

## HATE'S BODY: DANGER AND THE FLESH IN DESCARTES' *PASSIONS OF THE SOUL*

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Recent literature on René Descartes' *Passions of the Soul* has sought to erode his reputation as the inventor of the isolated subject, the mind severed both from the body and other people. The *Passions* fleshes out the "puzzling I" of the *Meditations* that so irritated Pierre Gassendi,<sup>1</sup> among others, by elaborating a complex understanding of the embodied person, a portrait of the "passionate mind,"<sup>2</sup> and a full-blooded take on "the Entire Nature of Man,"<sup>3</sup> which regards those moved by passions to be "capable of enjoying the sweetest pleasures of this life" (*PS*, a. 212; *CSM I*, 404). Attention to Descartes' correspondence, as well as to his late writings, poses problems for a facile treatment of the Cartesian legacy as the source of the solitary and disembodied ego, radically estranged from its body, other people, and the natural world. Moreover, his late writings suggest an unconscious life of the mind,<sup>4</sup> calling into question the view of the Cartesian subject as fundamentally self-transparent, able to master his body and external nature by way of simple exercises of the will. Indeed, there is much to be found in the *Passions* and the correspondence to upset the caricature of Descartes that populates so many critiques of modernity.

Good work in the history of philosophy often challenges our entrenched ideas about familiar figures and provokes us to reconsider the canned narratives we present to our students and colleagues. Work on Descartes faces a particular challenge in this respect, since he is held, justly or not, to be responsible for so many contemporary assumptions about human existence. Recent commentary has been especially concerned to reject the role that Descartes has been seen to play in promoting a vision of atomic personhood, in which we are fundamentally separate from our bodies and (thus) other people. Attention to his late writings reveals a philosopher, in the words of Deborah Brown, "sensi-

tive to the fact that our embodiment is important to our identities as individuals and socially related persons.”<sup>5</sup> Similarly, Rebecca Wilkin contends that Descartes’ treatise on the passions describes a relational, “ethical being who perceives him- or herself in varying degrees of connection to others.”<sup>6</sup> Descartes’ remarks on the passion of love, in particular, are cited to challenge the received view of the solitary Cartesian subject. Love can inspire a nonegoist ethical stance toward the world, even encouraging self-sacrifice in certain circumstances.<sup>7</sup> “The image of the Cartesian agent as an egoistical individual,” Cecilia Wee thus estimates, “receives a serious dent from these accounts of love and sacrifice.”<sup>8</sup> Thus, a number of scholars exhort us to revise the image of the Cartesian person as an asocial, solitary, and isolated ego.

The main point in favor of revising this portrait of the Cartesian ego is his treatment of embodiment and human relationships in his late writings. While it is true that, as Descartes remarks about himself, he is “not one of those cruel philosophers who want[s] their sage to be insensible,”<sup>9</sup> I think that from “Descartes embodied”<sup>10</sup> we get a more conflicted and ambivalent being than these revisionist projects suggest. Wilkin contends most boldly that the notion of Descartes as the father of individualism is a mistake. She argues that an examination of the corporeal foundation of Cartesian moral psychology yields a fundamentally relational subject.<sup>11</sup> Even if the passions are, by nature, relational phenomena,<sup>12</sup> viewing Descartes through the lens of his remarks on love and connection is at least partial and one-sided. Relationships of connection and affinity are not the only ones that Descartes examines or prioritizes in his study of the passions. Indeed, Descartes asserts that, as long as we are bound to these mortal coils, “sadness is in some way primary and more necessary than joy, and hatred more necessary than love; for it is more important to repel [*repousser*] things which are harmful and potentially destructive than to acquire those things which add some perfection which we can subsist without” (*PS* a. 137; *CMS* I, 376). Although several scholars analyze Descartes’ meditations on love, they barely touch on his substantial discussion of hatred. This imbalance is remarkable given the primacy of hatred for mortal beings. Attention to Descartes’ account of hatred, love’s necessary complement, we will see, reveals that it is precisely our embodiment that requires us to assert and maintain our power to withdraw from relationships and affirm our distinctness. Thus, although Descartes acknowledges the enduring effects of our corporeal involvement with others, our embodiment mandates that we must both depend on and guard ourselves against others. To be embodied, for Descartes, is to be forced to negotiate the fraught arena of corporeal communication and contact, without which we would not survive but against which we must also protect ourselves. Moreover,

the necessity of warding off the noxious effects of other beings issues from the body as opposed to the soul. If I must preserve my boundaries and cultivate an idiosyncratic sense of what is good for me as a distinct being, it is because of the body to which my soul is joined in this life.

