THE SUPREMACY OF REASON, WILL AND VIRTUE IN DESCARTES’S MORAL THEORY

Abstract

Descartes’s theory of morals whose general framework is given both in his correspondence with Elizabeth of Bohemia and his last published work, The Passions of the Soul has the feature of a proposal for happy and virtuous life. Starting off the nature and physical mechanism of passions Descartes aspires to establish a moral system which is based upon right use of reason and will. His theory can also be considered as therapeutic in the sense that it offers remedy for disorders of passions and harmful effects of excessive passions. The aim of this paper is to analyse Descartes’s moral theory first by focusing on his view regarding union between mind and body then, dwelling upon the mechanism and the structure of the passions. The significance of virtue and the role of reason and will in mastery of passions will also be elaborated in this paper.

Keywords: Descartes, passions, reason, will, virtue

1 This article is taken from the author’s master thesis entitled The Theory of Passions in Cartesian Philosophy which was submitted to Middle East Technical University in 2006.
DESCARTES’IN AHLAK KURAMINDA AKİL, İSTENÇ VE ERDEMİN EGEMENLİĞİ

Öz


Anahtar Kelimeler: Descartes, tutkular, akıl, istenç, erdem

Introduction

René Descartes is generally known as one of the major philosophers of the modern era. His methodological doubt, views about certainty and mind-body dualism have been influential over last three centuries. Although his theory of morals seems to be overshadowed by his epistemological and metaphysical doctrines, in fact Descartes not only lays stress on the significance of morals in his works but also late in his life he writes a treatise on morality. In the preface of Principles of Philosophy, Descartes likens philosophy to a tree whose “roots are metaphysics, the trunk is physics, and the branches emerging from the trunk are all the other sciences, which may be reduced to three principal ones, namely medicine, mechanics and morals” (Descartes, 1985: 186). A perfect moral system, says Descartes, necessitates “a complete knowledge of the other sciences” and it is “the ultimate level of wisdom” (Descartes, 1985: 186). Thus, he establishes a moral system attached to metaphysics and physical principles and prescribes rules for the contentment in life. The Passions of the Soul (1649), his last published work, is a comprehensive analysis of physical mechanism and causes of passions and an elucidation of passions from a moral framework by highlighting the role of reason, will and virtue. In this work, he also accentuates mastery of passions for happiness and supreme contentment. Although The Passions of the Soul is generally credited with Descartes’s doctrine of morals correspondence between Descartes and Elizabeth of Bohemia which begins in 1643 shows the fact that Descartes already engaged in investigating the existence and the mechanism of passions and rules for happiness before The Passions of the Soul. In his letters, Descartes writes detailed passages about passions, interaction between mind and body, use of passions, pursuit of virtue and steps towards happiness due to Princess Elizabeth’s enquiry on happiness, soul and its relation to body and her eagerness to know more about “substantial union” between mind and body. In his letter dated May 21, 1643, he highlights the fact that despite different
conceptions attributed to body and soul, they in fact form a union. “[A]s regards body in particular, we have only the notion of extension, which entails the notion of shape and motion; and as regards the soul on its own, we have only the notion of thought, which includes the perceptions of the intellect and the inclinations of the will” (Descartes, 1991: 218). However, the soul and the body are said to form a union based on our notions about both soul’s and body’s power to act on each other or move one another. Although Descartes always contends that mind and body are separate entities and have completely different functions in order to give a proper explanation about mechanism of passions, both in his letters to Princess Elizabeth and The Passions of the Soul he propounds the interaction between the soul and body which essentially takes place between the two hemispheres of the brain by means of animal spirits. The causal interaction and union of body and mind underpin Descartes’s theory of morals, the nature and causes of passions.

