René Descartes on *Émotion*

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Abstract

The primary aim of this discussion is to present a detailed case study of Descartes's use of *émotion* in *Les passions de l'ame* and in his early writings leading up to that work. A secondary aim is to argue that that while Descartes was innovative in suggesting that *émotion* might be a better keyword for the affective sciences than *passion*, he did not consistently follow his own advice. His *innovation* therefore failed in that regard, even though it did inspire later thinkers to explore the distinction between 'passion' and 'emotion' in their own manner.

Keywords

Descartes, *émotion*, emotion, passion, *commotiones*, *affectus*

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1 Introducing *Émotion*

There are seventeen occurrences of the term *émotion* – eight of *émotions* – in René Descartes's 1649 *Les passions de l'ame*. The first two occurrences figure in an attempt to define the term *passion*. The passages are reproduced immediately below, first in their original French printed form, then in a contemporary English translation. They will serve as a reference point for the discussion that follows.[1]

First, we begin with Article 27:

> Article XXVII. La definition des passions de l'ame
>
> Apres avoir consideré en qyoy les passions de l'ame different de toutes ses autres pensées, il me semble qu'on peut généralement les definir des perceptions, ou des sentimens, ou des émotions de l'ame, qu'on rapporte particulierement a elle, &

[1] Citations from *Les passions de l'ame* are taken from Descartes, *Œuvres*, ed. Charles Adam and Paul Tannery, 11 vols (Paris: Cerf, 1897–1909), http://philosophyfaculty.ucsd.edu/faculty/ctolley/texts/descartes.html (hereafter AT). English translations of passages in *Les passions de l'ame* will be taken from *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. 1, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) (hereafter CSM). All other English translations are by the author unless otherwise noted. Note that French accents are not always consistently applied in the original texts (Descartes, *Passions of the Soul*, trans. Steven H. Voss, intro. Geneviève Rodis-Lewis (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1989), 138). Finally, hereafter *émotions* will usually be understood as *émotion(s)* but rendered simply as *émotion*, for reasons of simplicity.

> qui sont causées, entrenuës & fortifiées par quelque mouvement des esprits. (AT, XI, 349–50)
>
> (Article 27. Definition of the passions of the soul
>
> After having considered in what respect 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, or emotions of the soul which we refer particularly to it, and which are caused, maintained and strengthened by some movement of the animal spirits. (CSM, 338–39))

Second, there is Article 28, which is quoted in abbreviated form:

> Article XXVIII. Explication de la premiere partie de cette définition
>
> On les peut nommer des perceptions … ou des volontez; … On les peut aussi nommer des sentimens … Mais on peut encore mieux les nommer des émotions de l'ame, non seulement à cause que ce nom peut estre attribué à tous les changemens qui arrivent en elle, c'est à dire a toutes les diverses pensées qui luy vienent; mais particulierement pource que, de toutes les sortes de pensées qu'elle peut avoir, il n'y en a point d'autres qui l'agitent & l'esbranlent si fort que font ces passions (AT, XI, 349–50)

> (Article 28. Explanation of the first part of this definition
>
> We may call them 'perceptions' … or volitions, … We may also call them 'sensations' … But it is even better to call them 'emotions' of the soul, not only because they this term may be applied to all the changes which occur in the soul – that is, to all the various thoughts which come to it – but more particularly because, of all the kinds of thoughts that the soul may have, there are none that agitate and disturb it so strongly as the passions. (CSM, 339))

Les passions de l'ame has an interesting publishing history.[2] Briefly, the text was originally written in French and then printed by Henri Le Gras in Paris and Louys Elzevier in Amsterdam. The original 1649 French edition does not contain a table of contents or an index, which is important in understanding word counts of key terms like *émotion*.[3]

There is a Latin edition of *Les passions de l'ame*, entitled *Passiones animae*, published in 1650 by Elzevier in Amsterdam. It is based on the original 1649 French edition but was not translated by Descartes himself. Indeed, it is very likely that Descartes never got to correct this Latin translation, as was usually his habit.[4] This will be important to remember when we

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[2] AT, XI, 293–300; Rodis-Lewis 1955, 37–39; Voss 1989, xv.

[3] Descartes, *Les passions de l'ame*, intro. and notes Genevieve Rodis-Lewis (Paris: Vrin, 1955), 39.

[4] Stephen H. Voss, 'How Spinoza Enumerated the Affects,' *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 63, no. 2 (1981): 167–79 (167–68); Stephen H. Voss, 'On the Authority of the *Passiones Animae*,' *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 75, no. 2 (1993): 160–78 (esp. 171, 178).

examine the proposed Latin equivalents of Descartes's affective vocabulary in *Les passions de l'ame* and compare it with the Latin edition.

2 Research Objectives

In Articles 27 and 28 Descartes not only introduces the term *émotion* for the first time in *Les passions de l'ame*. He also proposes a new stipulative definition of the term and appears to recommend that we adopt it on the grounds that it is even better (*encore mieux*) than any of its available French counterparts: *passions*, *perceptions*, *sentimens* and *affections*. Popular Latin candidates like *affectus*, *afficio* and *affectio* from the era 'before emotion' are not mentioned at all in the body of this French version of *Les passions de l'ame*.[5] Descartes does cite the Spanish philosopher Juan Luis Vivès (1493–1540), whose preferred term for what Descartes refers to as *émotion* is the Latin term *affectus*.[6] But in general no Latin substitutes or background information are provided on the use of *émotion* and *passion* in *Les passions de l'ame*. This suggests a confidence in the theoretical clarity, integrity and independence of the French language in this domain.

It is also important to remember that at the very beginning of *Les passions de l'ame*, Descartes tells us that 'I shall be obliged to write just as if I were considering a topic that no one had dealt with before me' ('obligé d'escire icy en mesme façon, que si je traitois d'une matiere

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[5] *Before Emotion: The Language of Feeling, 400–1800*, ed. Juanita Feros Ruys, Michael W. Champion, and Kirk Essary (New York: Routledge, 2019).

[6] Descartes, *Les passions*, intro. and notes Rodis-Lewis, 24n4, 28n3.

que j'amais personne avant moy n'eust touchée') (CSM, 328; AT, XI, 328). He also tells us that he is proposing to approach the topic as a natural scientist (*physicien*), and not as a rhetorician (*orateur*) or moral philosopher (*philosophe moral*). At first glance, a radically new scientific treatment of the topic, in a new scientific language, accompanied by a new term to replace the old one – *émotion* instead of *passion* – would appear to be consonant with the desire to make a fresh start on the topic: to innovate.

The problem is that immediately after inviting us to adopt *émotion* in a new, predominantly psychological, stipulated sense of the term, Descartes goes on to employ *passion* instead of *émotion* as his preferred term of art throughout most of the remainder of his book. He also retains *passion* in the title of his book. There is in fact a puzzling difference between the title on the second title page of the French edition of Descartes's book, namely, *Les passions de l'ame*, and the title on the second title page of the Latin edition, namely, *Passiones sive affectus animae* (which in French means *Passions, ou émotions, de l'âme*). On this question, Steven Voss goes so far as to claim that 'if Descartes had had a chance to review the translation, he would have renamed it'.[7] The anomaly speaks to the complex possibilities inherent in the Latin affective vocabulary of the time.[8] As it turns out, *commotiones*, and not *affectus*, is arguably the more

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[7] Voss, 'On the Authority of the *Passiones Animae*,' 177.