Thus, while I wholeheartedly agree that a more complicated Descartes is to be found by way of a close study of the *Passions of the Soul* as well as the correspondence, the nuanced figure who defies caricature is not simply an inversion of the received view. It is at least an overstatement to find in his moral writings on human relationships a denial of our fundamental individuality. Moreover, acknowledgment of the deep ambivalence within embodied existence, the dangers and pleasures proper to human relationships, may yield a more interesting Descartes than one who simply extols the virtues of the human bond. With a complex view of “the entire nature of man,” we find a portrait of a creature who is fully capable of enjoying embodied life, regarding the passions to be “all by nature good” (*PS* a. 211; *CSM*, 403–4) and who is defined in no small part by the ministrations of caregivers and childhood relationships.<sup>13</sup> Yet, his fuller take on human existence does not preclude a deep wariness of corporeal vulnerability and the threats posed by our relations to others. For Descartes, hate is necessary and primary because, as fragile beings, we cannot simply allow ourselves to be affected by whatever (and whomever) we encounter. Rather, we must protect ourselves from those others who poison or demean us. Ignoring this aspect of Descartes’ picture of human relationships in the *Passions of the Soul* may be useful for upsetting the received view of Descartes’ lonely meditator, but it may cost us the considerably more ambivalent and complex vision of human life that he shares with Princess Elisabeth.

I begin this paper with a survey of the textual evidence for a new Cartesian subject, a post-Cartesian Cartesian individual, for whom the life of the body, its passions, and its relationships are central. In the second section, I consider his remarks on hatred, which complicate his view of embodied life. Even if Descartes’ study of the passions in his treatise as well as his correspondence calls for a more nuanced understanding of the Cartesian person, we will find in his attention to embodiment a conflicted and wary human being for whom relationships can be noxious and bitter just as easily as they can be nourishing and sweet.<sup>14</sup>

### LOVING RELATIONS

The turn to a consideration of Descartes’ treatment of love, especially by feminist commentators like Wilkin, aims to challenge Susan Bordo’s influential presentation of Descartes’ scientific legacy as one of “supermasculinization.” For many theorists, the Cartesian subject has

become synonymous with the specter of the ego that is radically alienated from its body, world, and fellows. In Bordo's words, "[T]he separate self, conscious of itself and its own distinctness from a world outside it, is born in the Cartesian era. This was a *psychocultural* birth" that simultaneously reflected and generated experiences of "inwardness" and "separation anxiety," feelings of being isolated in a hostile world.<sup>15</sup> While previous cultural critics identified the Cartesian era with interiority and a reduction of mind to consciousness,<sup>16</sup> Bordo builds on their analyses by identifying the specter of solipsism with a distinctively masculine stance of "absolute *detachment*."<sup>17</sup> A project of detachment is masculine, for Bordo, not in that it is characteristic of biological males but in the Freudian sense that it is normatively appropriate for a masculine subject to strive consistently to individuate himself from his original immersion in his mother. On such a view, rationality requires that the erotic subject renounce his bond with his mother and liberate himself to observe his body, nature, and other people without the distortions provoked by sympathetic affinity and a feeling of unity with the sensuous world.

Bordo criticizes the Cartesian ambition to individuate one's mental contents from those of other people ("opinion") and to cleanse them of the distortions of the body as a normatively masculine one. In particular, Cartesian methodology valorizes the ability to isolate ideas, including the idea of the ego, as the condition of possibility for their certainty. She does not claim that the Cartesian subject is not psychologically or causally constituted by its relations with others but that the scientific ideal espoused in the *Meditations* aspires to overcome or minimize the relational and corporeal elements of selfhood in order to grasp what is clear and distinct. The idea I have of myself independent of sensation, the opinions of others, or metaphysical dogma reveals that "it is certain that I am really distinct from my body, and can exist without it" (*Meditation* VI; CSM II, 54). Descartes maintains that we are the kinds of beings who can conceive of our minds independently of our bodies and of our minds independently of other finite minds. Since we can conceive the distinction between our minds and bodies clearly and distinctly, we must also confirm that the distinction between them is real and not merely conceptual (*Principles of Philosophy*, pt. I, a. 60; CSM I, 213). When two things are really distinct, we do not need the concept of one in order to conceive of the other. No notion of extension is needed in order to grasp the essence of a thinking substance, and vice versa. The methodology of determining the character of reality through a criterion of mental clarity is seen to support "epistemic individualism," understood as a scientific perspective that follows from the distinct apprehension of the ego, independent of representations of sensuous objects, including one's body and other people. Cartesian analysis authorizes an ideal of

cognitive autonomy to be fulfilled by the detached scientific observer.<sup>18</sup> The ideal of the ego able to distinguish itself from its representations in order to produce a criterion of certainty informs the received view of Cartesianism that comes to define modernity and technological rationality. To what extent this epistemic individualism entails an ideal of a certain kind of personhood (ethical individualism) has become a source of contention among scholars.<sup>19</sup>

