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# Stoicism in Descartes, Pascal, and Spinoza: Examining Neostoicism's Influence in the Seventeenth Century

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Stoicism in Descartes, Pascal, and Spinoza:  
Examining Neostoicism's Influence in the Seventeenth Century

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
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## **DEDICATION**

For Alistair and Wesley, my *raison d'être*.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- AC        Descartes, René. *Meditations, Objections, and Replies*. Edited and Translated by Roger Ariew and Donald Cress. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Co., 2006.
- AG        Leibniz, G.W. *Philosophical Essays*. Edited and Translated by Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1989.
- AT        Descartes, René. *Œuvres de Descartes*. Edited by Charles Adam and Paul Tannery. Paris, 1910.
- EW        Hobbes, Thomas. *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes Vol. VI*. London: Bohn, 1839-45.
- CD        Augustine. *City of God*. Edited by Henry Bettenson. New York, NY: Penguin Classics, 2003.
- CSM       Descartes, René. *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes: Volumes I-II*. Translated by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugland Murdoch. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2007-2009.
- CSMK     Descartes, René. *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes: Volume III, The Correspondence*. Translated by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugland Murdoch, and Anthony Kenny. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- ST        Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologica*. I-II. Translated by the English Dominican Province, 2008. <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/2.htm>.

References to Pascal's work are from Jean Mesnard's *Œuvres complètes*, currently in four volumes (1964-1992). Since Volumes V-VIII are still forthcoming, I make the following exceptions. References for the *Pensées* are to the Sellier (S) edition (1999), though I also provide the older Lafuma (L) citations. References to the *Entretien avec M. de Sacy* are from Mesnard and Mengotti's 1994 edition; this newer manuscript was discovered and published after already appearing in the *Œuvres complètes*. In some cases, a text is not available in any of the above collections. Under these conditions, I reference Le Guern's *Œuvres complètes* (1965). All translations of the *Pensées* are from Roger Ariew's edition (Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, ed. and trans. Roger Ariew [Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 2005]).

All translations of Spinoza's work are from Samuel Shirley's *Complete Works* (Benedict Spinoza, *Complete Works*, ed. Samuel Shirley [Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Co., 2002]).

## ABSTRACT

My dissertation focuses on the moral philosophy of Descartes, Pascal, and Spinoza in the context of the revival of Stoicism within the seventeenth century. There are many misinterpretations about early modern ethical theories due to a lack of proper awareness of Stoicism in the early modern period. My project rectifies this by highlighting understated Stoic themes in these early modern texts that offer new clarity to their morality. Although these three philosophers hold very different metaphysical commitments, each embraces a different aspect of Stoicism, letting it influence but not define his work. By addressing the Stoic themes on the morality of these three authors, I also hope to help better capture the intellectual climate of the time by bringing Stoic themes into the foreground.

Stoicism is a Hellenistic philosophy that considered the passions a sickness of the intellect and the source of all human suffering; they believed the cure was virtue, which was obtained through replacing irrational passions with rational beliefs. Stoicism had a revival in the Renaissance ushering in a wave of Neostoic authors who play an important role in shaping the intellectual landscape of the following centuries. My first two chapters discuss Descartes, who wrote a “provisional morality” early in his public life, only (as I show) to ignore the subject of ethics until near his death. In my first chapter I argue that, though many present-day scholars misread Descartes’ first ethics as part of his final ethics, this earliest “provisional morality” mimics Neostoic Skeptics such as Montaigne and is provisional because his method of doubt is also provisional. In my second chapter I show that Descartes’ late, and more developed, moral



theory attempts to synthesize a variety of ancient, and seemingly contradictory, ethical traditions: Stoicism, Epicureanism, and Aristotelianism. In many ways Descartes embraces Stoic morality, but as a mechanist he does not view passions as an intellectual sickness; rather they are a physiological event, an amoral instrument that can be used to help control one's irrational desires. I further defend my thesis externally by showing that this is the reading supported by Descartes' contemporaries including critics such as Leibniz and early Cartesians such as Antoine Le Grand and Pierre-Sylvain Régis.

My third chapter discusses Pascal, who embraces Stoicism differently. Pascal offers Stoicism as the first tier of a binary ethics: modeled after Augustine's city of God and city of man, it is an alternative moral code for those who are ignorant of the good and true happiness. Finally, in my fourth chapter, I discuss two common misinterpretations of Spinoza's ethics: one of them neglects the Stoic influence on his thought while the other embraces it too strongly, portraying him as an unadulterated Stoic. Although there are ways that he is more Stoic than Descartes and Pascal, such as in his panpsychism and monism, this does not extend to his morality. Rather than accepting either of the two readings, I highlight anti-Stoic themes that are also present. I conclude that if the discussion is contained to his morality, Spinoza is no more Stoic than the other Neostoics I discuss in previous chapters.

## INTRODUCTION

The influence of Stoicism on early modernity is pervasive: for many authors during this time, it was a source of their philosophical thought; for others, it was a point of criticism against their contemporaries who dared to embrace the Hellenistic school. Unlike the early modern Epicureans, who unabashedly embraced Epicurus' philosophy, the early modern Stoics—or, Neostoics—were more subtle in their use of Stoicism, typically synthesizing it with their other philosophical and theological commitments to create something uniquely their own while also unquestionably Stoic.<sup>1</sup> This appropriation is most typically found in their moral philosophies, though not exclusively. In present-day scholarship, the role of Stoicism in the 17<sup>th</sup> century intellectual landscape is understated, and more often ignored. Without a proper awareness of Stoicism's influence, misinterpretations of early modern ethics have abounded. It is my goal in this dissertation to rectify this problem by examining the Stoic influences on the morality of three philosophers—René Descartes (1596-1650), Blaise Pascal (1623-1662), and Benedict Spinoza (1632-1677). This will result in gaining further clarity into their ethical theories and, as a result, place them into the context of this Neostoic revival, a research project that has been neglected before now.

With the amount of commentary that already exists on Descartes and Spinoza, and the oversight of Pascal's philosophical contributions, there is question as to what room there is for this project. The literature on their work is vast, and even long neglected areas of investigation, such as Cartesian morality, have received a good deal of recent interest. Likewise, Pascal is known

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<sup>1</sup> Pierre Gassendi (1592-1655) was an Epicurean. Although he synthesized Epicureanism into his Christian theology,

for his contributions to mathematics (binomial coefficients, a counting machine, the cycloid, infinity), the natural sciences (experiments on the void), and theology, but Anglophone philosophers tend to dismiss his philosophical contributions. At best, Pascal is presented as a skeptic, or a mystic whose only relevance is an argument for religious belief commonly referred to as “the Wager.”<sup>2</sup> It is not even immediately obvious what is common between them that can be identified as “Stoic” to deserve extensive treatment together, not to mention that they have very different metaphysical commitments: Descartes is a rationalist who rarely lacks confidence in his ability to understand the world, Pascal often draws attention to human epistemic limits to question our access to metaphysical knowledge, and Spinoza is a panpsychic monist and determinist.

I believe such a project is not only plausible, but also necessary precisely given the current intellectual climate. In the volumes of literature written on Descartes and Spinoza there is a multiplicity of errors, especially pertaining to their respective moral philosophies. The same is true of Pascal—I believe one reason for the lack of philosophical interest in Pascalian literature is that few scholars have taken the time to understand the fragments making up the *Pensées* or to read his minor treatises; as a result, his work is misunderstood.<sup>3</sup> One key to solving these issues,

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<sup>2</sup> His argument is that if someone believes religion is likely true, and wishes to believe but is not sure if s/he should, when weighing the odds of risk versus benefit of belief and disbelief, it is more rational to believe than not to believe. The argument is part of a larger fragment, “The Discourse on the Machine,” and should not be taken outside of Pascal’s many arguments to determine the true religion, though the Wager is commonly presented outside of these contexts. (*Pensées* S680/L418).

<sup>3</sup> The *Pensées* of Pascal are a collection of fragments that were found among Pascal’s belongings. He seemed to be composing a philosophical treatise that functioned as something like a defense of the Christian religion. The papers were collected and published posthumously in 1670 (the Port Royal edition) with very little sensitivity to the argument that Pascal may have intended to forward. As a result, the treatise has become something like a puzzle (or a critical editor’s nightmare). Undergoing several editions, editors have tried to undo the damage of the first edition. Of these, the most recent is the lauded work by Phillip Sellier whose edition has become the new standard, replacing the Lafuma edition, while Jean Mesnard’s critical edition is forthcoming as Volume VI of his *Œuvres complètes*.

Pascal also has many minor treatises that are typically overlooked by a philosophical audience, if not altogether disparaged. For instance, Desmond Clarke warns that, “There is a complementary reason for urging caution about reading Pascal as a philosopher. He wrote much but published little, none of which was philosophy in the sense in which that term is used today [...]. Apart from his brief essays on the vacuum and the *Provincial*

I argue, is to rediscover the Stoic roots in each of them, roots that these authors appeal to themselves and were once appreciated by their contemporaries. In doing so, there is a great deal to be learned still about these ethical theories that I begin to uncover in the following chapters.

To carve out a broader historical and philosophical background, Stoic philosophy emerged during the Hellenistic Period (c. 323-31 BCE), an era known for political and social unrest. Out of this turmoil, new philosophical schools emerged, most notably the Stoics and Epicureans. Like Plato, these philosophers attribute their legacy to the Socratic tradition, appealing to the Cynics and Cyrenaics respectively.<sup>4</sup> The Stoics began as a sect who gathered at the *stoa poikilê* to hear the teachings of Zeno of Citium (333-261 BCE). The school expanded rapidly to become one of the most dominant ancient moral philosophies, peaking in popularity during the Roman period. Stoicism was an attractive philosophy for this age, securing the good life inwardly during a time of external upheaval and unrest. It also had a broad appeal, given that the Stoic teachings were tremendously egalitarian for their time. To see this, the Stoic canon speaks for itself. The last two great Stoics were Epictetus (c. 50-130 CE) and Marcus Aurelius (121-180 CE): the first, a freed slave with very little social prestige, and the second, a Roman

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*Letters*, all his writings were edited and amended posthumously by collaborators who were still involved in the theological controversies that had dominated Pascal's later life. For example, he seems to have contributed to an early version of the *Port-Royal Logic* that was subsequently published in 1662; and the *Entretien avec M. de Sacy* was composed many years after his death, based on the recollections of an editor.” (Clarke [2015]). This is overwhelmingly false, and the disparaging tone obvious. The manuscript for *De l'Esprit géométrique*, a study on Cartesian method that is used in Arnauld and Nicole's *Port Royal Logic*, is available even though it was published posthumously. It is hard to understand how this work is unphilosophical, unless we are also to accuse Descartes and Arnauld of the same for their geometric methods. If its posthumous publication excludes this work as unreliable, then we would also have to call many other posthumous works into question including Spinoza's *Ethics*. Also, in the introduction to a newly discovered manuscript of *Entretien avec M. de Sacy*, Jean Mesnard provides a compelling case that although the dialogue itself is the construction of a later editor, the content is almost certainly taken from fragments written by Pascal himself. (See the introduction to Pascal [1994]). My point is that Pascal has plenty to say as a philosopher if enough pause is given to allow him to speak.

<sup>4</sup> The Cynics, founded by Diogenes of Sinope (404-323 BCE), taught that the human end was to return to natural desires, throwing off external constraints imposed by society. Zeno of Citium was a Student of Diogenes who embraced some of his teachings such as returning to nature, though he disagreed to what that meant. The Cyrenaics, founded by Aristippus (435-355 BCE) were a school of hedonists. Unlike Epicurus whose negative hedonism taught that the best way to obtain pleasure, the Highest Good, was to live a simple life, the Cyrenaics believed that the only pleasures that can be guaranteed are those immediately at hand, where denying a pleasure in hope of a greater pleasure lacks this certainty. See Arrington (1998), Brunschwig and Sedley (2003), Gill (2013).

emperor, the most important person within the largest empire to that point in history.<sup>5</sup> Because the Stoics believed that any person is capable of achieving tranquility regardless of his or her external fortunes, its teachings remain a bit general if not vague, a quality that makes it easily molded into any role or circumstance in life.

In part because of this broad appeal, recognizing what Stoicism actually entails is not as immediately obvious as it may seem. In the teachings from various strains of Stoicism, there are of course similarities. They teach that the universe is divine and contains the divine will. They describe everything in the universe as nature, and in something like pantheism, everything in the universe is God and thus belongs to God.<sup>6</sup> They also believe everything occurs due to prior causes according to nature, and is thus fated or determined. Since nature is God, to say that everything occurs according to natural principles is the same as saying that whatever happens occurs according to the divine will. Subsequently, all that happens is not only necessary, but it is also good, as determined by divine providence.

The Stoics taught that the passions are a sickness of the intellect and the source of human suffering; they believed the cure was virtue, which was obtained through replacing irrational passions with rational beliefs. Passions are not to be conflated with emotions, as the aim is to replace passions with rationally caused emotion, with the difference being whether the feeling is caused internally from reason (rational emotion) or from external causes (passions). Arising from the passions, a person becomes unnecessarily attached to other people and material objects, falsely believing these external goods to be their own. Because of this, when misfortune strikes, a person who believes an evil befalls him or her is mistaken: the real cause of suffering and

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<sup>5</sup> From Epictetus, the *Discourses* and his short but famed *Enchiridion* (“*Handbook*”), a collection of short aphorisms as a guide for living the Stoic life, are available. The best-known work by Marcus Aurelius is his *Meditations*.

<sup>6</sup> It is a small step to move from a nature that is God, which is described in terms of physics and understood through reason, to atheism. There is question, though, as to whether the classical Stoics would have been psychologically capable of atheism similar to how it is understood today.

anxiety are false beliefs, such as the delusional judgment that counterfactuals were possible or that a different fortune would have been better. This is a mistake, since reason tells us that all fortune, whether good or bad, is necessary and unfolds exactly as it must according to the divine will. Reason, on the other hand, should remind us that everything contained in the universe is its part and thus belongs to it; as a result, nothing external belongs to anyone in particular, but is on loan from the universe to use and enjoy for some time. Therefore, if someone loses a limb, for instance, one must remember it was in God's good providence to do so, and that soon enough the whole body will be returned to God anyhow.<sup>7</sup> Likewise, if someone loses wealth, a spouse, or a child, the Stoic sage will remember that these things were not his or her own but they belonged to God; these goods are to be enjoyed during this time, and when taken, the wise person knows the goods were given back to the universe. The result should be gratitude for the time with them, and equal contentment that the good has now been returned—it could not have happened any other way, and it was according to divine providence, which is always good.<sup>8</sup>

However, there are also several varieties of Stoic thought that take exception to particular 'Stoic' doctrines.<sup>9</sup> Among the Stoics there were those who believed some external goods are preferable to others, rejected monist psychology (that only one substance exists and our thoughts are merely modes of that substance), forwarded a Platonist Stoicism, required external goods for the good life, and ignored physics.<sup>10</sup> The best way to understand these traditions, then, is not a rigid set of dogma to which philosophers must adhere, but something closer to a family resemblance among various doctrines. In his articulation of family resemblances, Wittgenstein

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<sup>7</sup> Seneca, *De Providentia*, II.1-6.