**The Mechanism of Passions**

Descartes’ famous work *The Meditations*, (1641), is significant in history of philosophy in the sense that it presents a perfect outlook to his metaphysical and epistemological views. In *The Meditations*, he examines the sources and the nature of knowledge, the nature of man, the existence of God, mind-body distinction and substantial unity between them. Before his correspondence with Elizabeth of Bohemia he already touches upon the subject concerning the unity of the mind and the body. In the Sixth Meditation, he first defines mind as unextended and indivisible in contrast to body, which has extension and division. The body might lose one of its parts but it can continue its function. Nevertheless, for the mind it is impossible to think the same because the mind cannot be divided. While the essence of the body is extension thinking is the essence of mind. After defining mind and body as separate entities, Descartes considers the interaction between them. Human beings consist of mind and body and metaphysically these two things exist apart from one another, however; in this life they form a union and they interact. In other words, although mind functions differently from body, they are joined together. He states that “[n]ature also teaches me, by these sensations of pain, hunger, thirst and so on, that I am not merely present in my body as a sailor is present in a ship, but that I am very closely joined and, as it were, intermingled with it, so that I and the body form a unit” (Descartes, 1984: 56). If not so, says Descartes, when our body hurt we would not feel pain. We “perceive the damage purely by the intellect, just as a sailor perceives by sight if anything in his ship is broken” (Descartes, 1984: 56). This is same for our basic sensations like thirst and hunger. We understand our need for food and drink without any confusion which as a matter of fact arises from the association or the union of mind and body. In addition to the Sixth Meditation, in *The Passions of the Soul*, before analyzing the mechanism of passions Descartes reiterates the substantial union of soul and body and points out a specific place where this union ensues. The interaction between soul and body takes place in a specific part in the body. This place, which is between the two hemispheres of the brain, is called the “pineal gland.” Since his specific concern is to give a physical framework for the existence of passions, Descartes examines different parts of body and functions of them. As we know, some organs like heart, brain, muscles, and nerves, liver have important roles for our survival. The circulation of blood is crucial for the proper functioning of all organs. We have two major veins called superior and inferior vena cava, which carry dirty blood to right cavity of the heart. After having been cleaned in the lungs, blood spreads throughout the body from the left side of the heart by means of the great artery. Then, blood circulation occurs. The movements of the muscles and all
sensation depend on our nerves. In his extensive physiological research, Descartes uses the concept “animal spirits” in order to explain the mechanism of sensations. The nerves contain little tubes in which animal spirits flow. Animal spirits, in other words, air or wind flow through the nerves. In the modern sense, animal spirits can be called neurological impulses, which move through the axons. Descartes explains how animal spirits are produced in the brain:

All of the liveliest and finest parts of the blood that the heat has rarefied in the heart ceaselessly enter the cavities of the brain in great numbers. And the reason they go there rather than anywhere else is that all the blood leaving the heart by the great artery flows toward the place in a straight line and since they cannot all enter it because there are only very narrow passages, only the most agitated and the finest of its parts gets there, while the rest spread out into all the other places in the body. Now these fine parts of the blood compose animal spirits (Descartes, 1989: 23).

Descartes aims to disclose the correlation between body and soul by means of animal spirits, or tiny little physical components. In *The Treatise on Man*, he gives a detailed analysis of the movements of muscles and accounts for reflex actions by means of animal spirits. For instance, when our foot contacts with fire, tiny fibres attached to our foot make the pores or small tubes open where animal spirits enter and flow to our muscles “which serve to pull the foot away from the fire, some to muscles which turn the eyes and head to look at it, and some to muscles which make the hands move and the whole body turn in order to protect it” (Descartes, 1985: 101-2). However, says Descartes, it is not true to confine the function of animal spirits to simple movements of the body because they certainly serve higher purposes than actions of muscles and reflex actions. After a thorough analysis of function of the body, Descartes mentions functions of the soul, which are two types: actions and passions. While our volitions are meant by the actions of the soul because “we find by experience that they come directly from our soul and seem to depend only on it” perceptions and emotions which have their origin in the body signify the passions of it because “it is often not our soul makes them such as they are, and because it always receives them from things that are represented by them” (Descartes, 1989: 28). He also gives a clear definition concerning the actions and the passions of the soul in one of his letters to Elizabeth of Bohemia. He characterizes the passions as “all the thoughts which are […] aroused in the soul by cerebral impressions alone without the concurrence of its will” but rather with the engagement of animal spirits (Descartes, 1991: 218). Hereby, he underlines the role of animal spirits in the formation of passions. In order to make the passions of the soul more understandable Descartes sets to work by clarifying perceptions, sensations or emotions. He divides passions into three: The first type is perceptual sensations caused by external objects such as light of a torch or sound of a bell. The second type is our bodily sensations referred to our bodies such as pain, thirst, and hunger. The last type of passions is the passions of the soul like feelings of love, hate, wonder, anger, joy, sadness etc. The third type of passions is the main subject of *The Passions of the Soul*. Any types of passions originate in the body by means of the animal spirits and pineal gland has a crucial role in holding the unity of the soul and the

