

The passions of the soul



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What is passion:

Passion is a gift of the spirit combined with the totality of all the experiences we have lived through. Passion is most evident when the mind, body and spirit work together to create, develop and articulate or make manifest our feelings, ideas and most sacred values.

Passions enable us to overcome obstacles (both real and imagined) and to see the world as a place of infinite potential. The passionate spirit looks at every occurrence and discovers the golden kernel of what can be, what should be and what will be.

Passions has its own energy --- an energy that's observable and transferable.

Passions exist with our purpose and performance as a partner to help achieve the present and the future that what we desire for our families, our friends, our communities and ourselves.

Definition of the Passions of the soul:

Descartes defines the passions of soul by refining a general preliminary definition in the following steps. (When we speak about Descartes's definition on passions o the soul, we only mean the final, specific, and complete definition.)

1. In a very general sense, any perception, i. e. operation of the intellect (Principles of Philosophy, S32), is a passions of soul.

2. Perceptions are either caused by the soul (Passions of the soul, S19) or they are caused by the body (Passions of the soul, S21). First, Descartes

limits his definition of the passions of the soul to include only the perceptions caused by the body, but he specifies the definition further.

3. Among the perceptions caused by the body, we refer some to things outside of ourselves (Passions of the soul, S23), we refer some to our body (Passions of the soul, S24) and we refer some only to our soul (Passions of the soul, S25). Thus, Descartes writes: " After having considered in what respects the passions of the soul differ from all its other thoughts, it seems to me that we may define them generally as those perceptions, sensations, and emotions of the soul which we refer particularly to it, and which are caused maintained, and strengthened by some movement of the spirits" (Passions of the soul, S27).

4. However, although perceptions, sensations, emotions can all correctly be called passions of the soul, Descartes writes: " we restrict the term to signify only perceptions which refer to the soul itself, and it is the latter that I have undertaken to explain here the title 'passions of the soul'" (Passions of the soul, S25).

Thus, in other words, in its most specific meaning, a passion of the soul is a mental state caused (and maintained) by the body and referred to the soul alone.

The Passions of the soul:

Herein, Rene Descartes with the 'The passion of the soul' actually tries to give a detailed explanation of 'the nature of man'. To explain the first part of the definition, I should firstly try to define the 'passions of the soul', the way Descartes wants to.

In order to define the aforesaid, the elaborate diagrammatic representation is adequately sufficient.

Thoughts - produce actions of the soul (volitions and voluntary imaginings)

Passions of the soul in general sense (perceptions)

/ Caused by the soul caused by the body (perception of volition) / Neural non-neural (imaginings) / Reference to reference reference

External objects to body to soul (passions in restricted sense)

Explanation of the first part of this definition :

In a way we may understand by passions, in a very general way, the perceptions which pertain to thought, not actions or volitions but we cannot say the same thing in case of evident knowledge. From our experience, we gather that the understanding of these passions are quite confusing and obscure. In another sense they may be refer to as sensations as well, since they are received by the soul just the way the external senses are. But they could be best explained when we consider them to be emotions, since all kinds of thoughts in the soul are none that are agitated and disturbs strongly as the passions.

Explanation of the other part of the definition :

Here Descartes tries to distinguish the passions from other sensations. By sensations he refers to external objects like smell and sound and internal feelings of the body like hunger and thirst. He would say these occurrences may be caused by movement of spirits. He would also make an effort to

distinguish these passions from our volitions in order to explain their ultimate and proximate cause that distinguishes them from other sensations.

The soul is united to all parts of the body conjointly :

Here Descartes tells us not to consider soul as a part of the body like the limbs or the head etc. He would say the soul does not have any extension of its own and it merely present in all parts of the body. So, to say that even if any part of the body is damaged or cut off from the whole body, it does not in any way make the soul smaller. But it becomes completely separate from the body when we breakup the assemblage of the bodies organs.

There is a little gland in the brain where the soul exercises its functions more particularly than in any other part of the body :

We just now saw in the previous point that the soul exercises its functions on all parts of the body. But to be specific it is commonly held that the soul would mainly operate upon the brain or perhaps the heart. The brain because all sense organs are related to it and the heart because we feel the passions in our heart. But Descartes would clarify that the functioning occurs neither on the heart nor on the whole of the brain, but just the inner most part of the brain, a small gland situated in the middle of the brains substance and suspended about the passage through which the spirits in the brain's anterior cavities communicate with those in the posterior cavities. The slightest movements of the gland may alter the course of the spirits and vice-versa.

How we know that this gland is the principal seat of the soul :

Here Descartes would give explanation to his acceptance of this specific gland as the principle seat of the soul. He would argue that all other Parts of

the brain are dual just as all organs of our external sense. But we only conceive one simple thought about an object at a single moment. Therefore there must be someplace where two images coming from two eyes or in other words two impressions of a single objects coming through double organs, can come together as a single image or impression before reaching the soul. So that they do not presented two objects instead of one. We can attribute this to the gland by means of spirits which feel the cavities of the brain and they cannot exists united in this way in any other part of the body except as a result of being united in this gland.