[8] Michael J. Champion, Kirk Essary, and Juanita Feros Ruys, 'Introduction: The Language of Affect from Late Antiquity to Early Modernity,' in *Before Emotion*, ed. Ruys, Champion, and Essary, 1–8; Yasmin Haskell, Raphaele Garrod, Michael W. Champion, and Juanita Feros Ruy, 'But Were They Talking about Emotion?: Affectus, Affection, and the History of Emotion,' *Rivista Storica Italiana* 128, no. 2 (2016): 521–43; *Before Emotion*, ed. Ruys, Champion, and Essary.

popular term for translating the French *émotion* in the Latin edition (art. XXVII, 14; art. XXVIII, 15; art. XXIX, 15).[9] This is an apt warning of things to come, as similar problems arise in the case of English translation.

Thus, despite his gestures towards *émotion* as a promising new keyword for the affective sciences, Descartes does not abandon *passion*. At the same time, this does not annul the fact that he *does* introduce *émotion*. This perplexing situation has not been sufficiently acknowledged or studied in the history of these developments. Perhaps this is why there are such wide discrepancies in the scholarship on the status of the term *émotion* in Descartes's *Les passions de l'ame*? Some praise him for introducing *émotion* into the philosophical and scientific lexicon of

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[9] Descartes, *Passiones animae, per Renatum Descartes, gallice ab ipso conscriptae, nunc autem ... latina civitate donatae ab H. D. M. j. u. l.* (Amsterdam: L. Elzevir, 1650), http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb303285118. Consider, for example: 'commotio quae fit est cordi' (art. XLVI, 23), 'commotiones animae,' 'commotionis sentiamus,' 'commotio sanguinis' (art. LXXXIX, 42), 'commotio animae,' 'commotio producta à spiritibus,' 'Commotionibus' (art. XXXIX, 37), 'commotio animae,' 'commotione,' 'commotionem' (art .XCI, 42–43), 'commotione' (art. CXXVI, 58), 'commotiones animae' (art. CXLVII, 69), 'internae commotiones' (art. CXLVIII, 70), 'commotio' (art. CLX, 75), 'commotione in illo sanguine,' 'commotio' (art. CCI, 93), 'commotionis' (art. CCIII, 93), 'sentitur ea sanguinis commotio,' 'commotionem est in sanguine' (art. CCXI, 97). On its part, *affectus* and its variants tend to figure more among the Latin substitutes for *passion*: for example: 'excite la passion de la joye' ('excitat laetitae affectum') (art. XCI, 43); 'toute les passions' ('in genere omnis affectus') (art. CXLVII, 70); 'toutes les autres passions' ('omnibus passionibus'); 'contre tous les exces des passions' ('contra omnis excessus Affectuum est') (art. CCXI, 97).

his day and view it as a major innovation.[10] Others do not mention the matter at all, or at least appear to treat it as an issue of little significance for the understanding of Descartes's text and his wider legacy.[11] There is much at stake in this intriguing situation. Is it really with the lectures of Scottish philosopher Thomas Brown 'that the term "emotion" definitively took on its new status as a theoretical category in mental science', as Thomas Dixon has eloquently argued?[12] Or is René Descartes the real father of the modern concept of 'emotion', as the present study suggests? At the very least, one thing this study should show is that any decision to use the terms 'passion' and 'emotion' interchangeably in the study of Descartes's writings, or simply to exchange one term for the other in order to keep things clear and consistent, are practices that are fraught with peril and require elaborate scrutiny and defence. There are numerous aspects of Cartesian scholarship that arguably probably need to be revisited in this light.

Our main task in what follows will be to document the exegetical details behind this curious state of affairs. This will require a return to the original French and Latin texts themselves, since some of the pertinent issues can only be formulated in those terms and are understandably

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[10] Thomas Dixon, *From Passion to Emotion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Amelie Rorty, 'From Passions to Emotions and Sentiments,' *Philosophy* 57, no. 220 (1982): 159-172; Susan James, *Passion and Action: The Emotions in Seventeenth-Century Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).

[11] Lilli Alanen, *Descartes' Concept of Mind* (Cambridge and Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2003); Deborah, J. Brown, *Descartes and the Passionate Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Descartes, *Les passions de l'ame*, intro. and notes Genevieve Rodis-Lewis (Paris: Vrin, 1955).

[12] Thomas Dixon, '"Emotion": The History of a Keyword in Crisis,' *Emotion Review* 4, no. 4 (2012): 338–44 (340); Dixon, *From Passion to Emotion*, 133.

supplanted in contemporary English translations of those texts, where intelligibility and not literality is usually the main concern.

But why introduce *émotion* in the first place? A hypothesis for which there are interesting versions and precedents is that *émotion* is associated with metaphors of movement that offer novel opportunities to reformulate and study the more dynamic and relational qualities of the passions, which are stifled by the more passive associations of *passion*. For example, philosopher Amelie Rorty described the situation this way:

> Instead of being reactions to invasions from something external to the self, passions became the very activities of the mind, its own motions. So transformed they become proper motives, and along with desires, the beginnings of actions.[13]

Exploring this hypothesis in light of the data unearthed by our exegetical study will constitute the second major task of this discussion. The hope is not only to supplement and deepen the scope of the evidence for that hypothesis, but also to begin to lay the groundwork for assessing the success of Descartes's proposed innovation to introduce *émotion* into the scientific lexicon of

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[13] Rorty, 'From Passions to Emotions and Sentiments,' 159. On this general line of thought see also Dixon, *From Passion to Emotion*, 76–77, 109; Anik Waldow, 'Reconceptualizing Affect: Descartes on the Passions,' in *Before Emotion*, ed. Ruys, Champion, and Essary, 199–211 (208).

his day. The argument in this last case will be that Descartes largely failed to live up to his own innovative aims with regard to the new psychological definition of *émotion* he recommends.

Overall, the conclusion of this study is that while Descartes does indeed deserve credit for introducing *émotion* into the scientific lexicon of his day, he ultimately failed to deliver a consistent theoretical account in which *émotion* plays a successful explanatory role. At the same time, he changed the history of affective terms and concepts forever.

3 *Émotion* before Descartes

The question of precedents for Descartes's use of the term *émotion* in *Les passions de l'ame* is seldom explored in detail by scholars interested in that text. Yet it is impossible to fully appreciate the nature of his contribution in that area, and the difficulties he faced, without considering those precedents. Etymology is a required starting point.

The *Dictionnaire du Moyen Français (1300–1500)* contains an interesting selection of examples of early usages of the term *émotion*:

> A. – 'Instigation' … À l'esmotion de. 'À l'instigation de': ...le duc de Lancastre conduiseur de la gent Angloise à l'esmotion du duc de Bretaigne … (CABARET D'ORV., Chron. Loys de Bourb. C., 1429, 53).
>
> B. – [À propos d'une communauté] 'Émeute, soulèvement, mouvement populaire' … (CABARET D'ORV., Chron. Loys de Bourb. C., 1429, 5) …

> C. – [À propos de pers.] ‘Mouvement (sous l’action d’une chose qui frappe), excitation’: Cestui predist le grant mouvement de terre, qui fut en Constantinoble … et aussi la famine, qui fut lors en plusieurs lieux et la fervente esmocion des enfans pour aller à Saint Michel. (SIMON DE PHARES, Astrol., c.1494–1498, f° 156 v°).
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> D. – ‘Bouleversement, trouble moral’.[14]

Selective translation of key words in these passages indicates that, in this context, the term *émotion* (*ésmocion*, *ésmotion*) is sometimes tied to psychological disturbances or movements (‘trouble moral’), and at other times, physical disturbances or movements of crowds (‘d’une population’). The dominant metaphor is one of movement, excitation and agitation.