3 Cottingham designates Descartes’s theory as “primitive ‘pneumatic’ theory of the nervous system” because in order to explicate movements of muscles Descartes appeal to animal spirits which flow through the brain and organs via nerves (Cottingham, 1988: 125).

4 See also Descartes’s classification of passions in one of his letters to Elizabeth of Bohemia (Descartes, 1991: 270-1) (Letter October 6, 1645). Thomas Dixon refers that in the middle of the eighteenth century the term “passion” was used to describe emotions like joy, sorrow, love, hatred but he also reminds that Descartes had already used passions in order to refer emotions (Dixon, 2003: 62-79).
body. The animal spirits reach the pineal gland and the parts enter into the cavities, hence passions arise. In other words, animal spirits transmit sensation to the pineal gland and return through the nerves to the muscles by carrying potential motion. The intermediary role of the pineal gland is very significant in Descartes’ comprehensive physiological theory. It is regarded as the seat of the soul. He gives the reason of choosing of this place as a seat:

The reason which convinces me that in all the body the soul can have no other place than this gland in which to exercise its functions immediately is that I observe that the other parts of our brain are all double, just as we have two eyes, two hands, two ears, and, in short, all the organs of our external senses are double; and that, inasmuch as we only have a single and simple thought of a given thing at a given time, there must necessarily be some place where two images coming through the two eyes, or the two other impressions coming from a single object through the double organs of other senses, can coalesce into one before they reach the soul, so that they do not represent two objects to it instead of one. And we can easily understand these images or other impressions to unite in this gland by the mediation of the spirits filling the brain’s cavities, but there is no place else in the body where they can thus be united unless it is done in this gland (Descartes, 1989: 36-7).

As for the causes of passions Descartes ranks external things among one of the causes of passions. Besides that the nature of the body and also agitation of spirits are other causes of them. He states in Article 51 of The Passions of the Soul that “the last and most proximate cause of the passions of the soul is nothing other than the agitation with which the spirits move the little gland in the middle of the brain” (Descartes, 1989: 50). Descartes gives the causal sequence of the passions as the action of the external object, its representation, the bodily change and lastly the passion itself. When we see a dangerous animal, we perceive it by means of animal spirits and pineal gland. Then, we have certain internal and external physical changes like trembling, change in the rate of blood circulation and change in the colour of our faces. We fear and this directs us to think what is useful for us. We think of the danger and our will leads us either to run away or to overcome the danger by fighting. After the effect of the will, action takes place.

There is also another cause of passions which is exceptional and significant. This exceptional cause of the passions is the soul. This means that soul sometimes causes its own passions. This is exceptional, because soul does not always cause passions directly by itself. “They (passions) may sometimes be caused by the action of the soul, which decides to conceive of this or that object, and also by the temperament of the body alone or by impressions haphazardly encountered in the brain, as happens when one feels sad or joyful without being able to say why” (Descartes, 1989: 51). Here, Descartes introduces intellectual joy, sadness and love which exist as a result of inner excitations of the soul. In fact, love as a passion occurs by means of the movement of animal spirits and depends on the object’s representation of being good and suitable. However, intellectual love arises from the action of the soul. He also