In a compelling article, Rebecca Wilkin challenges the reception of Descartes among feminists and critics of modernity as the “inveterate dualist and ‘man-midwife’ of individualism.”<sup>20</sup> Wilkin thereby joins a host of scholars who, like Annette Baier, Deborah Brown, and Amélie Rorty, have, without denying Descartes’ egoism and dualism, forced any serious student of early modern thought and its legacy to reconsider what these doctrines entail. Attention to the *Passions of Soul*, the correspondence, and the sixth meditation reveals that dualism, for example, does not mean that the body is invariably an obstacle to knowledge, at least not when the kind of knowledge sought concerns the character and virtues of a human being. The body’s animal spirits excite passions in the soul to which it is intimately joined for the duration of a human life from conception to death. Even if such passions are described as “confused thoughts,” Descartes is clear that they often *contribute* to understanding, since they inspire the soul to engender and preserve clearer thoughts and salutary judgments, while also profoundly enriching human experience. Descartes, even if he unequivocally avows a “real distinction” of the mind and body, clearly values the passions and regards the mind-body union to be obvious and known to all by experience.<sup>21</sup> With respect to the passions, he asserts that the greatest souls undergo more potent passions than lesser souls and, moreover, receive the most benefit from intense rather than moderate passions.<sup>22</sup> While Descartes has almost ceaselessly been accused of advocating the transcendence of the body, he clearly does not advocate an extirpation of bodily induced passions.

As Annette Baier points out, moreover, the Cartesian ego is not entirely solitary. Descartes posits mental community between a finite thinker and an infinite thinker.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, she points out that, rather than “consistently bypassing the epistemic significance of early experiences with other people,”<sup>24</sup> as Lorraine Code charges, Descartes exhibits “obscure consciousness” of the developmental and dependent aspects of personhood. Indeed, in the *Passions of the Soul*, such consciousness does not even seem so obscure. Descartes presents early childhood and even intrauterine experience as important and enduring features of human existence without which we would lack the will to survive. It is on these grounds that Wilkin goes further than most interpreters in her revision of the Cartesian legacy. Like many others, she objects to

dualism understood as an antagonism between the mind and body. She contests especially the correlated thesis that the mind's independence from the body reflects and reinforces the self's independence from others, iconically represented by the meditator looking out the window questioning whether he sees automata or fellow humans. In contrast to the received understanding of the "lone cogitator of the *Discours* or the unmoored mind of the second Meditation,"<sup>25</sup> Wilkin finds in Descartes' remarks on intrauterine life a notion of the person marked indelibly by an enduring bond with the mother that contours its sense of self and relations to others for the entirety of her or his life.

Indeed, Descartes notes that the first joy felt by the soul occurs when it is initially joined to its body and nourished by the mother's alimentary juices (*PS* a. 107, a. 109; *CSM* I, 365–66). This joy immediately prompts love, that passion that "impels the soul to join itself willingly to objects that appear to be agreeable to it" (*PS* a. 79; *CS* I, 356). The nourishment the mother's body provides in the womb moves the soul to will its connection to the mother's body as well as its own. The first human experience is of a relationship; that is, of the sensations aroused by corporeal communication between the mother and her fetus. Moreover, this experience of oneself in and with another, to allude to G. W. F. Hegel,<sup>26</sup> is not transient and ephemeral. The soul carries the traces of this original love throughout life, such that "the same movement of the spirits has ever since accompanied the passion of love" (*PS* a. 107; *CSM* I, 366).

Love appears in the *Passions of the Soul* as one of the six primitive passions; it is both ontologically and phenomenologically basic. It is a fundamental feature of embodied existence and probably the first experience the soul undergoes on being united with its body. Descartes notes in a letter that prenatal experience certainly includes joy and love, likely sadness and hatred as well, the sensations of which always recur with those same passions as long as we remain embodied.<sup>27</sup> Love involves coming to think of ourselves as parts of a whole and persisting in the will that we remain bound to this whole (*PS* a. 83; *CSM* I, 357). Love is thus a passion that connects us to others and invests us in preserving this connection as a source of our vitality. Descartes' portrait of love as something that both arouses representations of ourselves as parts of wholes and evokes the history of an individual's attachments attenuates, at minimum, the solipsism often attributed to Cartesian consciousness.<sup>28</sup>

Before elaborating further, we should note that Descartes defines the passions most basically in functional terms. The passions alert the soul to the different ways objects "may harm or benefit us, or in general be important to us." They serve to "dispose our soul to will the things

which nature deems useful for us, and to persist in this volition" (*PS* a. 52; *CSM* I, 350). Although the scope of the notion of what is "important" is perhaps ambiguous, the primitive passions have special regard for the survival and welfare of the embodied individual. The passions guide the soul joined to a healthy body to want what is good for it. The primacy of wonder suggests that, for Descartes, what is good for the embodied individual may not be narrowly circumscribed by corporeal needs. A passion like wonder that incites curiosity certainly facilitates survival but arguably extends beyond mere bodily endurance to interest in knowing the infinite power that creates and sustains us. Joy and love, in particular, alert us to those things in the world that suit us, that contribute to our well-being and enhance our existence.