On its side, *Le Littré (XMLittré v2) Dictionnaire de la langue française* delineates three basic senses of the term *émotion*:

> 1. Mouvement qui se passe dans une population.
>
> 2. Agitation populaire qui précède une sédition, et quelquefois la sédition elle-même; ce qui est un mouvement moitié physique, moitié moral.

[14] *Dictionnaire du Moyen Français (1300–1500)*, http://www.atilf.fr/dmf.

> 3. Mouvement moral qui trouble et agite, et qui se produit sous l'empire d'une idée, d'un spectacle, d'une contradiction, et quelquefois spontanément sous l'influence d'une perturbation nerveuse, comme cela a lieu quelquefois dans l'hypocondrie.[15]

> (1. Movement that occurs within a population.
>
> 2. Agitation on the part of a crowd which precedes, or at times constitutes, sedition; which is both half physical movement and half moral movement.
>
> 3. Moral movement that both troubles and agitates, and that is produced under the domination of an idea, a performance, a contradiction, and at times the spontaneous influence of a nervous perturbation, as can happen in hypochondriasis.)

Again, movement is a dominant metaphor, as suggested by the proposed Latin etymology of the term: 'emotionem, de emotum, supin de emovere'.[16] Notably – and philosophically crucial – like the *Dictionnaire du Moyen Français*, the *Littré* also points out that there exist both psychological and physical senses of the term. So does the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Motion then is the dominant metaphor in both the psychological and physical senses of *émotion*, as reflected by the Latin *emovere*, which suggest a moving out: '*ēmovēre* to remove, expel, to banish from the mind, to shift, displace (< *ē-* e- prefix2 + *movēre* move v.) + -iō -ion suffix1)'.[17] The same is true

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[15] *Le Littré (XMLittré v2) Dictionnaire de la langue française*, by É. Littré, https://www.littre.org.

[16] *XMLittré v2*.

[17] *Oxford English Dictionary*, https://oed.com.

of mid-sixteenth-century English, a fact that is evident in the first English translation of *Les passions de l'ame*, published in 1650, where both psychological and physical uses of the term 'emotion' are employed.

Aside from etymological dictionaries, another valuable source of insights on French usages of the term *émotion* before Descartes is the *Essais* of Michel de Montaigne (1533–1592), which Descartes almost certainly read.[18] Along with the playwright Pierre Corneille (1606–1684), Montaigne is widely regarded as one of the most influential cultural figures of the 'French Renaissance'. Each employs the term *émotion* in a variety of ways. For reasons of brevity we focus only on Montaigne.

In his 1580 *Essais*, Montaigne refers several times to both *émotion* and *émotions* in what seems to be a psychological sense. For example, at one point he refers to an extraordinary emotion of pleasure ('une emotion de plaisir extraordinaire').[19] In another case, there is a reference to feeling an emotion in relation to a son bidding farewell to his mother ('[il] sentit toutefois l'émotion de cette adieu maternel').[20] However, there are also instances where *émotion* and *émotions* appear to have more physical connotations, for example when the pulse is

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[18] Michael Moriarty, 'Descartes and Montaigne'. In *The Oxford Handbook of Montaigne*, Philippe Desans, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016, 1-20).

[19] Montaigne, Michel Eyquem de, *Les essais*, ed. P. Villey and V.-L. Saulnier (Paris: PUF, 1965), 424, online ed. P. Desan, University of Chicago, https://artflsrv03.uchicago.edu/philologic4/montessaisvilley/.

[20] Montaigne, *Essais*, 235.

concerned (‘pendant que le pouls nous bats et que nous sentons de l’émotion’).[21] A purely physical example of the term occurs in the context of a remark on emotions of air and wind (‘une émotion d’air et de vent’).[22] Therefore, as early as Montaigne’s *Essais* – which although originally published in 1580, were subsequently reedited and organised in 1588 and 1595 – there is clear evidence of both physical and psychological uses of *émotion* at the highest levels of French literary culture.

To sum up, it is clear that the term *émotion* was well established and widely employed in the French language before Descartes began writing *Les passions de l’ame*. It is also equally clear that it was used in both a psychological and a physical sense, with strong connotations of movement and action in each case. All of this makes Descartes’s recommendation that it would be better (‘encore mieux’) to use *émotion* rather than *passion* in the scientific study of states like joy and anger seem all the more innovative. Stipulating one primary usage of the term was not in accord with current practice in the literary arts, which allowed multiple senses and uses of the term. And it certainly went against established physical medical usages of the term, such as *émotion du pouls* (emotions of the pulse).

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[21] Montaigne, *Essais*, 715.

[22] Montaigne, *Essais*, 914.

4 *Émotion* in Descartes's Early Works and Correspondence

We turn now to examine how *émotion* is employed in Descartes's early works, written before *Les passions de l'ame*, and his correspondence. Little attention appears to have been paid to that history, even though it is of central importance in understanding the trajectory of *émotion* in relation to *passion* up to and including *Les passions de l'ame*. This review also shows that Descartes's decision to highlight *émotion* in *Les passions de l'ame* was not only innovative with respect to how the term was used in the literary contexts considered above, but even with respect to his own earlier uses of those terms.

4.1 Early Works

Descartes's interest in the passions is evident in his very first publication, the *Compendium musicae*, which was originally written in Latin in 1618, but only intended for private circulation.[23] This first, very short, work by Descartes was only officially published posthumously in Latin in 1650 and then in French in 1668. The passions figure centrally in the *Compendium*. Indeed, the very first line of text states that the end (*finis*) of music is to move (*moveat*) and activate (*excitant*) the passions (*affectus*): More precisely, the goal of music is to instil and excite the passions ('Le but de l'art est d'emouvoir en nous les passions').[24] Note that Descartes's affective vocabulary here is taken entirely from Latin. Later French translations of

[23] Rodis-Lewis, 1995, 48, 51.

[24] Rodis-Lewis 1995, 51.

the work would not have been verified by Descartes, but the Latin terms he uses in the *Compendium* do provide some clues regarding his preferred choices in the Latin affective vocabulary at this time. His preferred Latin term for 'passion' appears to be *affectus*.[25] This is a reasonable and popular choice. However, in general this is a turbulent period, where affective terminology is very much in flux and varies in very nuanced and sophisticated ways.[26]

Passions are also an important topic in *L'homme*, which was originally written in French around 1633.[27] *L'homme* was intended to be a chapter in a larger work, provisionally entitled *Le monde*, which was never fully completed. Frightened by Galileo's recent persecution by the Church, Descartes initially decided not to publish *Le monde*, though some copies of *L'homme* and other texts were circulated to friends .[28] *L'homme* was only officially published posthumously, first in a 1622 Latin edition, then in a 1664 compilation of the French original along with other related writings of Descartes, as well as supporting materials by other authors, including a lengthy commentary by physician Louis la Forge.

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[25] Voss, 'On the Authority of the *Passiones Animae*,' 176–77.