<sup>8</sup> Seneca, Epistle XCIX (*On Consolation to the Bereaved*, 2-3). Epictetus, *Encheiridion* 3, 14, 26. See Seneca (1917, 1920) and Epictetus (1983).

<sup>9</sup> This is similar to Cartesianism, for instance, where there were Cartesians who at one point or another denied almost every claim that is arguably central to Cartesian doctrine: there were Cartesian Empiricists such as Jacques Rohault who focus on experimentation and ignore metaphysics, Cartesians who rejected substance dualism such as Pierre-Sylvain Régis, and so forth. See Schmaltz (2002), Dobre and Nyden (2013), Ariew (2014).

<sup>10</sup> Aristo, Posidonius, Panaetius, and Seneca/Epictetus, respectively, held these opinions. (Sellars [2006], 5-13)

describes them through giving an example of the category of ‘games’—it is difficult, if not impossible, to set forth a rigid set of necessary and sufficient conditions to define what a *game* is, as there always seems to be some exception. He writes,

What is common to them all? Don’t say: “They must have something in common, or they would not be called ‘games’” but look and see whether there is anything common to all. For if you look at them, you won’t see something that is common to all, but similarities, affinities, and a whole series of them at that. To repeat: don’t think, but look! ... And we can go through the many, many other groups of games in the same way, can see how similarities crop up and disappear. And the upshot of these considerations is: we see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: similarities in the large and in the small.<sup>11</sup>

Though the conditions to demarcate a game—or a Stoic—may not be precise and articulate, there are important affinities and shared similarities that, when looked at as a whole, are distinctive. For Stoics these distinctive similarities are that the passions are a disease caused by false beliefs, and while passions are the source of human suffering, they have a cure, which is virtue or rational beliefs.

The Stoics were prolific, although for the early Stoics (from Zeno until around 200 CE) most of the manuscripts are lost and we know them through the transmission of their accounts through ancient historians.<sup>12</sup> For middle and late Stoics, however, there is more primary literature available.<sup>13</sup> A common mode of their expression was letter writing; the Stoic epistles tend to focus on applying their doctrines to a variety of topics, such as the problem of evil, political governance, and dealing with tragedy.<sup>14</sup> In its final forms in the ancient world, the school took on a nearly religious tone with teachings shifting from entire philosophical systems that included their logic, metaphysics and physics, towards exclusive of all but moral philosophy. The

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<sup>11</sup> Wittgenstein (2009), 36e. *Philosophical Investigations* §66. Also, §66-§77.

<sup>12</sup> Diogenes Laertius, Plutarch, Galen, etc.

<sup>13</sup> The middle Stoics began around 200 CE and the late Stoics the first two centuries CE. I borrow the dates and categories of “early,” “middle,” and “late” Stoics as outlined by Sellars (2006), though he is right to note that these distinctions are contentious. (Sellars [2006], 8).

<sup>14</sup> Seneca, *De Providentia.*; Seneca, *De Clemeniam*. See Seneca (1927).

followers of Epictetus, for example, behaved more like religious disciples applying his dogmatic doctrine than philosophers seeking to better understand the world. It is perhaps for this reason that the movement stagnated.<sup>15</sup>

As the Hellenistic and the Roman periods came to an end and the medieval period followed, the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle reigned, exemplified by Augustine's Platonism and Aquinas' Aristotelianism. Although no new Stoic literature was being written during this stage of history, the philosophy was persistent: originally latent in the epistles of St. Paul, it rose as both a foil and a minor authority for the Christian Scholastics.<sup>16</sup> In the Renaissance, Stoicism began to grow from its place as a subordinate philosophy. The Renaissance Humanists showed a renewed interest in classical Greek and Latin texts, often translating them into the common vernacular. Among these Humanists were Justus Lipsius (1547-1606) and Guillaume du Vair (1556-1621). Lipsius made new editions of Seneca's texts and authored his own treatise, *De Constantia* (1584), in which he baptized Stoic philosophy into Christian thought. Du Vair followed this path, translating Epictetus' *Enchiridion* (1586) into French and synthesizing the Stoic and Christian philosophies in his own work, which included the *Philosophie morale de Stoïques* (1585). This movement, now referred to as Neostoicism, saw itself as filling the role of interpreting classical Stoicism; but like Plotinus' Platonism, they took liberties—at times, tremendous liberties—as they reintroduced Stoicism to the world. No longer merely a handmaiden to other philosophies, Stoicism was reborn. Other Neostoics emerged, including the ecclesiastic Pierre Charron (1541-1603) who took eclecticism further, synthesizing Pyrrhonist

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<sup>15</sup> Sellars (2006), 26-30. For more on Stoicism, see Inwood (2003), Sedley (2003), Sellers (2006), Gill (2013).

<sup>16</sup> See Enberg-Pedersen (2004) for Stoicism and St. Paul and the Appendix for a list of some medieval references to Stoicism and the Stoics.



and Stoic philosophies, adapting them both to support his theological convictions.<sup>17</sup> His treatise *De la Sagesse* (1601) sold tremendously well, a copy of which would later fall into the hands of a young Descartes in 1619. Johannes Molitor, a Jesuit priest who knew the youth, worried that Descartes put too much confidence in the capabilities of human reason and gifted the book to him, hoping Charron's skepticism would help cure him of this hubris.<sup>18</sup> Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592) also has Stoic themes throughout his work, though his allegiances are less clear. His magnum opus, the *Essays* (1580), is a collection of semi-biographical tales and short musings with common themes of turning inward to find truth, and his considerations of various philosophies and topics. While Montaigne's Stoicism is less obvious (or certain) than the other Neostoics, Charron read him as a Stoic, and this is the reading of him that is popularized in some circles.<sup>19</sup> This Neostoic landscape is diverse, more so than classical Stoicism, and those in the tradition readily reject and admit aspects of Stoic thought as needed to create a coherent philosophy in the light of their other intellectual commitments.

During this time, there is a strong reaction against Scholastic philosophy and its reliance on the authority of Aristotle that continues to escalate into the 17<sup>th</sup> century. While early modernity is known as the dawn for a new age of modern philosophies, the seeds of these philosophies are laid much earlier.<sup>20</sup> Because of the work of Humanists in the previous century, philosophers in the early modern period had access to a variety of ancient literature for the first

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<sup>17</sup> Pyrrhonism was a school of skeptics who followed the teachings of Pyrrho (360-270 BCE). Against the Academic skeptics, a group from Plato's New Academy who believed the only thing they knew is that they know nothing (Plato's *Apology* 21a-e), the Pyrrhonian skeptics believed nothing could be known, even that belief itself, and so the wise man is one who seeks a life of balance and indifference towards beliefs.

<sup>18</sup> Clarke (2006), 64; 334-335.

<sup>19</sup> Although the most popular of the *Essays*, *An Apology for Raymond Sebond* ends up influencing both Descartes and Pascal, the influence is most obviously skepticism, not Stoic; this does not mean that there are not other *Essays* where Montaigne comes across more Stoic, nor that his remedy for living the good life when ignorant of the good is altogether foreign from the Stoic sage. (See *In Defence of Seneca and Plutarch* (*Essays* II.32) and *On Books* (*Essays* II.10) as examples of more explicitly Stoic works.)

<sup>20</sup> See Ariew (2011).

time in centuries. Without having to return to the authorities of Scholasticism that they were trying so hard to leave behind, Skepticism, Stoicism, and Epicureanism allowed for alternatives from which the early moderns could draw in forming their new philosophies. In the case of Stoicism, the Neostoics even already did the work of ‘baptizing’ the pagan philosophy for Western Christian consumption.

In the past several years there have been significant gains in rethinking how to understand the history of philosophy, especially in early modern circles. Tremendous work by Roger Ariew, Daniel Garber, Edwin Curley, among others, has questioned previous methods of examining historical texts in isolation, and has uncovered a great deal of external evidence that helps to shape how authors such as Bacon, Descartes, Hobbes, Spinoza, and Leibniz should be read. Even so, although Stoicism is a persistent, though admittedly sometimes subtle, background for early modern thought, this influence was neglected until very recently and the literature that has emerged on the topic is sparse. Most of this commentary focuses on how Stoicism affected particular canonical figures and it typically lacks the appropriate contextual sensitivities. It is important, for instance, to be aware of the other Neostoics and medieval treatments of Stoicism before making general claims about how Stoicism affected a particular 17<sup>th</sup> century author. As a result, the current literature largely misunderstands the role of early modern Stoicism, and subsequently only confuses—not clarifies—our understanding of early modern thought. It is towards these ends that I turn.

My first two chapters discuss Descartes, who wrote a “provisional morality” (*morale par provision*) early in his public life, only (as I show) to ignore the subject of ethics until near his death. Historically, the *morale par provision* was considered a temporary morality, one constructed to provide moral guidance until an ethical theory could be provided after he

constructed a metaphysics and physics. In striving to recognize how various articulations of his moral philosophy relate with one another, recent literature identifies the *morale par provision* as a first step in Descartes' greater moral project: broad Stoic maxims that are filled in with more specific detail later through his *Passions of the Soul* and related correspondence. Specifically, in my first chapter I argue that, though many present-day scholars misread Descartes' first ethics this way, the "provisional morality" of Part 3 from the *Discourse on Method* should be taken provisionally. However, rather than repeating older arguments to do so, I show that it is part of Descartes' broader method of doubt. In Part 1 and 2, he enters into a skeptical mode which copies Montaigne and Pierre Charron in style and content; he does not emerge from this skeptical mode until Part 4 when he introduces the *cogito*. Part 3, then, is a natural extension of Part 2: rather than offering something intended to be taken too seriously, Descartes is recalling the advice of a Stoic sage offered by Montaigne and Charron for how to lead the good life when apodictic knowledge is unattainable. In short, the *morale par provision* is provisional because his method of doubt is also. Part 3 is another part of his method of doubt that he does not emerge from until Part 4.

In my second chapter I show that Descartes' late, and more developed, moral theory attempts to synthesize a variety of ancient, and seemingly contradictory, ethical traditions into his own morality. I begin by first arguing that the *Passions of the Soul* is best understood as a physics of man, a work in physiology, not a treatise on ethics. This interpretation is not only better supported by Descartes' published treatises and private correspondence, but it is also the reading that early Cartesians take when reconstructing Cartesian morality. I then argue that, if the *Passions of the Soul* is foremost a physics of man, then there is significant interpretive benefit in how to understand his other late ethical writings. I show that in many ways Descartes embraces

Stoic morality, but as a mechanist he does not view passions as an intellectual sickness; rather they are a physiological event, an amoral instrument that can be used to help control one's irrational desires. This is the foundation in which he believes his moral philosophy reconciles Stoic, Epicurean, and Aristotelian accounts of the good, virtue, and the passions. I further defend this thesis by showing that this is the reading supported by Descartes' contemporaries including critics such as Leibniz and early Cartesians such as Antoine Le Grand and Pierre-Sylvain Régis.

The topic of my third chapter is Blaise Pascal, a figure often overlooked by Anglophone philosophers. He is important in this context as he illustrates the complexity that sometimes went into adapting Stoicism in eclectic philosophical systems. Pascal has a number of influences that he carefully synthesizes into one complete philosophical program, most notably Augustine, Descartes, Montaigne, and Epictetus; by understanding how he draws upon these resources, it is possible to reconstruct his morality from the confusing *Pensées* fragments and other minor works. Pascal's credit to Epictetus is explicit and his way of incorporating Stoicism into his system is novel and nuanced. I will show that Pascal offers Stoicism as the first tier of a binary ethics: modeled after Augustine's city of God and city of man, it is an alternative moral code for those who are ignorant of the good and true happiness. True happiness is found in knowing and loving God, which allows a person to order his or her desires according to their proper end; however, in a postlapsarian state, loving God is impossible without effective grace. That is, as a precondition for knowing or living God, he must choose to dispense grace upon that individual. Since there is no guarantee of this happening, Pascal wants his interlocutor to pursue God and the good nonetheless, and not abandon them to the worst state, concupiscence. His answer then, is Neostoic—reduce passions and submit oneself to the good will of God. Best case, this will

better prepare one to receive divine grace; worst case, it is an alternative morality which allows the reprobate to have a less miserable life than s/he would if enslaved to the passions.

My fourth chapter is on Spinoza's morality, and it takes a different tone. Rather than arguing for a particular reading as I did with Descartes and Pascal, I push back against two common misinterpretations of Spinoza *vis-à-vis* Stoicism: one of them neglects these influence while the other embraces it too strongly, portraying him as an unadulterated Stoic. Rather than accepting either of the two readings, I argue that, if the discussion is contained to his morality, Spinoza is no more Stoic than the other Neostoics I discuss in previous chapters. Although there are ways that Spinoza is more Stoic than Descartes and Pascal, evident in their physics and metaphysics, these affinities do not extend so well to his morality. When it comes to his moral philosophy, there are several ways that Spinoza is anti-Stoic that should be taken into consideration. My goal is neither to understate the Stoic influences on Spinoza, nor to reduce him into an unqualified opponent of Stoicism. Rather, I argue that Spinoza is a Neostoic, fitting comfortably into an established tradition known for eclectic tendencies, selectively accepting and rejecting doctrines as they see fit within their broader philosophical project.