The fetus's joy is a confused thought in response to its first sensations, interpreted to indicate a "present good" (*PS* a. 61; *CSM* I, 351). Love is a kind of native intelligence of the fetal soul, by which it assents to be joined to the good that is the combination of its mother's body with its own.<sup>29</sup> The first passions reveal both what is needed for the soul-body union to persevere in being and involve an affirmation, however obscure at this point, that the mother's body is beneficial. Her alimentary juices encourage the fetal soul to be joined to its own body and to find in embodied life stimulation, pleasure, and interest. As Descartes remarks to Chanut, "[O]ur soul would have no reason to want to remain joined to its body for even one minute if it could not feel" passions.<sup>30</sup> Love, *in* and *ex utero*, offers compelling reasons to remain alive, connected to our bodies and to other people. The first sensations and thoughts that Descartes describes are not of oneself as a discrete, isolated being. The first thoughts, although confused by their overwhelmingly corporeal character,<sup>31</sup> may not yet be discursive, but if we could narrate them, they might go something like this: juice is good, I love this "fuel," this connection, this body, and this life. Effectively, the first intrauterine representations and volitions enable the soul-body union to persist and the human being to survive and develop.

Love is not, however, confined to an affirmation of what conduces to survival in a narrowly biological sense. Intrauterine love prefigures and orients future love "by which we consider ourselves henceforth as joined with what we love in such a manner that we imagine a whole, of which we take ourselves to be only one part, and the thing loved to be the another" (*PS* a. 80; *CSM* I, 356). Descartes notes that this thought of oneself as a part of a whole can take several forms. The passion that a miser has for money, an addict for sweet escape, or even a "brutish man for a woman he wants to violate" participates in the same love a good father has for his children. Each of these figures understands himself to form a whole with the beloved object. Yet, Descartes picks out the love of

the good father as a representation of love in pure form, unmixed with the ignoble passions of the drunkard or rapist.<sup>32</sup>

The love of a good father for his children is so pure that he desires nothing from them, and he wants neither to possess them otherwise than he does, nor to be joined to them more closely than he already is. He regards them, rather, as other parts of himself [*considerant comme d'autres soy-mesme*]. . . . [H]e imagines that he and they together form a whole of which he is not the better part, and so he often puts their interests before his own and is not afraid of sacrificing himself in order to save them. (*PS* a. 82; *CSM* I, 357)

In writing to Chanut, Descartes cites Virgil favorably in observing that “friendship is not perfect unless each is ready to say in favor of the other: ‘It is I who did the deed, I am here, turn your swords against me.’”<sup>33</sup> Love may entail sacrifice of one’s biological life when one does not comprise “the best part of the whole.” Moreover, for Descartes, we *ought* to consider ourselves to be the lesser part of the wholes we form with our children, country, or God, and be willing to “embrace with greater ardour the interests” of those we love than our own. Descartes warns, however, that, just as it would be “preposterous to risk the whole body for the preservation of our hair,”<sup>34</sup> it would be perverse if one were to sacrifice herself for a beloved flower or a horse since they are less noble than ourselves (*PS* a. 83; *CSM* I, 357).

In contrast to the image of the paranoid skeptic who gazes on others only through a window, Wilkin claims that relationships are essential to the Cartesian self that we find in Descartes’ late writings. The *Passions* offers an unexpected paradigm of human life, in which “good fathers who love their children were once fetuses who depended on their mother’s bodies for nourishment.”<sup>35</sup> Moreover, in place of Aristophanes’ erotic story devoid of maternal figures, “the fetus’s connection to the mother . . . is the originary unity that informs Descartes’ characterization of love.”<sup>36</sup> Descartes can thus be said to acknowledge human dependency and to celebrate human association, including love, friendship, and sacrifice on behalf of another. Relationships, moreover, are not simply contingent and ephemeral features of our lives. Our experience is defined by our relations to others in conscious and unconscious ways. In particular, Descartes repeatedly remarks on the enduring effects of intrauterine life, a relationship that contours one’s thoughts and volitions as long as one remains an embodied being. He explains, for example, highly idiosyncratic aversions as effects of

having been greatly disturbed [*offensez*] by some object in the early years of their life. Or it may result from their having shared the feeling their mother had when she was disturbed by such an object

while pregnant; for it is certain that there is a connection between all the movements of a mother and those of a child in her womb, so that anything adverse to the one is harmful to the other. (*PS* a. 136; *CSM* I, 376)

The fetus is not simply in the mother as cargo is in a ship. There is a connection between *all* their movements; they form a consummate whole and enjoy a full relationship. Sympathetic feeling in the womb not only provokes surprising associations and peculiar tastes but disposes one to be harmed by what was disagreeable (*contraire*) to the mother. Descartes' claim implies at least two things: (1) the effects of an original human relationship provoke unconscious associations with objects that populate psychic life; and (2) early relationships constitute the disposition of our bodies in significant and enduring ways. Indeed, in his letters to Elisabeth, he explains his own psychic and corporeal afflictions as an inheritance from his mother who died not long after his birth. He seems to consider his mother's illness, as well as her death, to be key explanatory factors of his physiology and character.<sup>37</sup>

