often been on the receiving end of grave insults. [In the rest of this article Descartes apparently

means to be explaining how that result comes about. It is an obscure and contorted story, and we can do without it.]

**208. Distaste**

Distaste is a kind of sadness that results from some cause from which there has previously been joy. It's just a fact about our constitution that most of the things we enjoy please us only for a time and then become tiresome. The clearest examples involve drinking and eating, which are beneficial when one has an appetite, and harmful when one doesn't. Because such things then cease to be agreeable to our taste, this passion is called 'distaste'.

**209. Regret**

Regret [see Glossary] is also a kind of sadness. It has a particular bitterness in that it is always joined to some despair and to the memory of the pleasure we have had from some enjoyment. The only things we regret are good things that we once enjoyed and are now so completely lost that we have no hope of recovering them. . . .in the form in which we regret them.

**210. Lightheartedness**

Finally, what I call 'lightheartedness' is a kind of joy that has this peculiarity: its sweetness is increased by the recollection of the evils we have suffered, from which we feel *lightened*, like feeling relieved of some heavy burden that we have carried on our shoulders for a long time.

I can't see anything very special in these three passions, and I have included them here simply in order to follow the order of the enumeration that I made above. I think

this enumeration has been useful in showing that I haven't omitted any passions that deserved special consideration.

### 211. A general remedy for the passions

Now that we have met up with all the passions, we have much less reason for anxiety about them than we had before. We see that they are all intrinsically good, and that all we have to avoid is their misuse or their excess, and the remedies I have presented could be sufficient if everyone took the trouble to apply them. But some of these remedies involve forethought and effort (*industrie*) through which we can correct our natural faults by trying to separate within ourselves •the movements of the blood and spirits from •the thoughts to which they are usually joined; and I admit that few people will have sufficiently prepared themselves in *this* way for all the contingencies of life! •And hard work in advance is certainly needed: the objects of the passions arouse movements in the blood that follow so fast from mere impressions in the brain and the disposition of the organs, without no input from the soul, that no amount of human wisdom could counteract these movements unless preparations have been made in advance. [Descartes follows this with an obscure account of laughter as a response to tickling. Then:] So too, those who are strongly inclined by nature to the commotions of joy, pity, fear and anger can't help fainting, weeping, trembling, or having their blood all in turmoil as though they had a fever, when their imagination is strongly affected by the object of one of these passions. But there's something we can do on any such occasion—and I think I can offer it here as the most general remedy against all excesses of the passions, as well as the easiest to carry out—namely: when we feel our blood agitated in this way, we should be on our guard and bear in mind that everything

presented to the imagination tends to mislead the soul and make the reasons for pursuing the object of its passion appear much stronger than they are, and the reasons for not pursuing it much weaker. When what the passion urges us to do involves some delay, we should •delay making any decision about it and •think about other things until the commotion in our blood has completely calmed down. And when a passion is pushing us towards some course of action that has to be started right away, impelling us to actions that require an immediate decision, the will should devote itself mainly to considering and following the reasons for *not* acting in that way, even if they appear less strong. Suppose for example that someone is unexpectedly attacked by an enemy: the situation doesn't leave him any time for deliberation, but if he is accustomed to reflecting on his actions there's still something he can do in this situation. When he feels himself in the grip of fear he can try to turn his mind from thoughts of •the danger he is in to thoughts about •the reasons why there is much more security and honour in resistance than in flight. And in a different kind of case, when someone feels the desire for vengeance and anger is pushing him to run rashly towards his assailants, he should summon up the thought that it's unwise to lose one's life when it can be saved without dishonour, and that if the contest is very unequal it is better to •make an honourable retreat or •submit and ask for mercy than •to expose oneself stupidly to certain death.

### 212. All the good of this life depends solely on the passions, and so does all the evil

The soul can have pleasures of its own. But the pleasures that it shares with the body depend entirely on the passions, so that persons whom the passions can move most deeply are capable of enjoying the sweetest pleasures of this life.

It's true that they may also experience the most bitterness, when they don't know how to put these passions to good use and when fortune works against them. But the chief use of wisdom lies in its teaching us to master and control so

skillfully that the evils that they cause are quite bearable, and even become a source of joy.

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