As a methodological note, I try to be textual and contextual, balancing internal and external evidence as much as possible to defend the thesis in each chapter. For external evidence, when speaking of one author influencing another, I limit myself to those cases where it is generally accepted that one author read the other in question; for example, I allow Charron's *Of Wisdom* but not Plato in examining the *morale par provision*. In other cases, I limit myself to those things that an author has said about either himself or his own work elsewhere, such as what Descartes said in the introductions to the French edition of the *Principles of Philosophy* (1647)<sup>21</sup> or the *Passions of the Soul* (1649). The same is true of their correspondence, and with some less

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<sup>21</sup> This date is for the French edition. The first edition in Latin without this Introduction was published in 1644.

weight, what was said by their contemporaries. My primary texts that I appeal to for Descartes are the *Treatise on Man* (1664), *Discourse on Method* (1637), the *Meditations on Philosophy* (1641/1642), and the *Principles of Philosophy* (1644/7). I also draw a great deal from the correspondence with Princess Elisabeth (dated May 21, 1643 through October 9, 1649), Queen Christina (dated November 20, 1647 through February 26, 1649) and Pierre Chanut (dated June 15, 1646 through March 31, 1649), the French ambassador to Christina's court. In Pascal, my primary texts are the *Pensées* as well as *Entretien avec M. de Sacy sur Épictète et Montaigne* (1655?) and *De l'Esprit géométrique* (1658?).<sup>22</sup> For Spinoza, I limit my discussion to his *Ethics* (1677). I omit the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* (c. 1661), the *Short Treatise on God, Man, and His Well-Being* (1662) and the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (1670) since the secondary literature I engage in during this current study limits itself to the *Ethics*. More could be said, I am sure, if these texts were also considered, but this will be left for future studies.<sup>23</sup>

My research on this topic, though hard earned, is still in its infancy; I do not pretend to exhaustively treat these topics. There is plenty more that could be said about Cartesian, Pascalian, and Spinozistic morality and its relation to Stoicism. However, what I do set out to accomplish is, first, to give a perspective from which to rethink which traditions influence the ideas of these great thinkers, and as a result, how we as an intellectual community can better understand their thought. By rethinking their moral philosophy through this lens, I will also provide a better understanding of how Stoicism shapes the early modern landscape, making room for future research in these areas. For this second accomplishment, it is fitting that my final

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<sup>22</sup> The first edition of the *Pensées* was in 1670, though as I note in fn3, this Port Royal edition was not without significant errors in its organization, the *Entretien avec M. de Sacy sur Épictète et Montaigne* and *De l'Esprit géométrique* (written c. 1658) The exact dates for the *Entretien* are not clear since it seems to be composed by an editor out of fragments. All three of these were published posthumously, but there is good reason to accept their reliability. See Mesnard's discussion of the texts' history in *Œuvres* III, 368 and *Entretien avec M. de Sacy* (1994), "Introduction."

<sup>23</sup> Justus Lipsius has a political program that would be interesting to read beside Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*.

chapter is on Spinoza, and not only in how each of the authors relate with one other individually. It is true that the chapters follow one another according to their historical chronology and philosophical development, and in this sense it is already an effective organization. But by ending with Spinoza among the Neostoics, it helps to sketch out the overarching theme that I work towards demonstrating—there is widespread influence of Stoicism in early modernity, and this is demonstrated by its appropriation even among philosophers who radically disagree with one another in so many ways.

## CHAPTER ONE:

### DESCARTES' FIRST MORALITY: A PYRRHONIAN *MORALE PAR PROVISION*

When it comes to unraveling Descartes' moral philosophy in present-day literature, commentators commonly see their task as understanding how various articulations of his morality relate with one another.<sup>24</sup> There are at least three places where Descartes discusses moral philosophy. The first is early in his public life – in part three of the *Discourse on Method* Descartes provides his *morale par provision* (“provisionally morality”), a list of rules to assist in living well. The remaining two are much later: his final treatise, the *Passions of the Soul*, and correspondence from the same period with Pierre Chaunt, Queen Christina, and most significantly, Princess Elisabeth.<sup>25</sup> The literature that strives to draw connections between these works is often insightful and not lacking in interesting textual evidence. However, I believe this process is fundamentally limited if not altogether flawed, as it operates under the assumption that the various articulations of his morality do in fact relate with one another. I am not sure that they do. While there may not be any inherent harm in seeing connections that Descartes himself did not intend, in the case of the ethics, I believe it is a distraction that makes his later ethics, which are already difficult to systemize, even more opaque.

For this reason, my goal in this chapter is to investigate whether the *morale par provision* relates to his later ethics in any significant way; by significant, I mean whether or not it should

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<sup>24</sup> See LeDoeuff (1989), Marshall (1998), Shapiro (2006), Naaman-Zauderer (2010), Shapiro (2011), Gilby (2011).

<sup>25</sup> Some authors attribute ethical themes to his *Meditations on First Philosophy*. I disagree, the reasons for which I will address in the body of this chapter.



be used in order to inform his later ethics. Traditionally, the *morale par provision* was interpreted as a temporary morality to be disposed of once an established ethics was offered.<sup>26</sup> The reasons for this reading may seem obvious at first glance. Just prior to offering the rules that are his *morale par provision*, Descartes says he intends on building a *morale par provision* as temporary housing “lest I should remain indecisive in my actions while reason obliged me to be so in my judgments, and in order to live as happily as I could during this time...”<sup>27</sup>; it is a temporary construction, he says, so that he may live comfortably while tearing down the old house and constructing plans for the new. For this reason, many authors have argued that the morality is provisional—a temporary construction to be demolished when appropriate.<sup>28</sup> Donald Rutherford aptly describes the *morale par provision* under this reading as “just that – provisional rules that Descartes will follow while he carries out his search for certain knowledge.”<sup>29</sup>

In more recent years, however, there is a movement in Descartes scholarship to argue that the moral philosophy established in the *Discourse* is “permanent and universal” in terms of his overarching moral project.<sup>30</sup> This trend begins with Michèle Le Dœuff, whose reading in her influential text *Recherches sur l’imaginaire philosophique* has been widely embraced by the Anglophone world.<sup>31</sup> Le Dœuff argues that the term *par provision* is a legal phrase, a “juridical term meaning ‘what a judgment awards in advance to a party’”.<sup>32</sup> Since Descartes would be aware of this legal sense of the term, she argues that in the *Discourse on Method* he is laying down a universal moral code, general maxims which are completed when ethical particulars are

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<sup>26</sup> Laporte (1945), Rodis-Lewis (1957), Schneewind (1997).

<sup>27</sup> AT VI, 22; CSM I, 122.

<sup>28</sup> Rodis-Lewis (1957), 9-24. Also Schneewind (1997), 185-187, etc.

<sup>29</sup> Rutherford (2008).

<sup>30</sup> I quote Cimasky and Polansky (2012), 353.

<sup>31</sup> Le Dœuff (1989). Anglophone texts include Marshall (1998), Shapiro (2006), Naaman-Zauderer (2010), Shapiro (2011), Gilby (2011), and Cimasky and Polansky (2012).

<sup>32</sup> LeDœuff (1989), 62.

provided in the later ethical works.<sup>33</sup> Other contemporary commentators do not attempt such an externalist approach, and instead freely pick from the corpus of Descartes' texts both published and unpublished, public and private, to create a systematic account of Descartes' morality based on these various articulations.<sup>34</sup> Both of these approaches share a common goal of reconstructing a Cartesian ethics that does not exclude the gains made in the *Discourse*.

Although I appreciate the contextualist aim of Le Dœuff's thesis and the desire for each of these authors to draw upon all of the treasures left by Descartes in reconstructing a Cartesian ethics, I find that I cannot embrace either of these present-day views. Of course, by forwarding the thesis that the *morale par provision* is indeed temporary, I may be criticized as looking backwards not forwards. However, I believe these readings are a distraction to understanding Cartesian ethics, adding misleading criteria and forcing a misemphasis upon certain themes. If that is the case and it makes his unfinished ethics, which are already difficult to systematize, even more opaque, then it would be unwise to keep moving forward.<sup>35</sup> When going on journey, the responsible traveler must sometimes pause, and if it is discovered that s/he is going in the wrong direction, then s/he must correct course; sometimes this means 'going backwards' when an incorrect turn has been made in the direction opposite to that which one intends to be traveling. Though my defense of the older reading is novel, in a sense I do move backwards, but it is so that we might once again move forward more productively. This is my goal at present, then; it is not to offer a more robust account of Descartes' ethics: I leave this task for my second chapter.

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<sup>33</sup> LeDœuff, (1989) 66-69.

<sup>34</sup> John Carriero's and Lilli Alanen's monographs best capture this position. See Carriero (2009) and Allanen (2003).

<sup>35</sup> Of course, Descartes would advise in his third rule once a decision has been made that one should remain resolute, like finding one's way out of a forest! (*Discourse on Method* Part 3; AT VI, 24-25)

I wish to defend the original thesis that Descartes should be taken seriously when he states that the provisional morality is temporary, but I will read it in a way that pays closer attention to influences that heavily shape the first three parts of the *Discourse*. To accomplish this, the chapter will consist of three sections. In the first I call into question the relevance of the *morale par provision* to his final morality by showing how unconcerned Descartes appears to be about moral philosophy until much later in his public life; in the second, I argue for a new reading of the *morale par provision* by showing that it is a natural Neostoic extension of the skepticism outlined just prior to it; in the third and final section, I will anticipate and then respond to the objection that Descartes proclaims the lasting importance of the *morale par provision* himself, drawing a comparison between it and a new list of moral guidelines in a letter to Princess Elisabeth.

## **I. An Early Indifference Towards Morality**

In his writing, Descartes cover a wide breadth of topics. Even in his private correspondence, these discussions concern metaphysics, Baconian experimentation, biology, philosophical and scientific method, mechanics, physics, medicine, and many other topics in speculative and natural philosophy.<sup>36</sup> In spite of the many pages written on different topics, until late in his public life, he almost entirely neglects the topic of morality. It is not until he begins corresponding with Princess Elisabeth, the Princess of Bohemia, that he begins any prolonged discussion of morality.<sup>37</sup> If Descartes intended the *morale par provision* to serve a role in his

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<sup>36</sup> For discussions of medicine in the correspondence see AT I, 648 (Huygens, 4 December 1637); AT II, 500 (Mersenne, 9 January 1639); AT II, 570 (Mersenne, 20 February 1639); AT III, 120 (Mersenne, 30 July 1640); and AT III, 271 ([Pollot?], Mid January 1641). For discussions of mechanics, see AT I, 434 (Huygens, 5 October 1637); AT I, 648 (Huygens, 4 December 1637); AT II, 500 (Mersenne, 9 February 1639); AT II, 542 ([Debeaune?], 30 April 1639); and AT III, 212 (Mersenne, 28 October 1640).

<sup>37</sup> May or June 1645 (AT IV, 218), 21 July 1645 (AT IV, 251), and 4 August 1645 (AT IV, 263). Misfortune struck Elisabeth concerning her nobility and health, and Descartes responds with medicinal and moral advice. Deborah

final ethics, it is strange that he typically neglects, and sometimes actively avoids, the topic. This omission should call into question his concern for writing a morality during this time and thus the role the *Discourse* should play in a final moral theory.

There is one explanation for his silence on morality that would allow for its continued importance, that Descartes had interest in moral philosophy but was quiet about it. By comparison, Descartes does not write about the *Regulae* in any of his other works and nonetheless the treatise seems to be of some importance to him. It underwent at least one major revision and, depending on how one interprets the forthcoming findings from the new Cambridge Manuscript, there is some possibility that he continued working on the manuscript until much later in his life. Although it is possible that he hints at the *Regulae* in the *Discourse on Method* when he says that the method of the *Discourse* is not his method in its entirety, this is only conjecture. If an argument from silence fails to undermine the importance of the *Regulae*, then why would it succeed for morality? If this is the case, the objection is that there is no immediate inference from Descartes' silence on morality that should be drawn: that he is sometimes silent on morality implies no more than the tautology that sometimes he is silent on morality. I believe this explanation fails to be compelling, however, because in spite of similarities, there is an important difference that makes this analogy fail in relevant ways. Although Descartes does not discuss the treatise of the *Regulae* itself, he is clearly concerned with method at large; method is important for him, even if he is silent about composing a specific treatise. This is not the case with his moral philosophy. With his morality, it is not a specific treatise that he is silent about, but the entire branch of moral philosophy itself.

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Brown notes that medicine and morals are not always easily distinguishable. I believe she is correct. See Brown (2008), 38-40. However, Descartes makes a distinction between them: medicine is for good of the body, morals are for the good of the soul. That they influence each other does not reduce them to the same thing.

### I.a. Ethics in the *Meditations on First Philosophy*?

The more compelling objection, then, is that Descartes actually does discuss ethics in the eight-year period; if so, then it is more likely that he laid down the *morale par provision* as a foundation that he continues to slowly build upon while constructing an ethics over time. In one sense, this objection is true; Descartes seems to discuss morality in the *Meditations*. In the third meditation, for example, Descartes talks of evil:

Now as far as ideas are concerned, if they are considered alone and in their own right, without being referred to something else, they cannot, properly speaking, be false. For whether it is a she-goat or a chimera that I am imagining, it is no less true that I imagine the one than the other. Moreover, we need not fear that there is falsity in the will itself or in the affects, for although I can choose evil things or even things that are utterly non-existent, I cannot conclude from this that it is untrue that I do choose these things.<sup>38</sup>

Then again, in the fourth meditation, “Were I always to see clearly what is true and good, I would never deliberate about what is to be judged or chosen. In that event, although I would be entirely free, I could never be indifferent.”<sup>39</sup> According to Descartes, ignorance of the good is the cause of indifference, and the appropriate response to indifference is to withhold judgment:

“Because the will is indifferent in regard to such matters, it easily turns away from the true and the good; and in this way I am deceived and I sin.”<sup>40</sup> Likewise, in the fifth meditation, Descartes discusses resoluteness. This topic mirrors the doctrine of constancy from the second maxim in the *morale par provision* and later in his morality.<sup>41</sup> And then, finally, the sixth meditation contains a discussion on pain and pleasure in terms similar to the *Passions of the Soul*.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> AT VII, 37. AC, 20-21. Quotes from the *Meditations* as well as the *Objections and Replies* will use the translation by Ariew and Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 2000) unless indicated otherwise. Here, Descartes considers his criteria of truth and the nature of ideas and he only discusses immorality (that is, choosing evil) only in so far as it helps to illuminate his criteria.

<sup>39</sup> AT VII, 37; AC, 21.

<sup>40</sup> AT VII, 58; AC, 33.