Love is said to raise questions about the extent and character of Descartes' individualism because he uses the holistic language of parts and wholes. Indeed, his remarks on love have been interpreted to imply cosmic holism by at least one serious student of the *Passions*, while others view them as a qualification of his egoism<sup>38</sup> or a softening of the Vulcan edges of his rationalism.<sup>39</sup> Although I see no evidence for cosmic holism in Descartes, his thoughts on love are somewhat equivocal on the ontological status of human individuals. On the one hand, Descartes typically uses the language of *representation*, *imagination*, and *consideration* to describe the lover's sense of himself as part of a whole. Moreover, we know that a hallmark of the Cartesian mind is the ability of the will to affirm or deny any representation whatsoever. The language of representation, then, implies that being a part of various wholes is a self-representation that guides one's actions but does not have the power to determine or constrain them. Thinking in terms of parts and wholes might be viewed as an important moral exercise, prompted by our physiology, that helps one to determine what goods to pursue and, in extreme cases, whether to sacrifice one's life on behalf of one's "better half." On this understanding, self-sacrifice is optional because one is not ontologically subject to the wholes of which one is a part.

In a letter to Elisabeth responding to her objection that moral practice requires an infinite science, Descartes claims that we need only preserve in mind the most useful truths to be confident that our judgments are good. He completes his list of these four truths with the claim that

[t]hough each of us is a person distinct from others, whose interests are accordingly in some way different from those of the rest of the world, we ought still to think that none of us could subsist alone and that each one of us is really one of the many parts of the universe, and more particularly a part of the earth, the state, the society and the family to which we belong by our domicile, our oath of allegiance, and our birth. And the interests of the whole, of which each of us is a part, must always be preferred to our own particular person.<sup>40</sup>

Frierson concludes in his reading of this passage that “Descartes does *not* in fact mean to claim that we actually *are* one of the many parts of the universe. Rather, his claim is that we ought to *think* of ourselves that way.”<sup>41</sup> As others have argued, the truths that guide action are not necessarily those that ground metaphysics or science.<sup>42</sup> Descartes clearly wants his moral actors to engage in a robust consideration of the others on whom we depend, especially God and the state but also our children, friends, and, albeit to a lesser extent, our spouses. There are certain others whom we *ought* to regard as “other ourselves” (*autres soy-mesmes*), other parts of a whole to which we also belong, and for whom we should be willing to forsake our own interests. *Pace* Earthfirst!, if those others are trees or whales, he estimates that we would exhibit “disordered mind[s].” Moreover, with respect to those clearly worthy of our devotion—like monarchs, children, and friends—Descartes uses the idiom of social contract theory to assert that we ought to be willing to “transfer” the care we take of ourselves to them.<sup>43</sup> The choice of the word “transfer” suggests that the care that we would ordinarily give to ourselves is originally our own and should be voluntarily given over to another but can be withheld. Nothing about the wholes of which we are parts, including divinity, constrains our will, forcing us to behave one way or another.

Nevertheless, Descartes’ warnings about the dangers of love indicate a *fear* on his part that relationships are constitutive and insuperable elements of selfhood. He urges that, in the presence of potentially noxious elements, it is better to hate than to love. In Descartes’ words, “there is more *danger* in being joined to something which is bad, and in being as it were *transformed into* this thing, than there is in being separated willingly from a thing which is good.”<sup>44</sup> With the qualification of the threat of transformation by the phrase “as it were,” Descartes signals that the loss of ourselves provoked by loving what is bad for us is not a literal ontological mutation but is a metaphorical exaggeration of how love affects us. One might see in this warning, however, a buried acknowledgment that relationships really do make us who we are, fundamentally and ineluctably. Perhaps the relation to the mother is a salutary constitutive transformation by which we become other than we

were. But, for Descartes, even the fetal soul is originally unique, with a distinct volitional power that is, at least in principle, separable from the representations provoked by sensations.

Moreover, following our primordial love of maternal juice are invariably sadness and the urge to separate from the other intrinsic to hatred. Hatred is an isolating passion by which we separate ourselves from others; and, in this life, while the soul is joined to the body, Descartes declares that it is more important and less dangerous than love (*PS* a. 142; *CSM* I, 378–79). Below we will find that, even if consummate unification of the perfect and imperfect thinker is desirable for Descartes, hate protects us from dangerous contact.

### HATEFUL ISOLATION

Descartes dedicates more of his analysis to love than to hatred. Although he mentions that it belongs to the nature of love to make us chatty even when we know very little,<sup>45</sup> it is not only due to its being a more lubricating topic that commentators have paid much greater attention to his treatment of love. The lack of any significant attention to hatred and sadness, however, results in a one-sided treatment of Descartes' primitive social passions. Attention to sadness and hatred reveals that our embodied nature is precisely what requires the repulsive lever of hatred to protect us from harmful others. Just as one bears the imprint of fetal love throughout one's embodied existence, the healthy individual preserves a salutary and self-protecting hatred. Whereas love urges us to join with others, hate erects a barrier. It is Descartes' reasonable contention that we need this barrier as long as we are alive. A key feature of his dualist perspective is that the body's interests, as *opposed* to the soul's, dictate that sadness and hatred are "in some way primary and more necessary" than joy and love, "for it is more important to repel things which are harmful and potentially destructive than to acquire those which add some perfection which we can subsist without" (*PS* a. 137; *CSM* I, 376). Resonating with Thomas Hobbes, Descartes finds that the fragility of the flesh makes hatred a necessary (and primary) evil within human relationships. Let us look closer at this salutary but costly passion.