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5 Lokhorst and Kaitaro argue that Descartes’s theory is original. Although some historians like Soury, Thorndike and Sherrington claim that this theory was defended before Descartes by some of his contemporaries, Lokhorst and Kaitaro support their view with some historical evidences (Lokhorst & Kaitaro, 2001: 6-18).
maintains that passionate love and intellectual love can be together due to the soul’s unity with the body. Intellectual joy and sadness arise when “someone feels sad and joyful without for all that being able to take distinct notice of the good or evil which is its cause” (Descartes, 1989: 70). He gives a specific example in Article 147 of The Passions of the Soul:

When a husband mourns his dead wife, whom (as sometimes happens) he would be upset to see resuscitated, it may be that his heart is constricted by the Sadness which funeral trappings and the absence of a person to whose company he was accustomed excite in him; and it may be that some remnants of love or pity, presented to his imagination, draw genuine tears from his eyes- in spite of the fact that at the same time he feels a secret Joy in the innermost depths of his soul, whose excitation has so much power that the Sadness and tears accompanying it can diminish none of its strength (Descartes, 1989: 100-1).

It follows from the instance of mourning husband that imagination carries an important role in inner excitations of the soul. That is because, the husband experiences sadness when he thinks of his lost wife or when he feels loneliness because of losing his wife’s company. At the same time, he feels a secret joy when he remembers their happy old days. In the letter to Chanut dated February 1, 1647 Descartes gives a further example about intellectual love. Again, he points out the significant role of imagination. Although God has no physical existence, generally we have the feeling of intellectual or rational love. We love God intellectually by just thinking of his existence (Descartes, 1991: 305-14).

Six Principal Passions

In The Passions of the Soul Descartes portrays six principle or primitive passions from which all other passions originate. These passions are wonder, love, hatred, desire, joy and sadness. Other passions are called composite passions, which are species or compositions of the principal ones. In the order of the passions, wonder comes first among other all passions because it does not have an opposite passion. When we experience an object which is extraordinary, unusual or novel it arouses our interest and we wonder it. “Since this can happen before we know in the least whether this object is suitable to us or not, it seems […] that wonder is the first of all the passions” (Descartes, 1989: 52). Wonder is the result of a new object’s representation. The object’s being completely new or novel means that it had not been seen in the past or will not be expected to be seen in the future. Esteem or scorn may be joined to wonder, and sometimes veneration arises from esteem. Like all other passions wonder arises by means of movements of animal spirits. However, something is peculiar about this particular passion. Changes in the heart and circulation of the blood cannot be observed. For Descartes, this is simply because of the fact that this passion does not excite good or evil in us. Although we define wonder as a sudden surprise that changes the motion of spirits, “this surprise is proper” and it does not come to mean astonishment, excessive form of wonder (Descartes, 1989: 58). However, like all other passions excess of wonder might be harmful. Descartes suggests that the only possible solution for excessive wonder is to acquire knowledge about things or objects, which seem unusual to us.

Love and hatred, which are basically opposite to each other, arise from an object’s perception as good or bad. In other words, these passions depend on the object’s representation. If an object is represented as good or suitable for us, this leads to love. On the contrary, if it is presented as bad or evil, this causes hatred in us. “Love is an excitation of the soul, caused by
the motion of the spirits, which incites it to join itself in volition to the objects that appear to be suitable to it (Descartes, 1989: 62). On the other hand, even if hatred has same physical nature it “is an excitation […] which incites the soul to will to be separated from the objects that are presented to it as harmful” (Descartes, 1989: 62). Descartes mentions two sorts of love one of which is called love of benevolence, wishing well to what we love and the other sort is called love of concupiscence, having desire for what we love. Descartes also speaks of some other species of love like ambitious man’s love of glory, greedy man’s love of money, vulgar man’s love of women, an honourable man’s love of his friend and love of a good father. They all have desire mixed with other passions except a good father’s love for his children. Love of a good father is not mixed with other passions as he wants and seeks nothing except his children’s well-being and considers what is best for them. Even if man of honour’s love is considered to be similar to father’s love, it seems to be less perfect and pure in its nature. Besides, Descartes clarifies that although the main principle does not change in all kinds of love its degree might differ. In other words, the feelings of affection, friendship and devotion are said to be different from each other in respect to the degree of esteem. We can only have a feeling of fondness for the objects that are less valued than ourselves. When the degree of esteem is equal to us, it is called friendship. Furthermore, the degree of love, which is higher than anything, is called devotion. For instance, we may have a feeling of devotion for our country or for a particular person. However, says Descartes, as there is no degree in hatred it does not have so many species as love. In other words, the feeling of hatred cannot be measured. There are only two species of hatred one of which arises from bad or evil things and the other arises from ugly things and called as abhorrence or aversion. For instance, a fly may cause the feeling of aversion only because we perceive it as ugly. The passion does not arise from fly’s being bad or evil.