<sup>41</sup> Descartes discusses the limits of knowledge for atheists compared with theists. Descartes expands on these themes in the replies to the second set of Objections: “I do not deny that an atheist could know clearly that the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles; I am simply affirming that his knowledge is not true scientific knowledge, since no knowledge that can be rendered doubtful seems to deserve to be called scientific knowledge. And since we

It is not unreasonable to see ethical themes in these examples – some of Descartes’ contemporaries, the authors writing against Descartes in the *Objections and Replies*, certainly saw them. Mersenne, in the second set of objections, criticizes Descartes’ criteria of truth, arguing that:

...if the will never goes astray or errs when it follows the mind’s clear and distinct knowledge, and if the will lays itself open to danger when it allows a conception of the understanding that is not at all clear and distinct ... there would be practically nothing that might permissibly be embraced by the will, since we know practically nothing with the sort of clarity and distinctness you require for that kind of certainty which is immune to all doubt.<sup>43</sup>

Descartes replies:

...what renders the will certain, if what it follows is not clearly perceived? And who has ever denied...that the more clearly we understand something before assenting to it, the less danger there is of our being involved in error...? But a concept is said to be obscure or confused only because something unknown is contained in it.<sup>44</sup>

Descartes concludes that it is unimaginable to only assent to truths completely known, and so when a person assents to a belief of this sort, s/he should hold on to it with the resolve of it being completely evident, reiterating the second rule of the *morale par provision* and directing Mersenne to revisit the *Discourse* on these matters rather than continue discussing them.<sup>45</sup> As for Descartes’ current concerns,

...I would like you to recall that in matters that can be embraced by the will I drew a very careful distinction between the conduct of life and the contemplation of truth... the fact that the contemplation of truth was the only topic I dealt with in my *Meditations* is borne out of both by the entire project and by what I declared in no uncertain terms at the end of

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are supposing him to be an atheist, this person cannot be certain that he is not being deceived in those very things that seem most evident to him, as has been sufficiently shown.” (AT VII, 141; AC, 83)

<sup>42</sup> AT VII, 86-88.

<sup>43</sup> AT VII, 126; AC, 74.

<sup>44</sup> AT VII, 147; AC, 87.

<sup>45</sup> In the Reply to the Second Objection: “Yet from time to time one thing must be chosen from a number of things that are completely unknown and, once chosen, it is no less to be held on to than if it had been chosen for very evident reasons, so long as no reason can be entertained to the contrary, as I explained on page 26 of my *Discourse on Method*.” (AT VII, 149; AC, 88)

the First Meditation, where I said that I could not indulge too much in distrust, since I was bent not on outward accomplishments but only on knowledge.<sup>46</sup>

In spite of what Mersenne may have first thought, the *Meditations* only discuss the contemplation of truth, not the correctness of action.

Likewise, in the fourth set of objections Arnauld pushes for Descartes to elaborate on errors committed in sorting true and false beliefs from errors of moral judgment.<sup>47</sup> In a rare moment of admitting error, Descartes yields to Arnauld's objection, making a late addition to the body of the *Meditations*. In an expanded preface, he adds:

But here one should meanwhile bear in mind that the Meditation there is no discussion whatsoever of sin, that is, the error committed in the pursuit of good and evil, but only the error that occurs in discriminating between what is true and false. Nor is there an examination of those matters pertaining to the faith or to the conduct of life, but merely speculative truths known exclusively by the means of the light of nature.<sup>48</sup>

While Descartes' concession is pragmatic—he tells Mersenne to include the amendment so that others will know he is reasonable and either be more willing to voice their disagreements or be less stubborn in accepting his views<sup>49</sup>—it is also an odd way of granting Arnauld his objection. Rather than agreeing to discuss morality based on the objection, Descartes restates with heightened emphasis that he is not addressing matters pertaining to the conduct of life in this work.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> AT VII, 149. AC, 88.

<sup>47</sup> AT VII, 215-216.

<sup>48</sup> AT VII, 15. AC, 8.

<sup>49</sup> See the 18 March 1641 letter from Descartes to Mersenne. (AT III, 334)

<sup>50</sup> The careful reader may note here that I omit the fifth set of objections with Gassendi and the correspondence with Hyperaspites. I do so because the letter to Gassendi at best addresses medical, not moral, concerns and at worst is only addressing metaphysical concerns. Similarly, the letter to Hyperaspites focuses on epistemic certainty. I already elaborated on both: In the fifth set of objections, Gassendi suggests that Descartes should move beyond foundational concerns to moral philosophy in the *Meditations*. In his response, Descartes describes the human tendency to err as a negation of choosing correctly, not a positive quality in itself. When we judge incorrectly, the will is judging independently apart from the intellect. Belief in a material mind, for instance, is judged as true because it was judged true in the past, not because the intellect actively judges that it is so. He illustrates these limits by considering someone who judges whether an apple is good for eating. In this case, the senses are insufficient for a sound judgment; by its smell or color, someone may judge that a poisoned apple is nutritious. These sensations clearly do not provide sufficient evidence that the apple is good to eat and it may even be that a person's desire to consume the

There are several points that should be taken away from this brief overview of the *Meditations*. The first is that Descartes is consistently emphatic through this period that his concerns are metaphysical and not moral. Whenever correspondents raise moral themes in their objections, Descartes is quick to remind them of his current indifference on the subject: he either draws his interlocutor back to metaphysics or dismisses the objection, directing them back to the *Discourse*. He is so emphatic about this point that, in addition to repeating it often in his replies to objections, he also amends the Preface to make his disinterest even clearer. The second is that, even in these cases, Descartes only discusses morality when prompted by an interlocutor to say more about it. This is hardly evidence that he actually desired to talk about ethics, found it important, or thought it was necessary to talk about during this period.<sup>51</sup> To summarize, the number of times Descartes mentions morality in the *Meditations* and its *Objections and Replies* are few, and when he does, it is always at the bidding of a correspondent in order to say he is not presently concerned with the subject.

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apple is the cause for the judgment that it is beneficial for the body. (AT VII, 376) Descartes concludes that for any given object, “there may be many things about it that we desire but very few things of which we have knowledge. And when we make a bad judgment, it is not that we exercise our will in a bad fashion, but that the object of our will is bad.” (AT VII, 376; CSM II, 259) Descartes is explaining to Gassendi why it is that people hold false beliefs, and this illustration of a poisoned apple is offered to assist him with offering this explanation. It is true that the judgment of whether an apple is beneficial or harmful to eat moves beyond the metaphysical concerns of the *Meditations*, but he only offers it as an example to address the metaphysical concerns raised by Gassendi. Even supposing that Descartes is more invested in this example than the text warrants, at very best these concerns are medicinal and, contrary to morality, medicine is a topic that he discusses often in his correspondence, so it is not much of a surprise to see it here.

As for the correspondence with “Hyperaspites,” during the period in which the text of the *Meditations* is coming together, Descartes has an exchange with “Hyperaspites,” a champion for Gassendi. Descartes hoped to publish this letter and his response along with the other objections and replies, but it was received too late to be included with the others. (Descartes’ letter to Mersenne, 17 November 1641; AT III, 447) Descartes tells Hyperaspites that “It would indeed be desirable to have as much certainty for the conduct of our lives as is needed for the acquisition of knowledge; but it is easily shown that in such matters so much is not to be sought or hoped for.” (AT III, 422; CSMK, 188) In short, as in the sixth meditation, Descartes is reminding Hyperaspites not to apply his epistemic certainty to morality; they are not the same.

<sup>51</sup> It is similar to those times when I am teaching ethics to my first year students ethics: they will sometimes ask me about Ayn Rand and, assuming their questions are relevant to the topic at hand, I will answer them. This is no indication as to how much I actually care about, or wish to spend any effort considering, the writings of Ayn Rand.



Even if, Descartes is not concerned with morality in the *Meditations* as I have shown, that does not make it any less important for his future ethical project. In the Preface to the French edition of the *Principles of Philosophy* he discusses the order of his philosophy, describing it as a tree: the roots of metaphysics will flow into the trunk of physics, and from the trunk of physics will grow the applied philosophies, each with its own end: medicine, mechanics, and morals.<sup>52</sup> In his tree of philosophy, medicine, mechanics, and morals are posterior to his metaphysics and physics. It is fitting that in discussing metaphysics he includes topics with ethical implications such as the will—it will ‘flow’ through the trunk and into the branches. We should think of the metaphysics (like the physics) as preconditions for morality.

To offer an example, in the *Summa Theologica*, Thomas Aquinas famously offers five arguments for the existence of God. Just prior to these demonstrations, he answers the question whether it is possible to demonstrate that God exists. Aquinas replies that, “The existence of God and other like truths about God, which can be known by natural reason, are not articles of faith, but are preambles to the articles; for faith presupposes natural knowledge, even as grace presupposes nature, and perfection supposes something that can be perfected.”<sup>53</sup> For Aquinas, natural knowledge can function as a precondition for faith, but the two are not identical; similarly, for Descartes, ethics presupposes metaphysics—a doctrine of the will may be a precondition for blameworthiness, for instance.

The remaining problem now is why he would choose to omit morality in the *Meditations* after including it in the *Discourse*. There are a few reasons why this may be the case. For one, Descartes’ *Meditations* is undertaking a different type of project than the *Discourse*. He writes in the preface to the *Meditations*, “The intent there [in the *Discourse*] was not to provide a precise

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<sup>52</sup> AT IXb, 14-15. The end of medicine is health, the end of mechanics is the use for which a human artifact is intended, and the end of morality is virtue or the good life.

<sup>53</sup> ST I.2

treatment of [God and the human mind], but only to offer a sample and to learn from the opinions of readers how these issues should be treated in the future.”<sup>54</sup> In the *Discourse*, however, he is trying to accomplish much more.<sup>55</sup> It was a wide and ambitious project, advancing a metaphysics, *morale par provision*, and physics, though he admits none of them were treated in their entirety.<sup>56</sup> All of this is in contrast with the narrow, metaphysical focus of the *Meditations*: that is, to provide a foundation for his physics by proving the existence of God

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<sup>54</sup> AT VII, 7; AC, 4.

<sup>55</sup> Also, while the *Discourse* and its reception are important historically and philosophically, it does not present Descartes’ mature philosophy. He did not think the *Discourse* was a completed work from the start. The *Discourse* was more of an afterthought to his scientific treatises for which it served as a preface. His correspondence leading up to its publication shows his efforts focused on the scientific treatises that became the *Meteorology*, *Optics*, and *Geometry*. Descartes makes no mention of the *Discourse* until a year before its publication when he tells Mersenne that he decided to include a preface to the three treatises. (Letter to Mersenne; March 1636 (AT I, 338); Though he mentions a little metaphysical treatise fairly early (Letter to Mersenne from 25 November 1630 [AT I, 177]), its stated purpose of proving the existence of God and the soul is different than that of the *Discourse on Method*. This is not to say that Descartes viewed the *Discourse* as an unimportant document; though he did not consider it a final or comprehensive product, (Letter to [Vatier], 22 February 1638. (AT I, 558)) he saw it as a step in a process toward developing a more complete metaphysics and physics. He actively pursued criticisms of the *Discourse*, requesting two hundred copies to distribute (Letter to Mersenne, March 1636; AT I, 339) and he requested objections from his correspondents. This was common in his interactions with Mersenne and Huygens as well as with their colleagues and acquaintances. One reason why Descartes may have asked for comments could be that he fears being misunderstood: he goes as far as to include instructions in the prefaces of his publications for how to properly read them, and confides in those closest to him that he is concerned for his reputation. In spite of this concern, it does not change the fact that he also explicitly makes the request in his letters to search for errors in his writing. Descartes pleads to Mersenne: “continue to tell me all those you hear. Make them as unfavorable to me as you can; that will be the great pleasure you can give me.” (27 February 1637. AT I, 349; CSMK, 52-53) Similarly, he writes later that year that, “those who bring some error to my attention will always please me more than those who bring me praise.” (Letter to [Noel], October 1637; AT I 454; CSMK, 74) This sentiment is repeated to Plempius in letter dated 20 December 1637. (AT I, 475) After Galileo’s condemnation, his concern is surely more than an inflated self-image or a desire to live undisturbed by uncharitable criticisms lest Galileo’s fate become his own. Though it seems that his original vision was to publish the *Discourse* with Objections and Replies, this idea was abandoned to write the *Meditations* in this way.

I strongly believe that though Descartes rarely admits to being wrong, the requests for comments on his work are not only rhetoric. As early as 1630, seven years before the *Discourse* is published, he tells Mersenne that he had interest in publishing a work that included objections from others and his replies to those objections. He brings this up again in a letter to Mersenne from Early June of 1637. (AT I, 377) Upon receiving these criticisms, he embraced many of them in action, if not in word, as evidence of his sincerity: there are clear differences between the *Discourse* and the *Meditations on First Philosophy* resulting from considering objections raised by even some of his fiercest critics. Many objections arose in letters from Pierre Petit, for example, who Descartes specifically alludes to in the Latin preface to the *Meditations*. Jean-Luc Marion argues that the whole of the *Meditations*’ body should be seen as a reply to the objections to the *Discourse*. (Marion [1995], 7, etc.) One of these changes is the order of philosophy in the *Meditations*, where the placement of a proof for the existence of God is moved to precede mind/body dualism.

<sup>56</sup> He writes in a 22 February 1638 letter to [Vatier] that he was not trying to teach his whole method in the *Discourse*, but only enough to show the treatises were not casual thoughts. (AT I, 558)

and the immortality of the soul. Here, he has a much narrower scope, intending that his physics will follow in a future publication.<sup>57</sup>

Another motivation for omitting discussions of morality from the *Meditations* may relate to Descartes' choice of publication language: the *Discourse* was published in French while the *Meditations* was first printed in Latin. There are several reasons for him to do this. For one, it was more practical; he began receiving correspondence in Latin, not French, and wanted consistency in language throughout the *Meditations*.<sup>58</sup> Aware that a Jesuit audience would be more receptive to a Latin text than a French manuscript, another incentive was political: to win favor with the faculty at La Fleche.<sup>59</sup> Because of these reasons, his choice of publication language may be overdetermined.<sup>60</sup>

Nonetheless, another explanation that Descartes gives helps explain the inclusion of the provisional morality in the *Discourse* and its omission from the *Meditations*. This explanation is as follows: both languages appealed to large numbers of readers, but had two very different audiences. The French language appealed to a broader demographic because it also included those not formally educated, such as woman, among its readership; but, geographically, it reached a smaller, francophone region. In contrast, Latin appealed to a smaller demographic of learned individuals, but reached much further geographically. Descartes was concerned that if he gave his strongest arguments in French he would corrupt the “weak minds.”<sup>61</sup> In a letter from

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<sup>57</sup> Descartes begins writing the *Principles of Philosophy* after distributing the *Meditations* while waiting to receive the objections that he will publish along with his replies in the finalized edition of the *Meditations*. In his response to Arnauld in the Reply to the Fourth Set of Objections, for instance, Descartes mentions having his own *Summa of Philosophy* in front of him. (AT VII, 254) He also makes note of the text to Regius in a February 1642 letter. (AT III, 523)

<sup>58</sup> Letter to Mersenne, 27 July 1638. (AT II, 267)

<sup>59</sup> Letter to Mersenne, 27 July 1638. (AT II, 267)

<sup>60</sup> He may also feel the need to follow Montaigne less closely, including his Stoicism, since the Latin style does not resonate with the Montaignian *essay* that Descartes mimics in the French *Discourse*. This speaks forward to the next part of my chapter, though, so I will leave it here.