The seat of the passions is not in the heart :

Here Descartes would assert that the seat of the passions is not in the heart, although they may seem to be. Since passions make us feel changes in the heart. These changes are caused merely by a small nerve which descend to the heart from the brain. Just like a pain in the neck is felt by means of the nerve in the neck. Thus we could say it is not obligatory for the soul to exercise its functions directly in the heart in order for the passions to be felt there.

How the soul and the body act on each other :

In this section Descartes tries to explain the functioning of this gland. He says that the gland radiates through the rest of the body by means of animals spirits, nerves, blood, which can take on the impressions of the spirits and carry them through the arteries to all the limbs. Let us recall what we said previously about the mechanism of our body. The nerve-fibres are so distributed in all the parts of the body that when the objects of the senses produce various different movements in these parts, the fibres are

occasioned to open the pores of the brain in various different ways. This, in turn, causes the animal spirits contained in these cavities to enter the muscles in various different ways. In this manner the spirits can move the limbs in all the different ways they are capable of being moved. And all the other causes that can move the spirits in different ways are sufficient to direct them into different muscles. To this we may now add that the small gland which is the principal of the soul is suspended within the cavities containing these spirits, so that it can be moved by them in as many different ways as there are perceptible differences in the objects. But it can also be moved in various different ways by the soul, whose nature is such that it receives as many different impressions - that is, it has many different perceptions as there occur different movements in this gland. And conversely, the mechanism of our body is so constructed that simply by this gland's being moved in any way by the soul or by any other cause, it drives the surrounding spirits towards the pores of the brain, which direct them through the nerves to the muscles; and in this way the gland makes the spirits move the limbs.

Example of the way in which the impressions of objects are united in the gland in the middle of the brain :

In this point Descartes explains the unity of impressions of objects in the specific gland. This is done with the help of an example. If we suppose an animal approaching us, the light reflected from its body forms two images, in the two eyes respectively. These images form two others by means of optic nerves on the internal surface of the brain. Then, by means of the spirits that fill the cavities the images radiate towards the little gland. The movement forming each point of one of the images tend to the same point on the gland

as the movement forming the corresponding point of the other image. In this way both images in the brain form only one on the gland which directly acts upon the soul to make it see the shape of the animal.

Example of the way in which the passions are aroused in the soul :

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

How all the passions appear to be caused by some movement of the spirits :

Something similar happens with all the other passions. That is, they are caused chiefly by the spirits contained in the cavities of the brain making their way to nerves which serve to expand or constrict the orifices of the heart, or to drive blood towards the heart in a distinctive way from other parts of the body, or to maintain the passion in some other way.

Example of movements of the body which accompany the passions and do not depend on the soul :

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

How one and the same cause may excite different passions in different people :

Here Descartes tries to explain different passion in different people from the same cause. He says the reason behind it is all brain are in constituted in the same way. Hence what might be fear for one might not be so fearful for the other.

The principal effect of the passions ;

Principle effect of passions is to move and dispose the soul to want the things for which they prepare the body. Therefore fear makes the soul want to flee just as courage makes the soul want to fight, and similarly with the others.

The power of the soul with respect to the body :

Here Descartes admits the nature of will to be free and he makes a distinction between two kinds of thought in the soul. Namely actions or volitions on one hand and passions on the other. Although passions are taken here in a very general sense so as to include all kind of perceptions. The actions are within its power and can be changed only indirectly by the body while the passions are dependent on the actions that produced them. Hence they can be changed by the soul only indirectly. The activity of the soul consists entirely in the fact that simply by willing something it brings it about that the little gland to which it is closely joined moves in the manner required to produce the effect corresponding to this volitions.

How we find in our memory the things we want to remember :

When the soul wants to remember something, the volitions make the gland lean from one side to the other which drives the spirits to all regions of the brain till they reach upon the one containing traces of the object we want to remember. Here Descartes would speak about the functioning of spirits which make the whole processes of recollection simple.

How the soul can imagine, be attentive, and move the body :

Descartes would once again attribute our ability to imagine to the functioning of spirits. And he would say in case of attentiveness the volition keeps the leaning in one particular direction during that time. And in case of motion of the body the volition makes the gland drive the spirits to the muscles which bring about this effect.

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

Our volitions to produce any movement or effect do not always succeed for these volitions depend largely upon the nature or habit has joined movements of gland to thought. for example if we want to look at a object far away the volition causes the pupils to grow larger and vice-versa but mere thinking of enlarging pupils may have volitions but not the enlargement. Since the spirits are driven to the optic nerve for enlarging or contracting the pupils which is joined by nature with the volition to look at say the far away objects, rather than with the volition to enlarge or contract the pupils.