Like love and hatred, all other passions arise from the same representation of good and bad in us. For instance, when we desire something we wish the acquisition of good. The degree of desire is crucial to define the related passions such as hope and apprehension. If we have a great desire for something to happen in the future, it is called hope. However, if the desire is slight, it only leads to a kind of apprehension or jealousy as a part of it, and ends with despair. Desire depends on present values or on the expectation of obtaining those values in the future. “We desire not only the presence of absent good but also the preservation of the present, and in addition the absence of evil, both what we already have and what we believe we might receive in time to come” (Descartes, 1989: 66). For Descartes, when we desire health, we desire to avoid sickness. Desire towards good things arises with love, hope and joy, whereas; desire to avoid evil things emerges from hatred, apprehension and sadness.

Descartes also defines another principal passion, joy, as a delightful excitation of soul. Conversely, sadness arises from evil and causes distress. In general, we have the feeling of joy as a result of present good. On the contrary, possession of a present evil leads to the feeling of sadness. Nonetheless, sometimes due to the impression of good and evil in the brain there might be a particular reason for feeling of both. After defining the six principle passions, Descartes deals with the use of these passions. The first passion, wonder, is again excluded by him because of its having no opposite. And, it does not originate from an object’s being good or evil. Although all passions originate from body, they are also linked to the soul, because mind and body are united. Passions direct the soul to right actions, which are important for our well-being and our happiness. Descartes supports this view about the significance of the use of five passions by referring to their general use:
And in this context, Sadness and Joy are the first two that are employed. For the soul is immediately informed of things that harm the body only by the sensation it has of pain, which produces in it first the passion of Sadness, next Hatred of what causes the pain, and in the third place the Desire to get rid of it. So also the soul is immediately informed of things useful to the body only by some sort of titillation, which, exciting Joy in it, next arouses love of what one believes to be its cause, and finally the desire to acquire what can make one continue having this Joy or enjoy one like it later on again. This shows that all five of them are very useful with respect to the body- and even that Sadness is in a way primary and more necessary that Joy, and Hatred than Love, because it is more important to repel the things that harm and can destroy than to acquire those that add some perfection without which one can survive (Descartes, 1989: 92).

The use of passions is metaphorically akin to a wounded man’s walking through a corridor at the end of which he would be healed. The first door that he comes across is “sadness”. Because sadness is a result of harmful things which give pain to the body; “hatred” is always a next door neighbour to sadness due to its being the real source of pain. However, unlike the ancients who considered hatred as an illness, Descartes claims that sadness and hatred are useful as they incite the soul to “desire” which is necessary for refraining from pain. Therefore, the third door is desire since it directs this man to the place called “joy” where he would be healed. Finally, in order to continue his well-being he experiences the feeling of “love”. All these five passions should be based on true knowledge and they should direct our soul to the right actions. Besides, they should be moderated in order to act virtuously and achieve good consequences.

After having defined six principal passions, Descartes gives brief definitions of particular ones. He characterizes particular passions as either combinations or species of six principle passions. What he calls as “species” of principle passions are indeed different sorts or types of them. On the other hand, “composite” passions are those that occur when two or more different principal passions unite. For instance, esteem, scorn, remorse, self-satisfaction, repentance, gratitude, anger, regret and light-heartedness are species of certain principal passions. Yet, hope, mockery, envy, pity, vainglory and shame are the combinations of them.