<sup>61</sup> Letter to [Silhon], May 1637. (AT I, 354); [Vatier], 22 February 1638 (AT I, 558)

1637, he admits that the arguments for God's existence in the *Discourse* were not the strongest; however, in order to strengthen them he would have to first offer a more robust skepticism, and "...I was afraid that this introduction [of more skepticism] would look at first as if it were designed to bring in skepticism, and would disturb weaker minds, especially as I was writing in the vernacular."<sup>62</sup>

Since Descartes is already concerned that his skepticism will disturb "weak minds," it makes sense, then, when writing in the common vernacular, French, that he takes extra care to include the *morale par provision* along with his doubt. He does this precisely to subdue any possibility of future moral misgivings that might come upon those of "weak mind" while still in the mode of skepticism. Arnauld highlights this point in the fourth set of objections to the *Meditations*: "...surely the author himself admits in his *Discourse on Method* that this style [of doubt] is dangerous to people of ordinary intelligence."<sup>63</sup> Descartes' reply affirms this. He refrained from treating more sophisticated skeptical arguments the *Discourse*, he says, because it was written in French; he "reserved them instead for these *Meditations*, which I warned early on should be read only by those who have both intelligence and learning."<sup>64</sup> The doubt in the *Meditations* he claims is not suited for people of all intelligence; when writing in Latin, which also implies a more learned audience, he is more comfortable delving deeper into skepticism since he does not fear leading "weak minds" astray in the same way as when he is writing in the vernacular. With this concern also vanishes the need for a provisional morality.

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<sup>62</sup> Letter to [Silhon], May 1637. (AT I, 354); He says something similar in 1638: "the principle reason for its obscurity is that I did not dare to go into detail about the arguments of the skeptics, or say everything which is necessary to withdraw the mind from the senses." (Letter to [Vatier], 22 February 1638; AT I, 560; CSMK, 86)

<sup>63</sup> AT VII, 215. AC, 128.

<sup>64</sup> AT VII, 247. AC, 148.

### **I.b. One Remaining Detail**

Up to this point, I have argued that Descartes was silent about morality after the *Discourse* in order to distance myself from readings that place too much emphasis on the role of the *morale par provision* in a Cartesian ethics. To do this, I have shown that his silence concerning the *Regulae* is not a relevant enough comparison to deflate my concern. I have also shown that his only discussion of ethics, not to be confused with the metaphysical preconditions for ethics, are when he is compelled to talk about it by others in the *Objections and Replies*. On each of these occasions he reminds his objector that he is uninterested in discussing moral philosophy, going so far as to add this disclaimer into the Preface of the *Meditations*.

So now I will address a remaining detail, the final reference to morality by Descartes before his 1645 letters to Elisabeth (other than the “provisional morality”). A year after the publication of the *Discourse*, Descartes writes to Pollot. In this letter, Descartes writes in reference to the moral rules of the *Discourse*, that “I apply this rule mainly to actions in life which admit of no delay, and I use it only provisionally, intending to change my opinions as soon as I can find better.”<sup>65</sup> He is merely reiterating what he already said in the beginning of the third part of the *Discourse*:

Now, before starting to rebuild your house, it is not enough simply to pull it down, to make provision for materials and architects (or else train yourself in architecture), and to have carefully drawn up the plans; you must also provide yourself with some other place where you can live comfortably while building is in progress.<sup>66</sup>

Aside from the *morale par provision*, in this only other explicit reference to morality before the letters to Elisabeth, Descartes reinforces the provisional nature of the rules in the third part: they are meant to serve as a guide for actions that cannot be postponed and will be demolished when a complete ethics is offered.

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<sup>65</sup> AT II, 35; CSMK, 96.

<sup>66</sup> AT IV, 22; CSM I, 122.

I have shown, then, that the only references to morality Descartes makes until later in his public life are very few and reaffirm that the *morale par provision* is temporary (and not to be taken in the legal sense offered by Le Dœuff) as well as that he is unconcerned with ethics at this time. There is a real indifference towards morality before he begins discussing the topic with Elisabeth, making the *morale par provision* an anomaly that warrants a different explanation. It is this explanation that I turn to in my next section.

## **II. An Alternative Reading of the *Morale Par Provision***

Up to this point I have been making a case that the morality in the third part of the *Discourse* is an anomaly, a brief moment when Descartes discusses moral philosophy with any interest or detail prior to correspondence much later in his life. Even if this is the case, then its anomalous inclusion in the *Discourse* deserves an explanation. In the last section, I offered some possible motivations—differences in both language and philosophical emphases of the *Discourse* and *Meditations*. However I believe there is something much deeper and interesting going on which motivates Descartes to include the *morale par provision* in the third part of the *Discourse*. In short, I believe that the provisional morality is a natural extension of the Neostoic skepticism outlined just prior to it. The provisional morality occurs under a ‘veil of doubt,’ which Descartes does not emerge from until the fourth part. In a sense, the *morale par provision* is not actually an anomaly, because his interest is skeptical, not moral; he is extending his skeptical program that he begins in the first two parts.

Two authors central to the development of the *Discourse* and *Meditations* are Montaigne and Pierre Charron. Montaigne was one of the most influential figures to emerge from the Renaissance. Famous for penning his tremendously popular *Essays*, one of particular

philosophical influence was the essay, an *Apology for Raymond Sebond*. In this apology, Montaigne defends Raymond Sebond's *La Theologie naturelle* against recent attacks.<sup>67</sup> It is hardly an apology, though, as his argument reduces to skepticism: Raymond's critics are mistaken, but only as much as everyone is mistaken. The criticisms against Sebond's natural theology are just as absurd as their object of the attacks because pursuing natural knowledge is a fruitless endeavor. The *Apology* includes classic Pyrrhonian arguments that Descartes unapologetically embraces later in the *Meditations*: our senses deceive us, we cannot be sure if we are awake or sleeping, and all expressions of our cognitive faculties lead to circular arguments.<sup>68</sup>

Pierre Charron is lesser known than Montaigne today, but he is arguably just as important for the development of early modern thought. Richard Popkin goes as far as to consider him among the fathers of modern philosophy, and I do not disagree.<sup>69</sup> Charron, a priest who systematizes Montaigne's fideism of the *Apology*, attempts to lead his author to a crisis of doubt; this Pyrrhonian crisis will affirm that human knowledge is impossible by natural reason, and human effort should instead be turned towards custom and self-knowledge. Charron's wise man is a Stoic sage, arrived at by doubt, and synthesized with his Christian faith, similar in ways to what the Renaissance Neostoics (e.g., Justus Lipsius and Guillaume Du Vair) did before him. Charron also interpreted Montaigne in this Neostoic tradition but whether this interpretation is fair or not is unclear. What is clear, however, is that his reading of Montaigne helped to inform the Stoic aspects of Charron's own thought. Descartes read Charron as well, receiving a copy of

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<sup>67</sup> Montaigne had promised his father that he would translate *La Theologie naturelle*. In 1581 he fulfilled this promise, translating the text from Latin into French.

<sup>68</sup> Clarke (2006), 191.

<sup>69</sup> Popkin (1954), 831.

*On Wisdom* when he was young.<sup>70</sup> This early exposure to Charron also likely affected Descartes' reading of Montaigne, helping him draw out Stoic-like themes latent in the *Apology* and more explicit in other essays.

The influence of these two authors is paramount for framing the first parts of the *Discourse*, which are nearly a *précis* of these two works in both thought and style. Montaigne's style in the *Essays* is distinct. Written in an elegant French, Montaigne offered semi-biographical aggrandized stories and thoughts on various topics, with focus on turning inward towards self-discovery and knowledge. Descartes repeats this Montaignian style in the *Discourse*, which he also calls an "essay" put forward "merely as a story or, if you prefer, as a fable".<sup>71</sup> It is written in French and provides an embellished autobiographical account of his journey to understanding that begins with self-knowledge: *je pense, donc je suis*.

The influence on the content of these first parts of the *Discourse* is also significant, most specifically in laying out a method of doubt. In the first part, Descartes lays out a provisional skepticism that he does not emerge from until the fourth part. One of the most central Pyrrhonian themes present in both Montaigne and Charron is the doctrine of indifference. Skepticism in this tradition teaches that for every proposition, its opposite can be proposed with equal rhetorical force. Since reason cannot rationally compel a person to judge in favor of either a proposition or its negation, s/he should embrace indifference, acknowledging that nothing can be known with certainty, even uncertainty. Descartes echoes Montaigne's disenchantment with Scholastic education, raising his own distaste for the Jesuit education he received at *La Flèche*.<sup>72</sup> Recalling the Pyrrhonian equilibrium traced throughout Montaigne's *Apology*, he applies it to the apparent

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<sup>70</sup> Rodis-Lewis (1999), 44-5. See also Clark, 64.

<sup>71</sup> AT VI, 4; translation from Roger Ariew's translation found in Descartes' *Philosophical Essays and Correspondence* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 2000), 47

<sup>72</sup> Clarke (2006), 191.



futility of education itself: for every reason to affirm one intellectual pursuit, there was an equally compelling reason reject it. Reading of classical texts and studying history are beneficial to know more about other people and judge more soundly, but at the end it is no different than traveling, and too much traveling makes one a stranger in his or her own country, and so forth. Descartes mimics other skeptical tropes from their writing, such as an emphasis custom and its role in shaping beliefs:

I thought, too, how the same man, with the same mind, if brought up from infancy among the French or the Germans, develops otherwise than he would if he had always lived among the Chinese or cannibals. [...] Thus it is more custom and example that persuade us, rather than any certain knowledge.<sup>73</sup>

It is not until the end of part two, when he wanders into method, does he deviate even slightly from Montaigne and Charron. When he offers this method, prescribing resources to begin untangling human knowledge, he has not yet emerged from the veil of doubt he has placed upon himself. This emergence from doubt occurs in the fourth part with his *Cogito*, the expression of self-knowledge. Once the reader is free from the grasp of provisional skepticism in the fourth part, s/he is able to begin applying the rules of method given earlier to solve problems and learn new truths based on those discovered.

The question remains of what to make of the third part. I have already discussed how the *Discourse* begins by repeating the skepticism of Montaigne and Charron almost verbatim, in content and style. For this reason, I would like to return to these two authors. An important difference between their projects and Descartes' is that their doubt is not provisional. Both remain committed to uncertainty, rejecting the ability to naturally obtain knowledge. However, their skepticism does not result in paralysis, no more than it does in Sextus Empiricus. Skepticism should lead a person to self-knowledge and tranquility. For Charron and Montaigne

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<sup>73</sup> AT VI, 16; CSM II, 119. Compare this with Charron's *De la sagesse* II.2.

(or at least Charron's Montaigne), the goal is nonetheless wisdom, and the Wise Man is none other than a Neostoic Sage. Most clearly outlined by Charron, there are two illnesses that plague the good life: giving oneself to external corruptions and the passions. Popular opinion is misleading, and distracts one from the search for truth. As for the passions, they are a sickness of the intellect and a source of all human suffering; the cure is virtue, which was obtained through removing irrational passions. There are four remedies that Charron lays out. The first, and basest, is to foster insensibility, as it is better to be numb to everything than succumb to the passions. His second is to invoke passions to suppress one another, followed by actively avoiding those circumstances that arouse passions. The fourth and highest remedy is to confront passions with reason. This virtue is a "firmness of the soul by means of which one foresees and confronts things without trouble."<sup>74</sup> In rejecting external influences and removing the passions, the wise man is able to conquer his self. In the search for truth, the wise man also empties his mind, letting indifference serve religion, as that person is free to follow the God and the Church.<sup>75</sup> Similarly, life is a performance, where "the wise man will often [...] play one role before the outside world and another in his mind."<sup>76</sup> Charron writes, "He must do and behave outwardly for public respect and offend no one, in accordance with the law, custom, and rites that the country observes and requires."<sup>77</sup> All of these should serve the ultimate purpose of seeking truth and they require constancy.<sup>78</sup> "Wisdom is a regulated handling of our soul with moderation and

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<sup>74</sup> *On Wisdom* II.I; Translations from Charron (1998), 54-5.

<sup>75</sup> *On Wisdom* II.II; Charron (1998), 60-63.

<sup>76</sup> *On Wisdom* II.II; Charron (1998), 59.

<sup>77</sup> *On Wisdom* II.II; Charron (1998), 59.

<sup>78</sup> For more comparison, see Popkin (1954), 831-837.

proportion,” he says, “that is a balance and a sweet harmony of our judgments, actions, manners, and a healthy constancy of our mind.”<sup>79</sup>

In rightly understanding the *morale par provision*, then, there are a few things that we already know. First, that it is a temporary housing while the new housing is drafted and constructed; second, that it occurs under provisional doubt. This second point I believe is particularly important in understanding it. If Descartes so closely follows Montaigne and Charron in the first two parts, and he does not remove this skeptical veil until the fourth, I suggest that the third part should be understood as an extension of these first two parts. When approached in this context the similarities are striking. Consider the advice for Charron’s wise man: follow the customs of one’s country, value constancy, conquer oneself through neglecting the external world and overcoming passions, and to make seeking wisdom the highest of life’s pursuits. These are, of course, exactly the three (or four) rules that Descartes prescribes in the provisional morality. For Descartes, they are to first, “obey the laws and customs of my country, constantly holding on to the religion in which, by God’s grace, I had been instructed from my childhood”; second, “to be as firm and resolute in my actions as I could”; third, to “conquer myself rather than fortune, and to change my desires rather than the order of the world”; and fourth, to review occupations for life, and “I could not do better than [...] spending my whole life cultivating my reason and advancing, as far as I could, in the knowledge of the truth.”<sup>80</sup>

It seems, then, that the third part of the *Discourse* is an explicit extension of the Neostoic skepticism in the first two parts. This reading, that the *morale par provision* is merely an extension of the skeptical part of his project solves several problems. First, it explains why

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<sup>79</sup> *De le sagesse* II.I. This is cited in its original French in Kogel (1972), 280; the translation is mine. Kogel offers an astute discussion of the differences between Charron and Montaigne on constancy here. Charron was firm in his commitment to this Stoic doctrine while Montaigne waived some. (Kogel (1972), 36-37)

<sup>80</sup> AT VI, 23-27; translation from Descartes (2000) by Roger Ariew, 56-48.