[26] Champion, Essary, and Ruys, 'Introduction'; Kirk Essary, 'Passions, Affections, or Emotions? On the Ambiguity of 16th-Century Terminology,' *Emotion Review* 9, no. 4 (2017): 367–74; Haskell et al., 'But Were They Talking about Emotion?,' esp. 1n3; Russ Leo, 'Affective Physics: *Affectus* in Spinoza's *Ethica*,' in *Passions and Subjectivity in Early Modern Culture*, ed. Brian Cummings and Freya Sierhuis (Ashgate e-Book, 2013; New York: Routledge, 2016), 33–49 (38).

[27] Genevieve Rodis-Lewis, *Descartes: His Life and Thought*. (Ithaca: N.Y.: Cornell, 1999, 153).

[28] Rodis Lewis, 1999, 154.

The purpose of *L'homme* is to provide a purely physiological and mechanical scientific framework for explaining the functions of the body, the senses, the various organs, and the pineal gland, without any allusion to the soul (*esprit*) and its interactions with the body. Like *Le monde*, *L'homme* is quite literally an exercise in scientific imagination – Descartes considered it a fable (*fable*) (AT, VI, 4–5) – built on the best science of the day, but substituting imaginary explanations where science itself falls short.[29] In part, *L'homme* is meant to provide an account of how passions and emotions are physically possible in creatures without a soul. The work is important for us because it contains several early occurrences of the French term *passions*, as well as a single occurrence of *émotion* that has no discernible analogue in any of Descartes's other works, including *Les passions de l'ame*.

In *L'homme*, Descartes engages the issue of the passions (*passions*) in a discussion of humours (*humeurs*), which he refers to as movements (*mouuemens*) and natural inclinations (*inclinations naturelles*) that may dispose (*disposent*) us to certain passions (AT, XI, 166). It is interesting that while he mentions one traditional humoral type in this discussion, the choleric temperament (*l'humeur colérique*), he fails to mention any other traditional humoral types by name, for example, the sanguine, the phlegmatic or the melancholic types. Instead, he focuses his attention on other sorts of states, some of them ostensible character traits or temperaments, some of them not, that are all termed *humeurs* nonetheless, for example, tranquillity of mind (*tranquilité de l'esprit*), joy (*l'humeur joyeuse*) and sadness (*l'humeur triste*), as well as an

[29] See also Rodis-Lewis, 1999, 146–47.

unnamed humour – *cette humeur* – that makes us pleasant (*complaisans*) and well-meaning (*bienfaisans*) (AT, XI, 167).

Recall that all of these humours can dispose us to passions, which raises the question whether they might cause and correspond to passions of the same name and categorical type as the humours themselves. The question cannot be pursued or resolved at this stage, but invites comparison with Descartes's later enumeration of the passions in *Les passions de l'ame*. It is also worth noting that some of the humoral states or traits identified in *L'homme* appear very much like what we would now consider 'moods' (fleeting or enduring) rather than naturally fixed states of character or temperament. This suggests that Descartes may be going beyond the bounds of traditional humoral theory in this discussion, perhaps even anticipating elements of the modern concept of mood.

Certainly, Descartes's use of *émotions* in this discussion appears to be both unusual and innovative, in that it is quite unique. He refers to *émotions interièures* that are caused by external stimuli (in this case a flame) and that follow the same nerve channels as pain (*douleur*) and are therefore internal states like pain (*semblable*) in that respect (AT, XI, 193). We shall soon have occasion to see that this early use of *émotions* by Descartes appears to differ markedly from his later use of that term in *Les passions de l'ame*, where by definition 'internal' emotions are also deemed to be 'intellectual', and as such are not directly caused or sustained by animal spirits travelling through the nerves. But this is to anticipate. The finding underlines the importance of enquiring into *passions* and *émotions* in Descartes's early works before we consider their status and relationship in *Les passions de l'ame*.

It is worth noting that in his lengthy commentary on *L'homme*, physician Louis La Forge does not question Descartes's use of the terms *passion* and *émotions*. He adopts the same terminology, but treats the two terms as if they are meant to be theoretically distinct and not interchangeable. For example, he refers to 'emotions of the passions' ('émotions des passions') (AT, XI, 252). He also remarks that we feel the emotions of our passions in a manner that is different from how we feel other impressions from our senses ('il en va de mesme des passions, dont nous ressentons les émotions tout d'une autre façon, que les autres impressions de nos sens') (AT, XI, 252; my translation). Finally, La Forge highlights the distinction between an emotion of the stomach (*émotion de l'estomac*) and the desire to eat (*le desir de manger*) (AT, XI, 252). None of these distinctions or variations are immediately evident in Descartes's text. Which means that we should be wary of uncritically identifying *passions* with *émotions* in this or any other work of his, and that we should refrain from simply assuming that the two terms are synonymous and interchangeable.[30]

Additional evidence of Descartes's early interest in the passions can be found in his 1644 *Principia philosophiae*, later published in a 1647 French translation entitled *Les principes de la philosophie*. As the title page of this French edition explicitly states, the translation was verified

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[30] Susan James, *Passion and Action*, 7n28, 95–96, considers Descartes to be among those seventeenth-century writers 'who use the terms "passion" and "emotion" synonymously.' This would appear to run directly counter to Thomas Dixon's stern admonition that, in exegetical contexts like the present one, 'we should not assume that "emotions" and "passions" are the same things' (*From Passion to Emotion*, 13, 20). The exegetical evidence reviewed in this case study clearly shows that synonymy cannot be assumed in this context.

by Descartes. The translator, moreover, was well-known to Descartes, and was none other than his close friend and colleague l'abbé Picot.[31] We can therefore in all likelihood be assured that any proposed French translations for key Latin terms and concepts in the French edition of the *Principia* reflect Descartes's considered judgement on the lexical and conceptual matters involved.[32] This is important, since the French edition of the *Principia* contains several references to *émotions* that prefigure his later use of the term in *Les passions de l'ame*.

In the 1647 *Les Principes de la philosophie*, Descartes refers to things (*choses*) that we experience in ourselves that should not (*doivent point*) be attributed to the soul alone (*l'ame seule*) nor to the body alone (*corps seul*) but to the intimate union (*étroite union*) that exists between them. Such experiences include our appetites (*appetits*) to drink and eat, and the emotions or passions of the soul (*les émotions ou les passions de l'ame*). (AT, IX, 45). They also include sensations (*sentimens*) and all other qualities (*qualités*) that fall under the umbrella of our sense of touch (*sens de l'attouchement*) (AT, IX, 45).

The manner in which *émotions* or *passions* are specified in this last passage must be cited in full. The relevant text is this: 'les emotions ou les passions de l'ame, qui ne dependent pas de la pensée seule, comme l'émotion à la colere, à la joyë, à la tristesse, à l'amour, &c.' ('the emotions or passions of the mind which do not consist of thought alone, such as the emotions of anger, joy, sadness, and love') (AT, IX, 33; CSM, 209). This last passage is interesting because of the manner in which it appears to single out a case where thoughts (*pensées*) that can be referred to

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[31] Rodis-Lewis, 1999, 210–11.

[32] Rodis-Lewis 1999, 219–20.

as emotions or passions (*émotions ou passions*) can, in some cases, also be referred to as emotions (*émotions*) only.

There are added complications. In a later passage in the *Principes* that mentions the same examples referred to in the first passage above, Descartes mentions the same states, though in a different order. In English translation, the passage reads: 'all the disturbances or passions and emotions of the mind like joy sorrow, love, and hate and so on' ('la joye, la tristesse, l'amour, la colère & toutes les autres passions') (CSM, 280; AT, IX, 311). Curiously, the English translation of this last passage refers to 'passions *and* emotions of the mind' (CSM, 280; my emphasis) and does not appear to respect the restriction to *passions* in the original French text. In fact, it does not even qualify the states in question as 'passions' (*passions*) at all, as is the case in the French original, the last qualification of which – '& toutes les autres passions' – is very different from the noncommittal expression 'and so on' (CSM, 280).