The power of the soul with respects to its passions :

Our passions are not directed by our will in a direct way, but indirectly by representation of things joined with passions we wish to have and opposed to passions which we wish to reject. For example if we want to be courageous and suppress fear it is not enough to have the volition to do it. We should be able to give reasons to ourselves which state the danger to be trivial, there is more security to defend then to flee, that we shall attain glory, joy if we conquer, while we cannot expect anything but regret and shame if we had run away.

What prevents the soul from having full control over its passions :

The reason for the soul not having full control over its passions is that they are all accompanied by some disturbances that occur in the heart and then in the blood and animals spirits. Until these disturbances stop, they remain in our mind just as objects of senses are present to it while they act upon our sense organs. The soul can prevent pain but it cannot in the same way

prevent a feeling of fire that can burn the hand. Just as it can overcome lesser passions and not stronger ones, except when the disturbances of the blood and spirit have died down. At most what the will can do is to alter the effects. for example, if anger causes the hand to rise to strike a blow, the will can restrain it, and so on.

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

All conflicts supposedly held between the lower part of the soul (sensitive) and the higher (rational) or between natural appetites and will, deal with the opposition, between the movements produced by the body (by means of spirit) and soul (by means of will) simultaneously, in the gland. Since there is just one soul without bifurcations, it would be erroneous to accept different functions of the soul in case of different people. This error occurs, owing to the confusion between the functions of the body and the soul. Moving further to speak of the movements in the gland, caused by spirits, wherein the first kind deal with impression occurring in brain without any influence on will, while the second kind does influence the will. The first kind do not have any conflicts what so ever, but the conflict occurs in the second kind, which is elaborated by Descartes in his writings.

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

It is by success in the inner conflicts that we are able to recognize how strong or weak our soul is. Strong souls are generally found in those who have a strong will as well. The way in which to test the strength of the will is by equipping it to fight with proper weapons (firm judgments about the

knowledge of good and evil, which the soul resolves to follow in guiding its conduct) and vice-versa.

The strength of the soul is inadequate without knowledge of the truth :

The strength of the soul alone without knowledge of truth is of no use. Since the judgments of a strong soul without knowledge are often false and based on passions by which the will had previously allowed itself to be conquered or led astray, but because will continues to follow them when the passion causing them is absent, they may be considered its proper weapons, and our judgment of the soul is also based upon their ability to follow these judgments and resist passions opposing them. But there is a difference between resolutions from false opinions and those which are based solely on knowledge of truth. For, those who follow the latter would never repent, while those who follow the former would always regret when they find out their mistake.

There is no soul so weak that it cannot, if well directed, acquire an absolute power over passion :

We observe that naturally every movement of the gland is joined to our thoughts innately, although we may join them to others through habit. Like in case of language. Words produce glandular movements, ordained by nature to represent the souls of their syllables, when they are spoken, or the shape of letters, when written, since we are habituated to think of the meaning, on hearing words spoken, and seeing them written. But the natural linkage may change without long practice. Like for example we have a bad experience at a place of our liking, and after the experience we reproach going to the place, inspite of our old liking. This tendency can be found in

animals as well, even if not to the same extent as much as in us. Yet even animals can be conditioned to behave in a way, different from their natural inclination, in that specific situation. This is really worth nothing that with little conditioning, if animals could be conditioned, devoid of reason, so could we, infact in a better way. Irrespective of a strong or weak soul, if effort is put in, every soul could conquer its passions, and rule over them.

How the passions which are peculiar to certain persons produces their effects:

We already know about the functioning of the soul and body and the inter linking between them, but the same thought is not always attached to the same action and vice-versa. Like in case of aversions which individuals develop, either from childhood experiences or may be from the mother's womb itself, wherein the aversions are purely subjective.

The function of the five passions explained here, in so far as they related to the body:

The passions of the soul are indeed very helpful for the body since it helps the body to identify and accept whatever is important for the body and more importantly make the body reject all those elements which are not essential for it.

Their faults and the means of correcting them:

Passions generally do well to the body though not always, since passion alone is not adequate to take decisions regarding the body, the reason or rationality should do so. That is because, if we blindly follow our passions, we may come across something which might seem good for the body but actually is not and vice-versa.

The internal emotions of the soul:

One more thing that may decrease the discomfort caused by the passions is to follow our internal emotions. Which one produced in the soul by the soul itself, making it different from passions since they are guided by spirit.

Although they are also similar to passions in some other aspects. Like the arousal of joy, sorrow, love or hatred in us from reading a book or watching a movie. This feeling of the arousal of passions generates pleasure within us.

Wherein the pleasure is an intellectual joy.

The exercise of virtue is a supreme remedy against the passions:

Internal emotions affect us intimately and they have more power over us than the passion which occurs with them in a distinct way. It is certain that if the soul has the means of happiness in itself there could not be any external troubles which could affect us. Infact such troubles would increase its joy. In order that our soul should have the means of happiness in needs to pursue virtue diligently.