Sadness is first felt, according to Descartes, when we lack nourishment (*PS* a. 110; *CSM* I, 367), and hatred is often a response to unsuitable juice consumed in the womb (*PS* a. 108; *CSM* I, 366). He defines hatred as the precise antonym to love: "Hatred is an emotion caused by the spirits, which impels the soul to want [*vouloir*] to be separated from objects which are presented to it as harmful" (*PS* a. 79; *CSM* I, 356).<sup>46</sup> Somewhat ambiguously, Descartes attempts to clarify his assertion

about volition in the following article. He notes that he does not mean the desire for a future state but the “consent [*consentement*] by which we consider ourselves . . . alone as a whole, entirely separated from the thing for which we have an aversion” (*PS* a. 80; *CSM* I, 356). Setting the obscurities of his doctrine of the will aside, we can observe that hatred involves a shift in perspective from that of love. The arousal of the spirits prompts the thought by which one consents to a representation of herself as a solitude, a whole unto herself, entirely separate from the object of hatred.<sup>47</sup>

Hatred, as Byron Williston points out, may be preceded by love. It may be especially important to separate ourselves from those things to which we once considered ourselves to be intimately joined.<sup>48</sup> Hatred is an isolating passion that causes us to view ourselves as self-sufficient wholes and thereby protects us from those objects to which we may be drawn but which also arouse sadness in us. Sadness names “an unpleasant listlessness which affects the soul when it suffers from an evil or deficiency which impressions in the brain represent to it as its own” (*PS* a. 92; *CSM* I, 361). The physiological effects of sadness and hatred are similar, each provoking a more or less intense form of dyspepsia. Hatred and sadness both prompt the heart to contract in order to constrict the influx of harmful juices (*PS* a. 108, a. 110; *CSM* I, 366–67). In sadness, the stomach continues to metabolize the depressing humors and fluids; but, in hatred, the noxious effects are impossible to neutralize. Thus, “the stomach ceases to perform its function, being inclined to regurgitate and reject the food we have eaten, or at any rate to spoil it and turn it into bad humors” (*PS* a. 98; *CSM* I, 363). Sadness and hatred protect the mind-body union from injurious elements, including those caused by traumatic events and negative encounters with fellow humans. Feelings of hatred are not just evaluations of the merits of objects or human beings but indications of physiological harm. They alert us to how names and images as well as sticks and stones can hurt us.

Descartes notes that we, as vulnerable, embodied beings, need sadness and hatred, but hatred especially entails disadvantages for the scientist. Because hatred separates us from the object hated, it is not especially discerning. Hate, thus, does not have as many species as love: “we do not notice the difference between evils from which we are separated” (*PS* a. 84; *CSM* I, 358; translation modified). Things we hate look more or less alike: repulsive. Things we love shine forth in their variety and richness. In being joined to things, we come to know them better. Thus, the passion of love, the physiological stimulation and will to be connected to something, can lead to intellectual love. Intellectual love is not caused by the body. It is an “interior emotion” provoked by the soul itself on judging something that belongs to us to be good (*PS* a.

139; CSM I, 377). Like so many in the history of philosophy, Descartes binds love closely to knowledge. Hatred, in estranging us from things that might be loved, costs us knowledge. This estrangement, this loss of a good we might have possessed, is one reason that hatred and sadness so often come together. We cannot but be saddened by the privation that alienation entails. In Descartes' words, "[T]here is nothing real that does not have some goodness in it; so the hatred that estranges us from some evil estranges us by that very means from the good it is joined to" (*PS* a. 140; CSM I, 377–78). We may be familiar with this loss from the experiences of formerly pleasant friendships gone sour. In that case, we may intensely mourn the loss of the good that we enjoyed with our friend, but hatred maintains the barrier that protects us from the bad effects of the relationship.

Descartes maintains that the soul, in contrast to the body, is invulnerable. Evil, for Descartes as for the schoolmen, is only privation and nothing real. The soul cannot actually suffer evil. The soul, thus, has nothing to lose by joining itself to as many things as possible and knowing and loving them without reserve. Intellectual love—love of what is known to be truly good—cannot be excessive:

I say also that it cannot be too great, for all that the most excessive love can do is join us so perfectly to these goods that the love we have especially for ourselves places no distinction between us and them; and this, I believe, can never be bad. And it is necessarily followed by joy, because it represents to us what we love as a good belonging to us. (*PS* a. 139; CSM I, 377)

The soul admits of infinite expansion. With intellectual love, we do not make a distinction between ourselves and what we love. According to Alexandre Matheron, Descartes makes love the vehicle by which an individual ideally appropriates the good in the universe, especially divine power.<sup>49</sup> The ambition of the soul is to represent as much reality as possible "as a good that belongs to us."