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Mastery of Passions: The Role of Reason and Will

Although Descartes criticizes the ancients about the nature and the characteristics of passions, he agrees with them about the significance of “happiness” in achieving a good life. He points out the crucial role of “happiness” or “supreme contentment” in his letters to Princess Elizabeth. He explains how we can achieve contentment and also gives remedy for harmful effects of passions. In his letter dated August 4, 1645, Descartes classifies the things which make us happy or lead to supreme contentment into “those which depend on us, like virtue and wisdom and those who do not, like honours, riches and health” (Descartes, 1991: 257). Although a man of good birth is said to be more content than the poor in fact worldly advantages or possessions are not so vital for a happy life; inner satisfaction matters most. To this end, Descartes accentuates three conditions. Firstly, one should appeal to reason in order to direct his actions. Secondly, he lays emphasis on possessing virtue and wisdom. He defines virtue as a “firm and constant resolution to carry out whatever reason recommends without diverted by […] passions or appetites” (Descartes, 1991: 257-8). Practice of virtue stands for right use of will and it requires to employ the power of reason. Thirdly, Descartes states that under the guidance of reason one reconciles himself not to desire possessing things which are outside his power. The reason, says Descartes, why Seneca’s De Vita Beata did not fulfill expectations is that he “should have taught us all the principal truths whose knowledge is necessary to facilitate the practice of virtue and to regulate our desires and passions, and thus to enjoy natural happiness” (Descartes, 1991: 258). This means that Descartes aims to present a moral system which encapsulates right use of reason, practice of virtue, moderation of passions and provides guidance to happiness. He emphasizes the role of reason and will on the path for virtuous actions, and says that they eventually result in happiness in life. However, he notes that the will does not have direct control on passions because of their physical origin. “The most the
will can do while this excitation is in its full strength is not to consent to its effects and to restrain many of the movements to which it disposes the body” (Descartes, 1989: 44). This means that the will has a control while we act. Therefore, the will has a pivotal role in directing us to morally good acts, training and giving us good and useful habits.

In the First, the Third and the Fourth Meditations, Descartes recognizes the knowledge of God’s existence as the foundation of all knowledge. He describes God as infinite, eternal, perfect and immutable and omnipotent. Therefore, God is not a deceiver and errors originate from our false judgments. The nature of judgment depends on two faculties: The faculty used in perceiving ideas and the faculty of will used in affirming or denying these ideas. “The will simply consists in our ability to do or not to do something (that is, to affirm or deny, to pursue or avoid); or rather, it consists simply in the fact that when the intellect puts something forward for affirmation or denial or for pursuit or avoidance, our inclinations are such that we do not feel we are determined by any external force” (Descartes, 1984: 40). Descartes claims that for human beings in order to reach a God-like level of perfection, possessing a will does not carry more significance than using it in a correct way. Reason shows the right way to our will in choosing good and evil. Reason does not only enables us to reach firm and clear judgments but also it teaches us not to desire things, which are outside our power. It is the cornerstone in the way of happiness and guides us to decide what is best for our well-being. Passions sometimes cause distress and conflict in us due to our strong desire for possession of certain goods. If we regulate our passions by correct use of reason we can form proper moral judgments and act virtuously. Happiness can be thought as a chain; the will, reason, resolution and virtue form rings of it.

Although passions were considered as ailments or disorders by ancient philosophers, Descartes does not accept their prescriptions and argues that passions are good in their nature. However, sometimes they may be excessive or we may not have a firm resolution due to the conflict of different passions. In such cases, Descartes recommends a remedy for harmful effects of passions: setting up useful habits and training ourselves by directing our attention for useful thoughts. He distinguishes two kinds of excess: “There is one which changes the nature of a thing, and turns it from good to bad, and prevents it from remaining subject to reason; and there is another which only increases its quantity, and turns it from good to better” (Descartes, 1991: 276-7). It is important to control the first kind of excess. We can guide and train ourselves in the light of reason. Besides, training and guiding ourselves must result in habituation. He explains this point by drawing similarities between animals and human beings.