In other words, there would appear to be cases where 'passions' can be considered emotions (*émotions*) only, and cases where they are not considered emotions only, but rather fully embodied passions (*passions*) of the union of the soul and the body. In the former case, we can speak of 'emotions' of anger, joy, sadness and love as states that are independent of the union of the soul and the body, while in the latter case, we can speak of joy, sadness, love and anger as 'passions' that are dependent on the union of the soul and the body. This, in turn, could be taken to suggest that the two terms may not be equivalent and interchangeable in all contexts.

To further complicate things, consider that Descartes also refers to states of the former type as purely intellectual and independent of any 'emotions of the body' ('indépendante des émotions du corps') which is rendered as 'bodily disturbances' in our chosen English translation of this

passage (CSM, 281; AT, IX, 311). Descartes gives the example of a joy that is 'purely intellectual' ('une joye purement intellectuelle'), though the word *purement* is inexplicably omitted in the English translation (AT, IX, 311; CSM, 281).

If we take the French version of these last passages as our guide, these findings suggest that in Descartes's view at this time, there can be emotions of the body (*émotions du corps*) just as there are emotions of the soul (*émotions de l'ame*). This puzzling and ostensibly inconsistent usage recurs in *Les passions de l'ame*, although it is rarely mentioned by English speaking commentators. These matters will not be pursued further here. But they do show that Descartes's use of affective terms[34] in his early works is relevant to the question of the status of *émotion* in

[34] In order to ground the present discussion, it is helpful to stipulate that the specific examples of *passion* and *émotion* that Descartes cites in these early texts shall serve as prototypes of the 'affective' (our expression) states and terms that he wishes to discuss. Anger (*colère*), joy (*joye*) and sadness (*tristesse*) are then the 'kind' of states he is primarily concerned with and they can be called 'affective' for ease of reference. The full list of such states and terms is provided in *Les passions de l'ame*, which is where, through enumeration, Descartes fixes the extension of the set of states he is concerned to discuss. Starting with six primitive passions, Descartes goes on to carefully distinguish forty passions, all of which are given a distinct French name (see, for example, Voss 1981, Table 1, 171–73). This is the list of states and their French names in the order in which they appear: *Admiration*, *Estime*, *Mespris*, *Generosité*, *Orgueil*, *Humilité*, *Bassesse*, *Veneration*, *Dedain*, *Amour*, *Haine*, *Desir*, *Esperance*, *Crainte*, *Jalousie*, *Securité*, *Desespoir*, *Irresolution*, *Courage*, *Hardiesse*, *Emulation*, *Lacheté*, *Epouvante*, *Peur*, *Remors*, *Joye*, *Tristesse*, *Moquerie*, *Envie*, *Pitié*, *Satisfaction*, *Repentir*, *Faveur*, *Reconnoissance*, *Indignation*, *Colere*, *Gloire*, *Honte*, *Desgout*, *Regret*, *Allegresse* (Voss, 1981, 171–73). Note that while the following additional states are mentioned in *Les passions de l'ame*, they are not officially designated as *passions* in the enumeration: *Ambition*, *Ris*,

Les passions de l'ame, even though – as we shall see – those precedents are sometimes reflected, and sometimes not, in that text.

4.2 Correspondence

There remains the matter of Descartes's correspondence, which ranges from 1622 to the publication of *Les passions de l'ame* in 1649 and his death shortly thereafter, in 1650 (AT, I–IV).[35] The correspondence provides evidence from both Descartes and his interlocutors that there was nothing especially unusual about using the French term *passions*, or indeed *émotion*, in the vernacular French of this period, which seems to be well-established. In the correspondence, *passion* sometimes occurs in contexts where a more precise understanding of its application is sought, for example, the origins of the passion of fear (*la passion de la crainte*) (AT, IV, 312). At other times, they simply occur as generally accepted figures of speech, for example, a passion for liberty (*passion pour la liberté*) (AT, I, 201).

The situation with *émotions* is more complex and especially important for our purposes. There are several occasions where the term is used rather innocently in connection with the experience of reading a letter, for example: 'I have read with much emotion' ('I'ay leu auec beaucoup

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Aversion, *Bienvueillance*, *Avarice*, *Yvresse*, *Brutalité*, *Devotion*, *Vengeance*, *Courtoisie*, *Modesite*, *Raillerie*, *Ingratitude*, *Cruauté* (Voss, 1981, Table II, 173).

[35] For English translations, I refer to *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. 3: *The Correspondence*, ed. and trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch, and Anthony Kenny (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) (hereafter CSMK).

d'émotion') (CSMK, 257; AT, IV, 278). There are also references to how letters can instil emotions in those who receive them: 'I imagine that most of the letters you receive from other people arouse emotions in you' ('que plus part des lettres que vous reçevez d'ailleurs vous donnent de l'émotion') (CSMK, 257; AT, IV, 251). But it is the other, more ostensibly medical and philosophical, references to *émotions* in the correspondence that are particularly germane to our inquiry.

In two cases, the term is ostensibly used to refer to physical and not mental states: 'l'émotion de cette vapeur' (AT, I, 118) and 'l'émotion qui arrive dans le sang' (AT, IV, 237). In the latter case, this reference to a physical form of *émotion* which is explicit in the French original is incorrectly rendered in the chosen English translation, which reads: 'the turbulence that affects the blood' and omits the term *émotions* entirely (CSMK, 253). And in the former case, the reference to physical emotion is, along with other passages, omitted from the translation of the 25 February 1630 letter to Mersenne in which it figures, for unknown editorial reasons (CSMK, 18–19).

These more physical and bodily uses of the term *émotion* differ markedly from the more psychological uses we have seen so far. While they reflect well-known and culturally entrenched usages of *émotions* in the French vernacular of the period, they are typically overlooked in the scholarship on *Les passions de l'ame*. Yet as we shall see, they actually occur in that text as well, when they are not supplanted in translation. For example, there is a reference to 'l'émotion qui est dans le sang' (AT, XI, art. CCXI, 487). Again, however, we find that the term *émotion* is omitted in the English translation of the relevant passage, and is replaced by the expression 'the disturbance in our blood' (CSM, 403). The point here is not to criticise these translations, but

rather to probe into some deeper exegetical issues that can only be stated and appreciated by reverting to the original texts themselves.

One last clue regarding the use of *émotions* in the correspondence occurs in a case where the soul is said to receive an emotion 'that constitutes the passion' ('reçoiue l'émotion, en laquelle seule consiste la passion') (CSMK, 271; AT, IV, 312–13). The French text here would appear to suggest that there are cases where a passion just is an emotion. So, are passions and emotions identical in some circumstances? Is this a case of synonymy? That thesis is not easy to reconcile with the other usages of those terms we have considered. Such usages recur in *Les passions de l'ame*, which underscores the importance of this preliminary evidence for examining the status of *émotion* in that work.