Descartes is otherwise unconcerned with morality until later in his public life. Although many present-day commentators are correct that there are Stoic themes embedded here, that is because these are the themes that Charron and Montaigne (at least Montaigne *vis-à-vis* Charron) also emphasize. At this point the Stoicism seems somewhat happenstance; though Descartes could have presumably picked a different ethical tradition to fit into the provisional morality, this is the one that Montaigne and Charron followed, and while still ignorant of the good, he maintains their project to the end, not stopping at doubt, but concluding with how the wise man should act when ignorant of the good. Descartes' morality is provisional because his doubt is also.

This is not to say that Descartes wrote his provisional morality while ignorant of classical Stoicism. Stoicism was extremely popular in the seventeenth century and, as an alternative to Aristotelianism, it would presumably be an attractive ethical tradition for a modern thinker such as Descartes.<sup>81</sup> However, I already showed that Descartes did not express any concern for morality before, during, or soon after writing the *Discourse*; given the sum of my evidence, I believe that is fair to say that his silence that follows the *Discourse* is because in this work he was more interested in following the skeptical project to its end, with its Neostoic conclusions, than he was in providing anything like a morality in itself.

### **III. The Objection From a Letter to Elisabeth, 4 August 1645**

In one final point on this matter, an obvious objection to my thesis is that when Descartes does begin discussing ethics later in his life, in describing conditions for a life of contentment he recalls the rules of morality in the *Discourse on Method* to Elisabeth.<sup>82</sup> In a letter from 1645, he

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<sup>81</sup> Anti-Aristotelianism was a necessary but not sufficient condition for Descartes as he also criticizes other early modern critics of Aristotle such as Hobbes and Gassendi.

<sup>82</sup> 4 August 1645. AT IV, 265; I also discussed above that he recalls them in the *Meditations*, but showed it was always dismissive in a sense, to redirect his interlocutor back to metaphysical concerns.

lays out the following conditions which he says relate to the three rules of morality from the *Discourse*: (1) to always employ his mind to discover what he should (or should not) do in all the circumstances of life, (2) to have firm and constant resolution to carry out what reason recommends without being diverted by his passions or appetites, and (3) to guide himself according to reason, acknowledging that all goods which he fails to possess are outside his power.<sup>83</sup> These are parallel with three rules of morality from the *Discourse*: (1<sup>\*</sup>) to obey the laws and customs of his country and religion, (2<sup>\*</sup>) to be firm and decisive in his actions upon adopting them, regardless how doubtful, and (3<sup>\*</sup>) to master himself instead of fortune, changing desires instead of the order of the world.<sup>84</sup>

There is undoubted similarity between the conditions and the rules, which Descartes makes explicit. For this reason, it is easy to equivocate them, drawing a bridge between the old and new morality. However, he does not say how they are related, merely that they are. It is sensible to pause to investigate how they are related and not just assume they are the same rules without investigation. And upon examination, the two sets of rules are quite different. In (1), Descartes tells Elisabeth that we should *employ our minds*, while in (1<sup>\*</sup>) he writes that he ought to *follow custom*. Likewise in (2), Descartes states we should use *reason* without being diverted by passions, but in (2<sup>\*</sup>) he recommends resoluteness *regardless of how doubtful an opinion he has resolved to follow*. Finally in (3), he writes that *reason* should guide him, enabling the realization that it is beyond his or her own power to possess goods that are not already in possession; however in (3<sup>\*</sup>) he suggests he should master himself, changing his *desires* instead of the order of the world.

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<sup>83</sup> 4 August 1645. AT IV, 265.

<sup>84</sup> AT VI, 22.

The rules of morality and the conditions for contentment do not clearly map onto one another. Rather, the differences perfectly correspond with my thesis: if Descartes is in the mode of a skeptic, it is best to follow custom given one's ignorance of the world, all opinions are doubtful so any constancy must exist in spite of doubts, and self-mastery is a path that one can control by changing his or her desires even when ignorant of the good. These rules of the *Discourse* mirror Charron and Montaigne's Pyrrhonian Neostoicism as discussed above, and seem appropriate while under the provisional doubt in the first four parts of the *Discourse*. On the other hand, his conditions for contentment sent to Elisabeth frame similar themes, but now from the perspective of someone who has a foundation for rational beliefs: employing our minds (not the non-rational process of following customs), executing reason without diversions (not constancy in face of uncertainty), and by means of reason recognize our current state (not by means of desire). Quite differently from the *morale par provision*, these conditions emphasize right living while quite confident of reason.

In the 4 August 1645 letter, Descartes is saying something new to Elisabeth, not merely repeating the rules from the *Discourse*. His later project is drastically different in nature, trying to build a rationally certain foundation for morals that benefits from gains made in metaphysics and physics, as opposed to operating under the skeptical mode as he does in the *morale par provision*. Though both resonate with a sense of Stoicism, the *morale par provision* is an *ad hoc* morality included by extending the provisional doubt through part four of the *Discourse*. It is a guide for living well when ignorant of the good. Differently, the list of conditions given to Elisabeth is one coming from a place of knowledge and certainty; it resonates with the emphasis in classical Stoicism that the irrational passions must be replaced with true beliefs. I will now turn to Descartes' later ethics in my next chapter.

## CHAPTER TWO:

### PASSIONS EMBODIED: DESCARTES' LETTERS TO ELISABETH REVISITED

In my last chapter, I focused on Descartes' earlier morality, demonstrating that the *morale par provision* was an extension of the provisional skepticism that he imitates from the Pyrrhonian Neostoic Pierre Charron, and the *Essays* of Montaigne *vis-à-vis* Charron. I now turn my attention to Descartes' later morality, typically identified with the *Passions of the Soul* and later correspondence, especially with Princess Elisabeth, Pierre Chanut, and Queen Christina. Since Descartes left behind no comprehensive or systematic ethics, his later morality must be reconstructed from these sources.<sup>85</sup> In forming a reconstruction, there are two general tendencies in present-day literature. The first is to treat the *Passions of the Soul* as an ethical treatise and the correspondence as its handmaiden.<sup>86</sup> The second is to classify his morality into one of several ethical traditions: Virtue Theory, Stoicism, Deontology, Platonism, and so forth.<sup>87</sup> There is often a good amount of textual support given for these positions, and there is a great deal that can be

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<sup>85</sup> There are several authors who claim that the *morale par provision* is the first part of a broader ethical theory. See LeDœuff (1989), Marshall (1998), Shapiro (2006, 2011), Cimakasky and Polansky (2014). In the previous chapter I rejected this claim, arguing that it is not intended as part of a morality in itself, but that it extends from the provisional doubt and is borrowed from Charron and Montaigne.

<sup>86</sup> See Marshall (1998), Alanen (2003), Carriero (2009), Shapiro (2006), Naaman-Zauderer (2010), Shapiro (2011).

<sup>87</sup> Lisa Shapiro identifies him as a Virtue Theorist (qua Stoic), John Marshall as a Stoic, Noa Naaman-Zauderer as a Deontologist, and Joseph Cimakasky and Ronald Polansky as a Platonist. See Marshall (1998), Shapiro (2006), Naaman-Zauderer (2010), Shapiro (2011), as well as Cimakasky and Polansky (2012). Donald Rutherford also recognizes Stoic themes in Descartes. However, I believe Rutherford's interpretation is properly balanced, and avoids identifying Descartes within any normative tradition. Rutherford describes ways that Stoicism helped shaped Descartes' thought, bracketing it within the claim that "there are substantial doctrinal differences between Descartes and the Stoics. Given this, the attempt to label him a 'Stoic' in any strict sense of the word must be rejected." (Rutherford (2014), 131).

learned from these studies.<sup>88</sup> Still, I believe both of these tendencies are fundamentally misguided, and when following them one misreading compounds upon another.

It is true that Descartes often appeals to ancient ethical traditions when articulating his ethical theory in letters, so I empathize with the motivation to classify Descartes into familiar normative categories. However, I suggest that rather than attempting to follow any particular school, Descartes is creating his own morality; this theory, he believes, can be best explained through appealing to familiar traditions such as Stoicism, Epicureanism, and Aristotelianism. Furthermore, he believes these three positions no longer contradict one another when understood through his philosophy. This chapter is composed of two sections in which I will argue for this conception of Cartesian morality. In the first, I cast reasonable doubt on the claim that the *Passions of the Soul* should be read primarily as a treatise on moral philosophy; I will argue instead that it should be read foremost as Descartes' physics of man. In the second I will sketch out Descartes' morality, a section that itself will be composed of three parts: first, I will outline Stoic, Epicurean, and Aristotelian themes in Descartes' letters, showing they are presented with equal admiration and criticism; I will then analyze Descartes' claim that his morality encompasses all three of these traditions. Descartes thinks they are reconcilable on the *summum bonum* and on virtue, and I argue that the physiological understanding of the *Passions of the Soul*, established in the first half of the chapter, provides space for this synthesis to occur.<sup>89</sup> Then, finally, I will show that Descartes' way of forwarding his own morality—presenting his ethical position by appealing to other schools of thought—is not new and in fact there is a strong

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<sup>88</sup> I find the work done by Lisa Shapiro to be especially helpful, for example.

<sup>89</sup> In previous versions of this chapter that were presented at the 2015 American Philosophical Association Pacific Division Meeting and at the 2014 Princeton-Bucharest Summer Seminar in Early Modern Philosophy, it was presented as a conditional argument: *If the Passions of the Soul are understood foremost as a physics of man, then it allows for the interpretive payoff which I suggest.* I believe the upshot of the consequent also serves as further evidence to show that the antecedent is more likely to be true.



historical precedent for this approach. Descartes cites competing authorities to lend support to his moral philosophy, and though he embraces aspects of their thought, sometimes explicitly, he means them instructively and does not self-identify as a member of any particular ethical tradition other than his own.

### **I. The *Passions of the Soul* as Physiology**

There is no strong consensus from modern literature on how to treat the *Passions of the Soul*, and it seems that scholars today are not quite sure what to make of the treatise. There are a few ‘standard’ readings, but not much agreement as to which one is correct.

One opinion rejects outright that Descartes was writing a physics of man. Lilli Alanen, for instance, does not devote a sustained commentary on the *Passions* (her primary concern is the Cartesian theory of mind), but in her brief treatment of the text, she promptly dismisses a physiological reading:

The fact that Descartes gives so much space in his *Passions* to the description of the bodily states causing and accompanying the emotions has led the commentators to classify his view among physiological or sensation theories. That is wrong: Cartesian emotions, although expressed in bodily states and behavior, remain essentially cognitive. They are not, *qua* bodily, mere expressions of “brute” or “blind” nature, but also complex patterns of acquired and learned reactions, carrying meaning and functions of their own.<sup>90</sup>

She supports this claim with the following example. Suppose I see a Rottweiler approaching and, due to a preexisting belief that Rottweilers are dangerous, I become frightened. In this case, the arousal of fear is caused by physiological changes that promptly occur upon seeing the dog. Although the passion of fear is *caused* through involuntary physiological reactions, fear *itself* is not physiological; fear occurs in the mind’s passive reception of these

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<sup>90</sup> Alanen (2003), 324.

physical sensations.<sup>91</sup> Alanen is right to recognize that particular sensations associated with fear, such as a quickened breath or beating heart, must have an intellectual component. In her example, these sensations only occur because a person has an idea of fear and it is only because of this idea that the pineal gland delivers the physical sensations representing fear. However, I believe it is important to frame this discussion in broader context. Descartes has already established his metaphysics in the *Meditations*; it is perfectly reasonable, then, even in a physics of man that he would draw from the theory of mind established in the *Meditations*. Deborah Brown draws attention to the physiological aspects of this process, recalling Articles 35-6:

The movement of the animal spirits caused by a perception of a wolf [or in Alanen's case, a Rottweiler] are very rapid and cut deep grooves in the surface of the brain, establishing a propensity for the spirits to rush in there and cause in the soul a passion of fear whenever the same or a similar image is formed on the brain.<sup>92</sup>

Brown acknowledges physiological aspects present in Descartes' description. While Descartes claims that the mind receives the representation of a passion, it is merely receiving a message, an impression. There are metaphysical aspects, of course, that must inform a comprehensive account of the passions. As Descartes tells Elisabeth, he has already established a theory of mind in his metaphysics; he has metaphysics available at-hand and is now ready to discuss the body.<sup>93</sup> It would be a bit absurd to expect Descartes to abandon the work that he established earlier, especially since his order of philosophy demands that the physics should follow from the metaphysics—if the *Passions* is a physics of man, the 'trunk' of physics will benefit from the 'roots' of the metaphysics. Alanen's claim, then, misunderstands a physiological reading of the *Passions* as one that ignores his established metaphysics; instead, as Descartes moves up the 'tree of his philosophy,' he derives new types of knowledge that can be used alongside those

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<sup>91</sup> Alanen (2003), 184.

<sup>92</sup> Brown (2008), 46.

<sup>93</sup> Letter to Elisabeth, 21 May 1643. (AT III, 663)

previously discovered. His problem at hand, the new subject of inquiry in the *Passions*, is one of a natural philosopher.

Other present-day commentators do not reject that the *Passions* has aspects that are best identified as a physics of man, but still tend to neglect physiological themes, preferring to treat the text as a moral treatise. Lisa Shapiro, for instance, develops a Cartesian ethical theory drawing from the *Passions* in addition to the correspondence and *morale par provision*. She explains that the *Passions* are a “follow up on the *morale par provision* of Part 3 of the *Discourse on Method*”<sup>94</sup> that comes by request of Princess Elisabeth to define the passions “in the middle of a discussion concerning the regulation of the passions, virtue, and the sovereign good.”<sup>95</sup> The *Passions* contain “a worked out moral psychology and some further insight into Descartes’s ethics,” which she expounds into a more robust ethical theory.<sup>96</sup>

### **I.a. The *Passions of the Soul* as Natural Philosophy**

Rather than accept either of these readings, I believe there is compelling internal and external evidence that the *Passions of the Soul* is foremost a physics of man.<sup>97</sup> When he first begins writing the treatise, he tells Mesland that he is fearful to write a morality because of the theologians.<sup>98</sup> Later, when Descartes is readying the *Passions* for publication, Descartes proclaims in an accompanying letter that, “my intention was to explain the passions only as a

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<sup>94</sup> Shapiro (2006), 269; See also Marshall (1998), 96 and Shapiro (2011), 453-458.