The body, however, is finite. It cannot digest all of reality and thereby enjoy cosmic oneness with infinite thinking substance. The dyspeptic body must protect itself from corrosive forces, even if those threatening forces are only the intense agitations of immoderate pleasure. "If we had no body," according to Descartes, "I dare to say that we could not go too far in abandoning ourselves to love and joy, or in avoiding hatred and sadness. But *all of* the bodily movements accompanying these passions may be injurious to health when they are very violent; on the other hand, they may be beneficial to it when they are only moderate" (*PS* a. 141; CSM I, 378; my emphasis). Love and joy must be held in check for the sake of our bodily welfare. And hatred and sadness cannot be shunned

but must be moderately sustained and given due weight to protect ourselves from noxious elements. The Bacchanalian revelry in the frenzy of truth is counterindicated for the body and, if infinitely enjoyable for the soul, must await the loss of its mortal coil.

It is unsurprising, then, that Descartes counsels his dear friend Elisabeth to guard in mind as one of the four most “useful truths” that “each of us is a person separate from others and, by consequence, with interests that are in some manner distinct from the rest of the world.”<sup>50</sup> The practical importance of our distinctness, I have aimed to show, is imposed not by the metaphysical separateness of the individual soul but by the needs of our vulnerable bodies. The bodily need for hate and sadness belongs both to the inherited and acquired idiosyncrasies of our physiology and the generic need of all bodies to undergo passions only in moderation. It is our passionate and embodied existence that demands our individuation, occasionally our isolation, and the volitional power to regard ourselves alone, as a whole, entirely separate from what we hate. That is, even if human relationships are important, enriching, and informative, we must also regard ourselves as the kinds of beings who can and should withdraw ourselves from harmful relationships when they provoke too much passionate intensity or otherwise corrupt our bodily welfare.

The notion of an independent and solitary ego fueled especially by the second meditation has, as several scholars have shown, overshadowed the richer view of human life in Descartes’ philosophy. I agree that it is a distortion to find in Descartes a vision of radical atomism that flatly denies “the epistemic significance of early experiences with other people,” as Lorraine Code contends.<sup>51</sup> The *Passions of the Soul* could not have been written had early experiences with other people and the loving relation between mother and fetus been deemed insignificant. And even if the *Passions* is not a narrowly epistemological project, it must, as a branch of the same tree, be compatible with it. The precise problem with the normatively masculine individualism that feminist critics, for example, have found in Descartes, or the broader category of “Cartesianism,” cannot be seen simply as the denial of dependency and loving relationships. Even if an element of “absolute detachment” from opinion, sensations, circumstances, and other people remains detectable in Descartes’ remedies for dangerous passions (*PS* a. 211; *CS* I, 403), it is only one of the several useful truths for moral agents. For humans considered in terms of their entire nature, relationships are necessary and precious, passions are often sweet, and our distinctive interests ought, sometimes, to be forsaken for those of the wholes to which we belong. Practically, it always remains the case that “one does not know how to subsist alone.”<sup>52</sup>

Nevertheless, those who have turned to love to undermine the myth of Cartesian solipsism ought to consider the fuller picture. Although it is true that, for Descartes, we survive only because we love, he concomitantly and emphatically maintains that we do not persist without the armor of hate. The life of the flesh, on Descartes' account, is not only an existence filled with delectable passions, wondrous provocations, and nourishing human relations. Being a mind joined to a body entails dangers to which sadness and hatred alert us. Simply put, to be embodied is to be dangerously exposed to others, for better and for worse.

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## NOTES

1. See the fifth set of objections to the *Meditations* in CSM, vol. 2: *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, 2 vols., trans. J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff, and D. Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985). I cite CSM, followed by the volume (in roman numerals) and page numbers within the text.

2. D. Brown, *Descartes and the Passionate Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

3. Part I on the *Passions on the Soul* is titled "About the Passions in General, and Incidentally about the Entire Nature of Man." I will hereafter cite the title (*PS*) followed by the article number (e.g., a. 50) within the text. I generally follow, but sometimes modify, the translation from CSM I. I refer also to the French original, *Les passions de l'âme* (Paris: Vrin, 1999).

4. See A. Gombay, "Sigmund Descartes?" *Philosophy* 83, no. 3 (2008): 293–310.

5. Brown, *Descartes and the Passionate Mind*, 164.

6. R. Wilkin, "Descartes, Individualism, and the Fetal Subject," *Differences* 19, no. 8 (2008): 120.

7. P. Frierson, "Learning to Love: From Egoism to Generosity in Descartes," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 40, no. 3 (2002): 313–38.

8. C. Wee, "Self, Other, and Community in Cartesian Ethics," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 19, no. 3 (2002): 262.