5 *Émotion* in *Les passions de l'ame*

The preceding review of the history of *émotion* before the time of Descartes, as well as the review of *passion* and *émotion* in his works written before *Les passions de l'ame*, indicate that during this period *émotion* is quite a protean term. It is generically associated with connotations of movement, deriving from its Latin (*emovere*) and French (*émouvoir*) etymology. And typically, there are also indications of action and excitation – sometimes sudden or unusual – of diverse sorts. Importantly, while the various usages of *émotion* during this period can be loosely characterised as psychological or physical, or mixed, it is not in itself exclusively a psychological, or a physical, term.

Therefore, when, in Articles 27 and 28, Descartes undertakes to define (*definir*) the passions of the soul and suggests that it would be better (*mieux*) if we named them (*nommer*) emotions of the soul (*émotions de l'ame*), he appears to be proposing something very innovative. He is suggesting that, by stipulation, we adopt a purely psychological and ostensibly 'affective' use of *émotion*.[36] The reason is that these special states belong to the soul, and so are psychological, and at the same time are different than perceptions of outward objects, and from interior sensations like hunger and thirst. These *émotions de l'ame* form a distinct group of 'affective' states, distinct from either perceptions and sensations. A plausible hypothesis is that, in order to put the scientific study of the passions on a firm terminological footing, Descartes believes that we should consider adopting a new, stipulated, narrower sense of *passion*, which in the end leads him to *émotion*. However, there are several steps leading up to this point, and nuances are important. Special care must be taken not to read our present-day assumptions and distinctions into these earlier texts. This is especially true with the common modern-day supposition that 'emotions' are above all mental, psychological, in nature.

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[36] Notoriously, Descartes also tells us that these psychological states of the soul are joined to the body as a whole ('jointe à tout le corps') in a special union ('unie'), and that it is this union of the soul and body that meet the tribunal of experience as a whole (AT, XI, art. XXX, 351; CSM, art. 30, 339). The preservation of that union is the primary function of the passions (AT, XI, art. XL, 359; art. LII, 372; CSM, 343, 349–50). In this aspect of Descartes's work, human beings appear to be a distinct, naturally given, 'kind' of embodied emoting organism, with a fundamentally relational nature that extends from basic sensation and physiology to social forms of life. In this sense, human organisms – 'emoters' – are fundamentally intersubjective and relational in nature, which seems inconsistent with the view of the lone cogito in earlier aspects of Descartes's work, whose primary mode of being seems to be fundamentally insular, private, and subjective.

Before we begin our analysis it is important to reiterate what is often taken as an obvious exegetical fact about the different kinds of states of the soul considered in *Les passions de l'ame*. This is that *passions* are not the only major category of such states. In addition, there are also the actions (*actions*) of the soul, namely, its volitions (*volontez*), which ostensibly are very different (AT, XI, art. XVII, 342; art. XXIX, 350; CSM, 335, 339). These willings (*volontez*) can be called emotions of the soul (*émotions de l'ame*), but they differ from the soul's passions in that they are caused by the soul itself (*sont causées par elle mesme*). Despite appearances, however, this distinction between the soul's *actions* and *passions* is apparently not meant to be hard and fast, because the 'perception of such a willing may be said to be a passion of our soul' ('c'est aussi en elle une passion d'apercevoir se quelle veut') (CSM, 336; AT, XI, XIX, 343). Nonetheless, in the end we call them *actions* rather than *passions*, Descartes tells us, because 'names are always determined by what is most noble' ('la denomination se fait tousjours par ce qui est plus noble') and that it is also customary (*coustume*) to call them *actions* and not *passions* (CSM, 336; AT, XI, art. XIX, 343). With this puzzling caveat in mind and already two different senses of *émotion* allegedly in front of us, we can begin our analysis of how *émotion* is employed in *Les passions de l'ame* in earnest.

Prior to the formal definition of *passion* presented in Articles 27–29, in Article 25 Descartes tells us that when we consider the term *passion* in its most general sense ('sa plus générale signification'), it is nonetheless customary (*coustume*) to restrict (*restreindre*) its use to signify (*signifier*) only those states which refer (*se rapportent*) to the soul itself (AT, XI, 348; CSM, 337–38). These, and only these, kinds of states are what he proposes to call *passions* in his chosen, restricted, sense of the term. Feelings (*sentimens*) of joy (*joye*) and anger (*colère*) are the only examples provided at this stage, although the list is meant to extend to other similar states

(‘autres semblables’). Importantly, such states of the soul are said to be ‘excited’ in us (‘excitez en nous’), which is a distinguishing feature of *émotions* in some usages of the term. An important feature of those states is that it is impossible (*impossible*) that the soul feel them (*les sente*) without them truly being in the soul (AT, XI, art. XXVI, 348; CSM, 337).

The second step of the argument occurs in Article 28. There, we are invited to use *émotion*, instead of *perception*, in order to define (*definir*) the special thoughts (*pensées*) or states of the soul that are customarily referred to as its *passions* (in the narrow sense). In this article Descartes shifts from talking of *passions* to *perceptions* where, in this context, *perception* is understood to exclude actions of the soul (‘ne sont point des actions de l’ame’), and willings of the soul (‘ou des volontez’) (AT, XI, art. XXVIII, 349; CSM, 339). These *perceptions*,[37] Descartes tells us, may also be called feelings (*sentimens*) on account of the fact that they are received by the soul in the same manner as our perceptions of objects (*objets*) of our external senses (*sens exterieures*), ‘and they are not known by the soul any differently’ (CSM, 339). The emotions of the soul (*émotions de l’ame*), then, are all those states that refer particularly to the soul itself and are also caused, fortified and maintained by movements (*mouvements*) of the animal spirits (*esprits*), which are physical in nature. Note that in this case *émotion* is invoked in a context

[37] Voss uses the term ‘sensation’ instead of ‘perception’ (*perception*) in his translation of this passage (Descartes, *Passions*, trans. Voss, art. 28, 34). On their part, Cottingham et al. use ‘“sensations”’ (in scare quotes) to translate the French *sentimens* just below (CSM, art. 28, 339). These are not errors but rather very thoughtful efforts to render Descartes’s text intelligible to English readers. The problem arises because Descartes himself does not appear to clearly or consistently distinguish *sensations* and *sentimens*, which are both varieties of feeling (from the French *sentir*, and the Latin *sensus*). *Sentimens* and *sensations* are not yet fully distinct.

where movement is crucial, which is consonant with its etymology in both its psychological and physical senses, although movement in this case is also tied to the physical substrate of *émotion*, which in turn is understood (more narrowly) to be a psychological state of the soul. So, it is not only *passion* that is supposed to be employed in a restricted sense from now on, it is also *émotion*.

To sum up, Descartes's point appears to be that it is not only the term *passion* that is overly inclusive and needs to be restricted in this context. It seems that it is also his view that *émotion*, as well, must be restricted to its psychological aspects. This is evident from the comparison with other psychological states, like outward perceptions (*perceptions*) and inner sensations (*sensations*), which although they are referred to the soul, are nonetheless distinct from feelings (*sentimens*) which are primarily 'affective' in nature (see note 34). Quite clearly, what Descartes is recommending, at least at *this* point in the discussion, in *these* articles, is that we adopt the use of the term *émotion* in its psychological sense,[38] to speak of *passions* in the narrow sense, even though his previous remarks on the topic also show that he is aware that it also has a physical sense and usage. In effect, the term *émotion* undergoes a double restriction, or narrowing. It is first narrowed to mean *émotion* in a psychological sense, and then further to refer to states of the soul like joy and anger and the like; that is, *passions* in the narrow sense.