<sup>95</sup> Shapiro (2006), 268.

<sup>96</sup> Shapiro (2006), 273-4.

<sup>97</sup> This reading is not necessarily contrary to Shapiro’s thesis—it is possible that the *Passions of the Soul* contains both physiological and moral themes. I push back at her claim, though, that it should be recognized as a moral treatise since morality seems at best a subordinate theme of the main project of the physics. My thesis, of course, is contrary to Alenen’s.

<sup>98</sup> See Descartes’ letter dated 2 May 1644, believed address to Mesland. (AT IV, 110)

natural philosopher [*en physicien*], and not as a rhetorician or even as a moral philosopher.”<sup>99</sup>

Though Descartes gives detailed account of the passions in this final publication, this taxonomy is according to each passion’s physiological phenomenon, absent of prescriptive moral theory until these themes begin to emerge in the third part.

The *Passions* consists of three parts. The first two are almost exclusively physiological. Here Descartes describes how passions arise in the body and their corresponding physiological traits: physical coldness, paleness in the face, and so forth.<sup>100</sup> In part one, Descartes differentiates living bodies from other bodies in that they have movement; they are machines, as if a wound up clock.<sup>101</sup> These movements are caused in one of three ways: by animal spirits, which move from the brain to parts of the body through nerves; by blood, which is heated through the heart then pushed throughout the body; and by muscular movement which are caused through several ways: through the body itself, the mind, or external stimuli like perceptions.<sup>102</sup> It is no surprise that he offers the third way, self-movement through the mind, given his stated purpose to Elisabeth in writing a treatise on the passions. He draws on metaphysics established in his previous writing, but maintains his focus on physics: the passions of the soul, he writes, may be defined “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 spirits.”<sup>103</sup> When he expands on the definition in Articles 28-29, his account is making empirical observations of a natural philosopher, not a prescriptive moralist: perceptions are merely knowledge caused by

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<sup>99</sup> AT XI, 326. I recognize that earlier I quote Alanen dismissing this claim. I believe my evidence will speak for itself to support my reading against hers.

<sup>100</sup> The 17<sup>th</sup> century artist Charles Le Brun has a series of sketches based on the *Passions of the Soul* where he tries to capture the appearance of each passion on a person’s face using Descartes’ descriptions.

<sup>101</sup> a. 6 (AT XI, 330-331)

<sup>102</sup> a. 7-26 (AT XI, 331-347)

<sup>103</sup> a. 27 (AT XI, 349; CSM I, 338-339)

external objects that result in movements of animal spirits. There is physical interaction between objects, the senses, the pineal gland, and the soul that excites these movements.<sup>104</sup>

Some topics discussed in the first two parts clearly have moral implications, but that should not be confused with a morality. For example, when Descartes gives an account of the passionate pursuit and aversion to things, such as a person shunning something that was previously harmful, it is given in terms of the brain's predisposition to send animal spirits to particular parts of the body, which has no immediate moral implications.<sup>105</sup> Imagine there is a person, Eustace, who hates beer because, after becoming too intoxicated once, the mere thought of beer causes physical revulsion. When he sees, smells, or tastes beer he is repulsed. Eustace's immediate rejection of alcohol does not have direct moral implication—it is a physical response due to the harm that beer had previously caused his body. Of course after the immediate reaction, he may then think of the moral consequences of intoxication. However, that moral deliberation is not a passion. The passion is an immediate revulsion, a physical response. This is what Descartes describes.

Likewise, in Article 41 Descartes discusses the will, but it is absent of blameworthiness; he is bracketing the conversation, describing its physiological aspects and building upon the metaphysical gains he made in the *Meditations*. In defining strong and weak souls, for instance, his account lacks concern for which inclinations one should take towards particular behaviors.<sup>106</sup> His advice is not much different than that of a trainer who may through habituation instill habits and behaviors into an animal. A dog trainer may train a dog not to eat chocolate, for example. For a dog, an aversion to consuming chocolate is good, and this is a behavior formed through

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<sup>104</sup> a. 34-36

<sup>105</sup> This is a significant theme of Parts Two and Three.

<sup>106</sup> a. 49

conditioning.<sup>107</sup> The only difference between this example and its human application is that with humans there is a ghost in the machine; because humans have souls, each person can be his or her own ‘trainer,’ conditioning the will by means of one’s own intellect.

In Part Two, Descartes describes, orders, and enumerates the passions. Though the passions (including scorn, pride, envy, love, desire, hatred, courage, and remorse) are clearly of moral importance, similar to his treatment of other topics in the *Passions*, he is giving a biological description of how the body experiences these passions: rising through heat, blood flow, and animal spirits. The biologist who observes and records the quickened heart rate, flushed face, and furrowed eyebrows of an angry man is by no means forming an ethics – there is no normative or prescriptive force. So Part Two’s taxonomy of the passions consists of almost exclusively biological descriptions: after much laughter, for instance, one feels inclined towards sadness because the most fluid part of the blood from the spleen is expended and coarser blood returns to the heart.<sup>108</sup> Likewise, trembling occurs during anger because this passion releases too many animal spirits into the brain and as a result cannot “be directed from there in an orderly way.”<sup>109</sup> And so forth.

In the first two parts, then, he is recounting physiological responses to external stimuli, closer to William Harvey’s work on medicine than the Stoics or any other normative tradition. It is only in the final article (a. 148) of Part Two that Descartes writes on anything clearly related to morals, virtue. Concluding Part Two with virtue is fitting because, in Part Three, Descartes begins bridging the gap between his physics and moral philosophy. It is only in this third part where Descartes begins touching on moral themes with any substance. Nonetheless, if the *Passions* itself is a moral treatise, it is deeply unsatisfying—Part Three is brief and lacking in

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<sup>107</sup> Chocolate is toxic for dogs.

<sup>108</sup> a. 126

<sup>109</sup> a. 118 (AT XI, 416; CSM I, 369)

depth. While it is true that a badly developed moral philosophy is still a moral philosophy (just a poorly conceived one – just as a kitschy and uninspired Thomas Kinkade landscape is still a painting), I believe Descartes has earned enough respect for us not to surrender his morality so expediently. But if the *Passions* is a physics, it need not be satisfying qua morality; Descartes clearly has more to say about ethics from his correspondence at the same time that he chooses to omit. If his goal was not to create a morality in Part Three, but to build a ‘bridge’ between the physics of man and ethics, making the connections between the two clear, then the fact that there is overlap between the third part of the *Passions* and the correspondence on ethics is to be expected.

In one final thought before moving to the next section, some advance the thesis that the *Passions of the Soul* is foremost a treatise on medicine<sup>110</sup> while others recognize both medical and moral themes, drawing connections between the two. It was not uncommon, after all, following the influence of Galen, for treatises on the passions to simultaneously operate as both natural and moral philosophies.<sup>111</sup> This second thesis resonates with an ambiguity in some parts of the *Passions*, as well as his correspondence with Elisabeth, where Descartes describes the negative consequences that follow from passions as bad (*mal*): *mal* could mean vicious or morally blameworthy, but it also can refer to bodily harm, an ambiguity found in the virtue of temperance, for instance. Gluttony (failing to exhibit temperance) is a moral failure, but also bad for one’s health. Expressing a similar reading, Deborah Brown notes, “There is little distinction then for Descartes between the ‘cures’ for unruly passions and the practice of moral philosophy itself.”<sup>112</sup> She is right that he does often discuss physical remedies for the passions, and that his

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<sup>110</sup> Shapin (2000); Aucante (2006).

<sup>111</sup> Brown (2008), 29; 29fn3; also Levi (1964).

<sup>112</sup> Brown (2008), 35.

remedy is in part psychotherapeutic:<sup>113</sup> tranquility is found through the acquisition of knowledge and forethought, using reason correctly, reflecting upon Divine Providence, and the correct understanding and exercise of the will.<sup>114</sup> She concludes, however, that:

Descartes' statement in the *Preface* to the *Passions* that he will approach the passions *en physicien* does not, therefore, indicate that he intends to reduce the passions to physiological processes or ignore their moral status, but nor does it tell us what exactly he thinks he is doing that is so new.<sup>115</sup>

Her concern raises an important point of disagreement concerning the nature of the passions but I am not sure that it fares better than arguments for the *Passions* as strictly a morality. If the *Passions of the Soul* is a precondition for morality, then it would also be a precondition for medicine. At this point, Descartes has still failed to offer a physics of man and the *Passions*, especially parts one and two, lacks the prescriptive force of a moralist or a medical doctor.

### **I.b. The Order of Philosophy and a Physics of Man**

As discussed briefly in my first chapter, the order of philosophical inquiry is central for Descartes: without the correct order, the philosopher loses his or her certainty in judgments. Descartes is concerned with the correct order of his philosophy, ensuring that clear and distinct ideas precede ideas deduced from them. In the Preface to the French edition of the *Principles of Philosophy*, he violently distances himself from his former disciple Regius who among other things, “changed the order” of his philosophy.<sup>116</sup> Thus, when he writes of order in the same preface, we should be attentive: in his tree of philosophy, medicine, mechanics, and morals are posterior to his metaphysics and physics. This is echoed in a letter to Chanut dated 15 June 1646:

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<sup>113</sup> In the sense expressed by Martha C. Nussbaum in *Therapy of Desire* and which follows from Hellenistic philosophies, especially Stoicism; Nussbaum (1994). I recognize this is a bit of an anachronism, but common enough in the literature that I will use it to convey my point.

<sup>114</sup> Brown (2008), 35. She appeals to *Passions of the Soul* arts. 50, 211, 76, 176,v 138, 148, 170, 145, 156, and 161.

<sup>115</sup> Brown (2008), 35.

<sup>116</sup> AT IXb, 20; translation from Roger Ariew's Descartes (2000), 230.



"I must say in confidence that what little *knowledge of physics* I have tried to acquire has been a great help to me in *establishing sure foundations in moral philosophy*."<sup>117</sup> Appealing to the metaphor of a tree, Descartes believes that sound reasoning begins with metaphysics, which are the roots or foundation upon which physics rests. The branches and fruit that stems from physics are medicine, mechanics, and morals. As a result of this order, physics must be discovered anterior to morality. Descartes' publications lay this groundwork: first the metaphysics in *Meditations on First Philosophy* followed by the physics in *Principles of Philosophy*.<sup>118</sup>

The *Principles* contains four parts: The Principles of Human Knowledge, The Principles of Material Things, The Visible World, and The Earth. Though he concludes the *Principles* in four parts, he envisioned six parts as necessary for a complete physics:

I would not add anything further to this fourth part of the *Principles of Philosophy* if, as I originally planned, I was going on to write two further parts – a fifth part on living things, i.e. animals and plants, and a sixth part on man.<sup>119</sup>

A comprehensive treatise on physics would have included biology or physiology—a physics of living things and a physics of man—and it was his original intent to include a fifth and sixth part dedicated to each respective topic.<sup>120</sup> However, he explains that, "I am not yet completely clear about all the matters which I would like to deal with there, and I do not know whether I shall ever have enough free time to complete these sections."<sup>121</sup> Rather than postponing the publication of his physics indefinitely while he works out a physics of animals and of man, Descartes chooses to send the *Principles* to press with only four parts. In place of parts five and six, he includes ten sections at the end of part four to offer preliminary thoughts, what he calls "a

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<sup>117</sup> AT IV, 441; CSMK, 289. Italics mine.

<sup>118</sup> In my last chapter I explain why I omit the *Discourse on Method* from this list.

<sup>119</sup> AT VIIIA, 315; CSM II, 279.

<sup>120</sup> This is not uncommon for its seventeenth century use. I will show later in this chapter how Le Grand and Régis use it this way, for example.

<sup>121</sup> AT VIIIA, 315; CSM II, 279.

few observations,”<sup>122</sup> concerning objects of the senses—a sketch of what may be contained in the physics of living things and of man.

Descartes does not intend these observations as a replacement for a complete physics; he means them provisionally until he obtains clarity and can write a full physics of living things and of man. A reasonable question to ask here is whether he gives an account of these topics elsewhere in a way we can reasonably assume that Descartes would have deemed them as an acceptable substitute for parts five and six of the *Principles*. The only known manuscript that could contend for them is the *Treatise on Man*, which is indeed a physics of man. However, there are two problems with considering this in place of Principles V and VI. The first is Descartes’ failure to include it in the *Principles*. The *Treatise on Man* is an early work, written even before the *Discourse on Method*.<sup>123</sup> If Descartes had already written a physics of man that he believed was sufficient, it would be strange for him not to use it in the *Principles* or for him to have written in part four that he was not clear about what he wanted to deal with in the final two parts. The second concern is that he failed to share the *Treatise on Man* with any of his confidants. Descartes is constantly sharing his work with correspondents, asking for their advice and comments, especially for works that were still being drafted and not yet ready to be published. When he writes the *Discourse*, *Meditations*, and *Passions*, he shared his work to extract comments from his audience.<sup>124</sup> He also authored a treatise on animals a year after the *Principles* were first published; he shares this with Elisabeth.<sup>125</sup> If he saw potential in his *Treatise on Man* as his physics of man, it is not clear why it remained secretive, especially since it would have more closely related to the topics that he and Elisabeth corresponded than a treatise on animals.

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<sup>122</sup> AT VIII A, 315; CSM II, 279.

<sup>123</sup> He was composing the *Treatise on Man* along with *The World* around 1629-1633, prior to both the *Discourse on Method* and its treatises (*Optics*, *Geometry*, *Meteors*) as well as the condemnation of Galileo. (CSM I, 79)

<sup>124</sup> I discuss this earlier in this chapter and in the previous chapter.

<sup>125</sup> Letter from 6 October 1645 (AT IV, 304)

For these two reasons, this is very unlikely the physics of man that he hoped for, the one that would bridge the gap between the first four parts of his physics and the practical philosophies of medicine, mechanics, and morals.<sup>126</sup>

With this methodological and conceptual gap missing between physics and morality, so is this important precondition for Descartes' ethics missing given his philosophical order. He believes physics are essential for framing morality, so there must be something about physics that cannot be overlooked in constructing a moral philosophy. It is surprising, then, that many commentators altogether skip the physics of man and begin reconstructing a Cartesian morality with the *Passions of the Soul*, assuming that it is a treatise on ethics.