9. Letter to Elisabeth, May 18, 1645. *The Correspondence between Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia and René Descartes*, ed. and trans. L. Shapiro (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2007).

10. D. Garber, *Descartes Embodied: Reading Cartesian Philosophy through Cartesian Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

11. Her provocative article, "Descartes, Individualism, and the Fetal Subject," goes significantly further than the ingenious argument of A. Baier, "Cartesian Persons," for a view of Cartesian persons and "second persons." In *Philosophia* 10, nos. 3–4 (1981): 179–82.

12. See S. James, *Passions and Action: The Emotions in Seventeenth-Century Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

13. Cf. Baier, "Cartesian Persons."

14. Such a view resonates with the concerns of Descartes' near-contemporaries, like Thomas Hobbes and Baruch Spinoza.

15. S. Bordo, "Selections from *The Flight to Objectivity*," *Feminist Interpretations of René Descartes* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1999), 48–69.

16. For example, S. Toulmin, "The Inwardness of Mental Life," *Critical Inquiry* 6 (1976): 1–16; and R. Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979).

17. Bordo, "Selections from *The Flight to Objectivity*," 65.

18. See B. Gertler, "Can Feminists Be Cartesians?" *Dialogue: Canadian Philosophical Review* 41 (2002): 91–112.

19. A satisfying investigation of individualism(s) in Descartes would, I suspect, require a book-length treatment and is beyond the scope of this paper.

20. Wilkin, "Descartes, Individualism, and the Fetal Subject," 109.

21. In a well-known and fascinating letter, he notes that it is simply impossible to conceive of the distinction of the mind and body at the same time as their union. Moreover, the distinction is something known only by philosophy (anticipating Immanuel Kant's antinomies of reason), and the *problem* of grasping the substantial union of mind and body is imposed by philosophical practice only on philosophers. No one else has any difficulty recognizing the truth of our being both minded and embodied. Finally, he recommends meditating on the distinction only a "few hours per year," lest it impede one's ability to function in life. Letter to Elisabeth, June 28, 1643.

22. See letter to Elisabeth, September 1, 1645. Elisabeth, however, expresses confusion about this claim multiple times.

23. Baier, "Cartesian Persons," 173.

24. L. Code, "Taking Subjectivity into Account," *Rhetorical Spaces* (London: Routledge, 1995), 46.

25. Wilkin, "Descartes, Individualism, and the Fetal Subject," 120.

26. In particular, his understanding of freedom as being-with-oneself-in-another, in G. W. F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. A. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), §7A.

27. See letter to Hector Pierre Chanut, February 1, 1647. *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. 3, trans. J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff, D. Murdoch, and

A. Kenny (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 305–14. (Hereafter CSMK)

28. See Brown, *Descartes and the Passionate Mind*, 159; and Frierson, “Learning to Love.”

29. The question of fetal will is but a notable case of the ambiguity of volition involved in the passions. I cannot address this within the scope of this discussion, but an interesting treatment of passionate volition, or as the French indicates “*consentement*” can be found in A. Gombay, *Descartes* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), ch. 8.

30. Letter to Chanut, November 1, 1647. CSMK, 300.

31. Descartes notes that we do not remember fetal thoughts or consciousness because our intimacy with our corporeal existence is so powerful at that point. Letter to Chanut, February 1, 1647. CSMK, 308.

32. Matheron claims that the father’s love is pure in the chemical sense of being unmixed with other elements. A. Matheron, “Amour, digestion, et puissance selon Descartes,” *Revue Philosophique de la France et de l’étranger* 4 (1988): 436.

33. Letter to Chanut, February 1, 1647. CSMK, 311.

34. *Ibid.*

35. Wilkin, “Descartes, Individualism, and the Fetal Subject,” 116.

36. *Ibid.*, 117.

37. Letter to Elisabeth, May or June 1645.

38. See Frierson’s paper, which is a response to an unpublished argument for holism by Stephen Voss.

39. This is how I understand Brown’s project in *Descartes and the Passionate Mind*.

40. Letter to Elisabeth, September 15, 1645.

41. Frierson, “Learning to Love,” 333.

42. Baier, “Cartesian Persons,” 171.

43. Letter to Chanut, February 1, 1647, CSMK, 312

44. *Ibid.*; my emphasis.

45. *Ibid.*, CSMK, 308.

46. *Vouloir* could be translated as “want,” suggesting desire, or “will,” implying the more technical notion of volition.

47. The language of consent implies a kind of middle voice whereby the will agrees to give itself over to the received impression of solitude.

48. B. Williston, “The Cartesian Sage and the Problem of Evil,” *Passion and Virtue in Descartes*, ed. B. Williston and A. Gombay (New York: Humanity Books, 2003), 344–82.

49. Matheron, "Amour, digestion, et puissance," 342.
50. Letter to Elisabeth, September 15, 1645.
51. Code, "Taking Subjectivity into Account," 46.
52. September 15, 1645.