Why adopt this new restricted sense of *émotion*? The argument that is provided is twofold. Descartes argues that we should consider adopting *émotion*, because: (a) 'this term may be applied to *all* the changes which occur in the soul – that is, to *all* the various thoughts which

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[38] Leo, 'Affective Physics,' 37.

come to it'; and (b), 'more particularly because, of all the kinds of thought which the soul may have, there are none that *agitate* and *disturb* it so strongly as the passions' (CSM, 339; my emphasis).

The first argument seems clear enough, but how to make sense of it is a more difficult question. The argument appears to be that there is no problem in classifying states of the soul (*pensées*) such as joy and anger and the like as *émotions* (which is a *restricted* sense of *émotion*, in the *psychological* sense), since *all* the states of the soul are, generically speaking, classifiable as *émotions* anyway. This seems to accord with the interpretation offered by Voss, for example, who states that, in Articles 27–29, Descartes is 'using *émotion* to speak of the genus and *passion* the species' of the psychological states he is concerned.[39] Note that in that same context, Voss also states that in those articles, Descartes 'maintains a clear distinction between *émotion* and *passion*',[40] which directly contradicts the view that they are *synonymous*, a view that is endorsed, or at least presupposed or implied, by other commentators.[41]

Voss's argument that *émotion* functions as a generic term is based on the claim that 'Descartes uses *émotion* extremely broadly, to refer to a disturbance or commotion or excitation in soul *or* body'.[42] This accords well with Descartes's second argument for recommending the use of *émotion*, namely, (b) its strong association with agitation (*agitation*) and disturbance

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[39] Descartes, *Passions*, trans. Voss, 138.

[40] Descartes, *Passions*, trans. Voss, 138.

[41] James, *Passion and Action*, 7.

[42] Descartes, *Passions*, trans. Voss, 138 (my emphasis).

(*esbranlement*). This still allows for the possibility that the term *émotion* can be used to refer particularly to psychological states of the soul and, moreover, psychological states of a specifically 'affective' sort. The point is simply that these are psychological agitations and disturbances, and not physical ones – although they may be accompanied by such.

But now we seem to have a problem. It would appear that in this argument of Descartes's, the term *émotion* can be viewed as pulling in two directions. One way points to a very wide and generic sense tied to movement, excitation, and even disturbance, that has psychological applications. The other is toward a much narrower psychological sense of the term that is more intimately associated with specifically 'affective' states (like joy and anger and the like).[43] It is impossible to resolve this two-way tension in the characterisation of *émotion* in the above discussion without first considering how the term is used in the remainder of *Les passions de l'ame*. The main worry that arises is whether Descartes is ultimately inconsistent in the manner

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[43] Referring specifically to Article 27 in the 1650 Latin edition, literary scholar Russ Leo provides a compelling account of the complexities surrounding *passiones* and *affectus* in the Latin edition, which reflect the problems we have encountered with *passions* and *émotion* in the French edition. He writes: 'where Descartes gives the first and most complete definition of the passions of the soul, *affectus* does not appear … For Descartes, passions [*Passiones sive Affectus*] are only passions insofar as they are of the soul [*animae*]. This is an important intervention in its own right, as Descartes excludes from this purview a field of related phenomena which his contemporaries still regarded as passions – nervous tensions, and other species of corporeal energy – in order to emphasize the distinction between body and soul, where passions are only appropriate to the soul and thus only to man' (Leo, 'Affective Physics,' 37; see also Waldow, 'Reconceptualizing Affect,' esp. 208).

in which he employs the term *émotion* in *Les passions de l'ame*. Or, whether he is attempting to draw from its rich etymology and heterogenous usage as he sees fit.

It is certainly a curious thing that, after recommending that we consider using the term *émotion* in the psychologically restricted sense in Articles 25 to 29, Descartes does not follow his own advice. He primarily resorts to *passion* in order to refer to states like joy and anger (and others like them) throughout the remainder of his discussion, with only a few scattered mentions of *émotion*. Why then recommend *émotion* unless one is prepared to use it? What seems odd is that when Descartes does mention *émotion* in the remainder of his book, he alternates between psychological and physical usages and senses of the term, without any reservation or explanation. This is puzzling after stipulating that we should consider using *émotion* in the psychological sense. Some commentators who have written in English on *Les passions de l'ame* do not appear to have noted, or appreciated, the significance of these irregularities surrounding the use of *émotion*.[44] This most likely is because the relevant data are often masked or simply eliminated by translation. However, there are also French commentators who have failed to record and comment on the importance of the issue.[45] Hence the present study, whose primary aim is to help bring these issues to the forefront and lay the groundwork for future commentary.

Consider now the remaining usages of the *émotion* found in *Les passions de l'ame*. One important additional – and very different – psychological usage of the term has to do with so-

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[44] See for example, Alanen, *Descartes' Concept of Mind*,; Brown, *Descartes and the Passionate Mind*; Rorty, 'From Passions to Emotions and Sentiments.'

[45] For example, Rodis-Lewis, 1995.

called ‘interior emotions’ (*émotions intèrieures*), which are introduced relatively late in the book, at the end of Part Two (AT, XI, art. CXLVII, 440; CSM, 147, 381). This additional *psychological* sense of the term is widely recognised and discussed by philosophical commentators on *Les passions de l’ame*.[46] It is first in our list, because it is well known, although it comes after other usages of *émotion* which, in sharp contrast, have commanded little or no philosophical attention or commentary, even though they are historically and philologically significant because they reflect primarily *physical* usages of the term.

Briefly, the *émotions interièures* ‘are emotions which are produced in the soul only by the soul itself’ (‘excitées en l’ame que par l’ame mesme’) (CSM, 381; AT, XI, art. CLXVII, 440). In this respect, ‘they differ from its passions, which always depend on some movement of the spirits’ (‘different de ces passions, qui dependent tousjours de quelque mouvements des esprits’) (CSM, 381; AT, XI, art. CLXVII, 440). The term ‘excitation’ (*excitées*) is used in referring to these states in the French original, which we have seen is a core connotation of *émotion* in general. Yet that term is not captured by the English ‘produced’, which is used in the English translation. Which hides the fact that, in French, there is at least some etymological rationale to call these ‘interior’ states *émotions* rather than *passions*, even if this use of *émotion* seems inconsistent with the use of *émotion* to mean genuine full-bodied *passions* in a narrow sense (which depend on and maintained physical movements of the animal spirits).

There is one last psychological sense of *émotion* alluded to in the remainder of *Les passions de l’ame* (AT, XI, art. XCI, 397). It occurs in the context of a discussion where purely intellectual

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[46] For example, Brown, *Descartes and the Passionate Mind*; James, *Passion and Action*.

joy (‘la joye purement intellectuelle’) is distinguished from joy the passion (‘cette joye, qui est une passion’). The former joy is said to come from the soul through the soul’s own actions (‘qui vient en l’ame par la seule action de l’ame’). Descartes then tells us that we can say of this intellectual joy that it is ‘a pleasant emotion which the soul arouses in itself’ (‘une agreable emotion excitée en elle mesme’) (AT, XI, art. XCI, 397; CSM, 361). As explicitly stated, such an *emotion* cannot be considered an *émotion* in the narrow sense of *passion*. It seems more like a simple psychological feeling (*sentimen*), rather than a *passion* in the narrow, restricted, sense, which is more akin to a *syndrome*, which is caused, maintained and fortified by animal spirits, and is directed to an ‘object’.