When a dog sees a partridge it is naturally inclined to run toward it, and when it hears a gun fired the noise naturally incites it to run away. But nevertheless setters are commonly trained so that the sight of a partridge makes them stop, and the noise they hear afterwards, when (the bird) is fired on, makes them run up to it. Now these things are useful to know in order to give everyone the courage to study the regulation of his passions. For since with a little skill one can change the movements of the brain in animals bereft of reason, it is plain that one can do it even better in men (Descartes, 1989: 48-9).

7 Amélie Oksenberg Rorty gives a specific example: when we see a lion, fear occurs by means of movements of animal spirits. We judge the best (flee or fight) by using our will in the light of reason (Rorty, 1986: 521).
If animals can be trained properly; it is much easier for us to have useful habits by the help of reason. Reason guides us to see what is beneficial for us and helps us to be accustomed to choosing good and acting well.

In addition to acquiring or setting up useful habits, Descartes says that some virtues are important in mastering passions. Virtues secure the right way for contentment of mind. He admits that “the scholastics are right when they say that virtues are habits; for in fact our failings are rarely due to lack of theoretical knowledge of what we should do, but to lack of practical knowledge— that is, lack of a firm habit of belief (Descartes, 1991: 267). Since mankind is not identical and all human beings experience passions differently their actions can also differ from each other. But it is a fact that human beings cannot live alone and each individual constitutes parts of the whole. Every man belongs to a state, a society and a family, therefore; one should not think and behave only in favour of himself but he should also know how to behave for the sake of his country and act as a responsible citizen. Descartes recommends cultivation of generosity which not only involves proper esteem and regard for ourselves but also enables us to regard for others. He considers generosity not only a passion but also a crowning virtue and it is the key virtue for all others. It is also a remedy for certain passions (Descartes, 1989: 109). It is defined as a passion because of the fact that it is caused and strengthened by the movement of animal spirits. It is also a virtue as it consists of firm resolution, right use of will and reason and it also enables us to achieve the best moral judgments. Besides, it makes us regulate excessive passions, overcome pride and acquire useful habits. Establishment of healthy communities requires generous people who value and respect feelings and thoughts of others. Qualities like being deferent, polite, emphatic, helpful and courteous which a generous person possesses are not only crucial in being a member of a society but they are also the cardinal elements that make us faithful, responsible and altruist agents.

**Conclusion**

Descartes’ theory of morals is generally considered as original because it differs from those of ancient and medieval philosophers with regard to its physiological baseline. Three aspects of it are noteworthy. First, he investigates passions and explicates how they arise from the connection between the mind and the body. His anatomy of passions gives the physical characteristics of passions in the light of animal spirits, air or wind particles flowing through the nerves. He also regards pineal gland as the seat of the soul to which animal spirits pass through and consequently passions arise by specific movements in this gland. He analyses how passions direct the soul to the will by dwelling upon six principal passions; wonder, love, hatred, desire, joy and sadness. Secondly, Descartes does not portray passions as dispositions or inclinations that are harmful and should always be restrained or mastered. Rather, he remarks positive nature of passions and highlights the fact that passions should be regulated when they become excessive. Thirdly, he accentuates particularly the roles of will and reason in both directing and canalizing our passions for morally good acts and reaching happiness or contentment of mind which is the ultimate goal of life. Correct use of will and acquisition of rational habits, says Descartes, make human beings virtuous, which is essential for the attainment of supreme

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8 John Cottingham uses the psychological term “conditioned response” to explain this passage. He says that “in adapting the example of animal training to the human sphere, Descartes retains the central idea of the conditioned response as the key to how the innately predetermined mechanisms of the body can be modified to our advantage (Cottingham, 1998: 91).
contentment and happiness. Besides, legitimate self-esteem or generosity which is a passion and also a cardinal virtue enables moral agents to be resolute while using their free will, realize their freedom in their choices, regulate their pride and regard for others inasmuch as they have for themselves. Moral theory of Descartes can also be considered as therapeutic in the sense that he recommends us to gain useful habits in order to cure immoderation and harmful effects of passions. He assures that good and useful habits in the light of reason and good use of will direct moral agents to right and firm moral judgements.

REFERENCES