Aside from the *émotions intèrieures*, and *émotion* as a simple feeling, which are both psychological states, but nonetheless still differ from *émotions* as *passions* in the narrow sense, the other uses of *émotion* in *Les passions de l’ame* have to do with cases where *émotion* is used in a physical sense. For example, in the context of a discussion on how to distinguish two varieties of anger (*colère*), some of the underlying physiological considerations are said to include, along with the presence of bile (*bile*), the amount of blood in the heart, which can at times surge, creating ‘une grande emotion dans le sang’ (AT, XI, art. CCII, 480). Now, notice that the allusion to *émotion* in the French original is not reproduced in the chosen English translation of the relevant passage, which reads: ‘the aversion which surprises them must drive enough bile into the heart to bring about a *great commotion* in this blood’ (CSM, 400; my emphasis). We return to this kind of anomaly shortly.

Additional occurrences of physical usages of the term *émotion* can be found towards the very end of *Les passions de l’ame*, when Descartes is discussing ‘a general remedy for the passions’

(‘un remede general contre les Passions’). For example, in one case where the blood is said to be moved (‘le sang tout emeu’) there is also an allusion to crying (*pleurer*) and trembling (*trembler*), which suggests physical forms of disturbance (AT, XI, art. CCXI, 486). Yet in the chosen English translation, the etymological allusion to *émotion* (*emeu*) in this passage is omitted and replaced by an alternative construction referring to ‘blood all in turmoil’ (CSM, 403). In several other passages the same translation strategy is employed and physical allusions to *émotion* and its variants are also supplanted in translation. For example, there is a French reference to when one feels the *émotion* in one’s blood (‘lorsque qu’on sent le sang ainsi emeu’) which is physical, but also arguably psychological, and so mixed (AT, XI, art. CCXI, 487). Lastly, there is a more clearly physical usage of *émotion* where the movement in question is said to reside *in* the blood (‘l’emotion qui est dans le sang’) (AT, XI, art. CCXI, 487). This is rendered in English as ‘the disturbance in our blood’ (CSM, 403).

Finally, there are other passages where *émotion* is invoked in *Les passions de l’ame* which appear to reflect a purely physical sense of the term. Consider the following:

> Et il y a une raison particuliere qui empesche l’ame de pouvoir promptement changer ou arrester ses passions, l’aquelle ma donné sujet de mettre cy dessus en leur definition, quelles sont non seulement causées mais aussi entretenuës & fortifiées, par quelques mouvements particulier des esprits … et quelles sont accompagnées de quelque émotion qui se fait dans le cœur, et par consequent aussi en tout le sang & les esprits, en sortent que jusques à cette émotion ait cessé, elles demeurent presentes à notre pensée. (AT, XI, art. XLVI, 363).

> (There is one special reason why the soul cannot readily change or suspend its passions, which is what led me to say in my definition that the passions are not only caused but also maintained and strengthened by some particular movement of the spirits … [and] that they are all nearly accompanied by some disturbance which takes place in the heart and consequently also throughout the blood and animal spirits. Until this disturbance ceases they remain present to our mind. (CSM, 345))

The above passage has to do with the reasons that prevent the soul from having full control over its passions, which in the original French are twice said to be *émotions* of the heart and blood and animal spirits, which are all physical phenomena. This is not evident from the English translation of this passage, however, which does not mention the term *émotion* and refers instead to a 'disturbance', a strategy that is consonant with Descartes's focus on physical bodily turbulence but does not capture or reflect his choice of the term *émotion* to make that point (CSM, 345). Soon after, there is another passage where the original French refers to an emotion of the blood ('une émotion du sang') but the chosen English translation mentions instead 'a disturbance of the blood' (AT, XI, art. XLVI, 364; CSM, 345). In contrast to these physical uses of *émotion*, in Article 79 love (*amour*) is referred to as an emotion of the soul (*émotion de l'ame*), while hate is simply labelled an emotion (*émotion*). These appear to be psychological uses of *émotion*. The reason for this is that in both cases, love and hate considered as emotions of the soul (*émotions de l'ame*) are contrasted with their causes (*causes*) which are the physical animal spirits (*esprits*)

(AT, XI, art. LXXIX, 387). In this case, the English term ‘disturbance’ is not used to translate the French *émotion*. Instead, the English term ‘emotion’ is used (CSM, 345).

There is a very good and plausible reasons for these decisions to omit direct mention of the term ‘emotion’ in the English translations of *émotion* when it is used in a bodily and physical sense, namely, intelligibility for modern English readers. So the above remarks are not intended as a criticism of English translations of Descartes’s work. However, intelligibility of this sort is not the aim of the present discussion, which is concerned instead with documenting and understanding the challenges that Descartes faced when he tried to stipulate and introduce a more strictly psychological sense of the term *émotion* to serve as a new basis for the affective sciences. And for this it is necessary to revert to the original wording in both the original French and Latin texts in question. It is worth noting that the very first English translation of *Les passions de l’ame*[47] reiterates both the psychological and physical uses of *émotion* by employing the English ‘emotion’ for both (art. 46, 37–38; art. 201, 164; art. 211, 171). Perhaps this is because, much like *émotion*, ‘emotion’ had both a psychological and a bodily sense and did not then have the more entrenched, predominantly psychological, meaning it has today.

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[47] Descartes, *The passions of the soule in three books the first, treating of the passions in generall, and occasionally of the whole nature of man. The second, of the number, and order of the passions, and the explication of the six primitive ones. The third, of particular passions. By R. des Cartes. And translated out of French into English* (London, 1650).

6 Conclusion

The exegetical evidence documented in this study strongly suggests that Descartes did indeed innovate when he introduced a new psychological definition of *émotion* in *Les passions de l'ame*. At a time when the term had established psychological *and* physical uses, he chose to highlight only one of these. The problem is that Descartes fails to employ his psychological sense of *émotion* consistently after he says that it would be better if we used it instead of *passion*. He seems unable to extricate himself from the entangled state of the affective vocabulary of his time, which is reflected in both the French and Latin versions of his text – even if he did not translate or check the Latin version himself. Even so, Descartes's introduction of *émotion*, in this new restricted psychological sense, certainly did have an impact. It inspired a series of efforts by later French, English, and other European thinkers, to explore the relation between 'passion' and 'emotion'.[48] However, this observation goes beyond the bounds of the present study and requires a separate treatment of its own.

Ironically, the challenges Descartes faced in trying to adopt and employ the psychological meaning of the term *émotion* are arguably still with us today. Referring to the role of Thomas Brown and Charles Bell in the historical trajectory of 'emotion' in English, historian Thomas Dixon writes: 'While Brown and Bell agreed that an "emotion" was itself something mental,

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[48] Louis C. Charland, 'Science and morals in the affective psychopathology of Philippe Pinel', *History of Psychiatry*, 21, 1 (2010): 38-53; 'The distinction between 'Passion' and 'Emotion'. Vincenzo Chiarugi: a case study', History of Psychiatry, 25, 4, (2014): 477-484; 'William James on Passion and Emotion: Influence of Théodule Ribot', *Emotion Review*, 11, 3 (2019): 234-246.

they differed over whether its constituents were primarily mental or bodily. The tensions between these two models were never fully resolved'.[49] Documenting Descartes's initial struggle with *émotion* is an important historical step in understanding the troubled status of 'emotion' today.

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[49] Dixon, '"Emotion": The History of a Keyword in Crisis,' 341.