### **I.c. The Cartesian (Re)construction of the *Passions of the Soul***

While a physiological understanding of the *Passions of the Soul* may seem novel in contemporary literature, the earliest Cartesians favor this reading. Among them was Antoine Le Grand,<sup>127</sup> a Franciscan friar sent to England where he was assigned tutoring as an ecclesiastical duty.<sup>128</sup> Though his first publications discussed the philosophy of Duns Scotus, he earned a reputation for himself in authoring a text propagating Seneca's Stoicism, *Le Sage des Stoïques, ou l'Homme sans Passions*, a philosophy to which he says he swore his allegiance.<sup>129</sup> Less than a decade later, however, he published a tract defending the Epicurean morality, *L'Épicure*

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<sup>126</sup> The *Treatise on Man* was something he seems to have abandoned and was only published posthumously. This does not mean that some of its contents were not developed into future material, including what Descartes wrote in letters to Elisabeth or the *Passions of the Soul*.

<sup>127</sup> See Roger Ariew (2014), 197-199 as well as Mautner (2000), 209-232. Roger Ariew also gave a talk in Lecce titled "Passions of the Soul in the First Cartesians" (October 2014; unpublished) that discussed LeGrand's Cartesian morality. In these places, Ariew also argued that Pierre-Sylvain Régis treats Cartesian ethics similarly.

<sup>128</sup> Mautner (2000), 209.

<sup>129</sup> Mautner (2000), 210-212.

*Spirituel, ou l'Empire de la Volupté sur les Vertus*,<sup>130</sup> and only two years later, perhaps by request, he published a textbook propagating Cartesianism which received an expanded English translation titled *An Entire Body of Philosophy According to the Principles of the Famous Renate Des Cartes* in 1694. In this textbook, Le Grand extolls Descartes, ascribing to him the role of restoring philosophy.<sup>131</sup> Following the traditional outline of a Scholastic textbook, Le Grand includes Logic, Metaphysics, Physics, and then in the second English edition, an Ethics. It is simple enough for the early Cartesians to include a metaphysics and physics in their textbooks as they could just generally follow the arguments in the *Meditations on First Philosophy* and *Principles of Philosophy*.<sup>132</sup> The best way to go about including a Cartesian logic and ethics, though, was less clear: Descartes left little systematic work on these branches. In the place of logic, Le Grand uses the Cartesian method, not unlike the account in Arnauld and Nicole's Cartesian Logic, the *Port Royal Logic*.<sup>133</sup> For a Cartesian ethics, though, Le Grand must turn to the *Passions of the Soul* and the correspondence.

Drawing from these various resources, the chapter outline of Le Grand's second edition of the *Entire Body of Philosophy* is as follows:

- I. Logic (Method)
- II. Natural Theology (Metaphysics)
- III. Demonology (Metaphysics)
- IV. Natural Philosophy: General (Physics)
- V. Special Natural Philosophy, the heavens and planets (Physics)
- VI. Four Bodies, Metals, and Meteors. (Physics)

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<sup>130</sup> He published his tract on the Stoics in 1662 and the pamphlet on Stoicism in 1669. It is worth exploring in the future whether Le Grand found Descartes' ethics so appealing because he claims to synthesize these two, but it is too tangential for my current project.

<sup>131</sup> Mautner (2000), 212. The text underwent several Latin editions before publication as the English version, which was a collection of the Latin text plus additional work by Le Grand. The English edition also had two editions, the second of which includes the morality. Mautner (2000) goes into this in detail.

<sup>132</sup> I say "generally" as Le Grand also includes discussions of angels and demons in the metaphysics, for example. Le Grand (1694), 74-89.

<sup>133</sup> It is worth noting that Descartes would have likely rejected both this account as well as Le Grand's given his violent criticism of Regis for rearranging his writings and thoughts in the French *Preface to the Principles of Philosophy*. (AT IXb, 19-20)

- VII. Living Creatures in General, specially of Plants and Animals (Physics of Living Things)
- VIII. Of Man, Considered With Relation to His Body (Physics of Man)
- IX. Of Man, Considered With Relation with the Mind (Physics of Man)
- X. Ethics, or the Right Way of Ordering the Life of Man (Moral Philosophy)

Following Descartes, Le Grand includes a physics of living things and a physics of man before he discusses ethics. In VIII, “On Man, Considered With Relation to His Body,” and IX, “Of Man, Considered With Relation with the Mind,” he discusses the contents of the *Passions of the Soul*—how the circulation of the blood and respiration affect the body or how the senses and appetites affect the nerves in order to bring about particular physical effects, for example. On the passions he includes their number and order, specifically discussing Admiration, Love and Hatred, Affections, Joy, and Sadness, all in the two chapters concerning man.<sup>134</sup> It is not until Part X that Le Grand moves into what he believes is Ethics proper, which is posterior to discussions of the passions and focuses on topics including the Highest Good, Virtue, and right reason, as well as the usefulness of the passions in attaining these ends. The sum of the material found in what Le Grand is willing to label as ‘ethics’ is found almost entirely in Descartes’ correspondence, with only some overlap with Book III of the *Passions*. Therefore, the earliest instantiation of Cartesian ethics follows the physiological reading that I suggest.

Thus, to summarize so far, I believe Descartes’ *Passions* are best understood as physics of man, a foundation for practical fruit but not the practical fruit itself. I also admit that in Part Three he allows himself the chance to begin to bridge the gap, providing some overlap between the physics and morals. I showed that internally this best represents the nature of the text, and externally it best fits into Descartes’ grand philosophical vision, one that the earliest Cartesians also saw. I will now to turn to the benefit of this reading, which is a clearer vision of Descartes’ moral philosophy. In short, if it is true that Descartes wrote the *Passions* as a natural philosopher

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<sup>134</sup> Le Grand (1694), 333-340.

rather than an ethicist, his assertion that he can reconcile the claims of Stoics, Epicureans, and Aristotelians becomes more coherent.

## II. Cartesian Morality

The tendency in recent commentaries is to classify Descartes' morality into one of several ethical traditions: Virtue Theory, Stoicism, Deontology, Platonism, and so forth.<sup>135</sup> It is true that Descartes often appeals to ancient ethical traditions in his letters, so I empathize with the motivation to classify his morality into a familiar normative category. However, I believe that rather than attempting to follow any particular school, Descartes is creating his own morality that can be explained through Stoicism, Epicureanism, and Aristotelianism, three positions that no longer contradict one another when understood through his philosophy. I will argue this position through three sections. First, I will outline Stoic, Epicurean, and Aristotelian themes in Descartes' letters, where they are presented with equal admiration and criticism. Second, I will analyze Descartes' claim that his morality encompasses all three of these traditions. Descartes thinks they are reconcilable on the *summum bonum* and on virtue, and I argue that a physiological understanding of the *Passions of the Soul* provides space for this synthesis to occur. Then, third, I will show that what Descartes is doing—presenting his own ethical position by appealing to other schools of thought—is not new and in fact there is overwhelming historical precedent for his approach. Descartes cites competing authorities to lend support to his moral philosophy, and though he embraces aspects of their thought, sometimes explicitly, he does not self-identify as a member of any particular ethical tradition other than his own.

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<sup>135</sup> Marshall (1998), Shapiro (2006), Naaman-Zauderer (2010), Shapiro (2011), Cimasky and Polansky (2012).

## II.a. Descartes and the Greek Ethicists

Descartes appeals to Stoics, Epicurus, and Peripatetics with some frequency in his late letters. Of these, his appeals to Stoicism are the most explicit. As I showed in my first chapter, after Descartes wrote his provisional morality in the *Discourse*, he showed very little care for ethics in the years that followed. When Descartes returns to these topics later in his life, it is in his correspondence with Elisabeth, the Princess of Bohemia who recently suffered from a series of ill fortunes.<sup>136</sup> In attempt to console and heal her, he recommends she read Seneca's *De Vita Beata*.<sup>137</sup> Upon rereading Seneca's treatise himself, Descartes takes a more critical stance towards the text, but sees it as a good place from which to explain his own opinion. In the next letter addressed to her, Descartes replies,

I have since given some thought to this and find it not sufficiently rigorous to deserve to be followed. [...] Seneca 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. That would have made his book the finest and most useful that a pagan philosopher could have written.<sup>138</sup>

That is, in *De Vita Beata*, Seneca offers a picture of virtue and self-regulating passions that Descartes admires, but the Stoic fails to instruct the reader how to obtain these lofty goals.<sup>139</sup> Nonetheless, Descartes prescribes much from Seneca: he agrees that reason is superior to custom, that happiness consists in contentment of the mind, and so forth.<sup>140</sup> He also agrees that the best cure for misfortune is reason; this remedy will not only make her more content in spite

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<sup>136</sup> Charles I of England was Elisabeth's uncle and his crown largely responsible for supporting her family, who was in exile. She also became quite ill. Lisa Shapiro offers a succinct but very good biographical account in the introduction to her translation of Descartes' Letters with Elisabeth. (See Shapiro [2007], 1-51)

<sup>137</sup> In my first chapter I noted that Descartes offers Elisabeth rules similar to the ones he gives in the *Discourse*—but there are important differences. Since he gives them posterior to his physics, he is able to frame them in terms of his final morality. The lists appear similar, but the first is clearly framed provisionally, focusing on probability and custom, and the second in terms of a final morality, focusing on rational belief. Though they somewhat mirror one another, they are two unique lists serving two different purposes.

<sup>138</sup> Letter to Elisabeth, 4 August 1645. AT IV, 263, 267; CSMK, 257-258.

<sup>139</sup> This is also one of Pascal's criticisms of the Stoics. I discuss this in my next chapter.

<sup>140</sup> Letter to Elisabeth, 18 August 1645. AT IV, 271-277; CSMK, 259-262.

of misfortune, but also will aid her health.<sup>141</sup> Descartes recommends that she face her suffering by adjusting her disposition to consider the good that rises from misfortune, tranquility.<sup>142</sup>

These Stoic attitudes persist in other letters throughout the same period. He tells Mersenne that virtue is exhibiting resolve towards what is reasonable, and that free will is the highest faculty because it is not controlled by anything corporeal.<sup>143</sup> In a letter to Huygens on the occasion of his wife's death, Descartes offers 'consolation': since the tiresome duty of caring his wife is complete, Huygens no longer has to bother himself with hope that she will become well. Since he has a strong soul, he should find interior satisfaction knowing that he was resolute in caring for her.<sup>144</sup> Though Descartes' tone towards a grieving Huygens (whose love of his wife is famous<sup>145</sup>) lacks expected sympathy, it echoes Epictetus, who writes in the *Euchidriion*:

You are foolish if you want your children and your wife to and your friends to live forever, since you are wanting things to be up to you that are not up to you, and things to be yours that are not yours. [...] But wanting not to fail to get what you desire—*this* you are capable of. A person's master is someone who has power over what he wants or does not want, either to obtain it or take it away. Whoever wants to be free, therefore, let him not want or avoid anything that is up to others.<sup>146</sup>

His attitude on virtue is firmly Stoic in these instances.

While there are those explicit Stoic themes in Descartes' morality, his attitude towards fortune and corporeal pleasures are more Epicurean than Stoic. Epicurus claims, "When pleasure is present, so long as it is uninterrupted, there is neither pain of body or of mind or of both

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<sup>141</sup> Letter to Elisabeth, May or June 1645 (AT IV, 218)

<sup>142</sup> Letter to Elisabeth, June 1645 (AT IV, 236)

<sup>143</sup> Letter to Mersenne 3 December 1640 (AT III, 248)

<sup>144</sup> Descartes to Huygens, 20 May 1637 (AT I, 631); Descartes discusses this point more fully in a 6 October 1645 (AT IV, 304) letter to Elisabeth, stating that when we practice the virtue of charity, we can have more pleasure while weeping and under distress than while laughing.

<sup>145</sup> Huygens' called his wife his Star and wrote poetry expressing his love and despair over her death ("CUPIO DISSOLVI. OP DE DOOD VAN STERRE," 24 January 1637).

<sup>146</sup> *Handbook* §14, 15; Also, *Handbook*, §10: "Never say of anything, 'I have lost it'; but instead, 'I have give it back.' Did your child die? It was given back. Did your wife die? She was given back. 'My land was taken.' So this too was given back. 'But the person who took it was bad!' How does the way the giver asked for it back concern you? As long as he gives it, take care of it as something that is not your own, just as travelers treat an inn." (14)



together.”<sup>147</sup> This resonates with Descartes, who writes to Elisabeth that, “in general the soul is pleased to feel passions arise in itself no matter what they are, provided it remains in control of them.”<sup>148</sup> For Descartes, the passions are needed to inform the soul of what is good and harmful to the body and they should only be resisted when a passion runs counter to an already established firm judgment in the soul. Although this still maintains resolute judgment as a higher good, which is in tension with the Epicurean teaching that the good is reducible to pleasure, it is even further from the Stoics who argue that the passions are a sickness to be entirely eradicated by reason.<sup>149</sup> For the Stoics, exterior goods are never good for the soul, nor does contentment (virtue) come in degrees.<sup>150</sup> Quite contrary to this, in the same letters where Descartes discusses Seneca, he also tells Elisabeth that someone with more exterior goods may be happier than someone who does not have good fortune—desire is not antithetical to happiness and virtue is easy because it is not against pleasure.<sup>151</sup>

Still in other letters, Descartes gives Aristotelian advice that contradicts both his Stoic and Epicurean claims. One example comes in Descartes emphasizing the role of community in the good life. He tells Elisabeth,

though 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 those of our own particular person - with measure, of course, and discretion, because it would be wrong to expose ourselves to a great evil in order to procure only a slight benefit to our kinsfolk or our country. (Indeed if someone were worth more, by himself, than all his fellow citizens, he would have no reason to destroy himself to save his city.) But if someone saw everything in relation to himself, he would not hesitate to injure others greatly when he

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<sup>147</sup> Epictetus, *The Principle Doctrines*, III. (Diogenes Laetrius, X.139-141; 655)

<sup>148</sup> AT IV, 311; CSMK, 270.

<sup>149</sup> AT XI 367; 48; Greenberg, 728; See Seneca, *Epistles* 75; (1920), 137-147.

<sup>150</sup> Seneca, *Epistles* 92; (1920), 446-470.

<sup>151</sup> Letter to Elisabeth, 4 August 1645 (AT IV, 263)

thought he could draw some slight advantage; and he would have no true friendship, no fidelity, no virtue at all.<sup>152</sup>

Though community involvement is an essential component to *eudaimonic* living for the Peripatetics, it comes in a rejection of the Stoic sage, unattached and self-sufficient, and against the Epicureans whose concept of the good makes basic social functions challenging, such as child rearing.<sup>153</sup>

Descartes also recalls Peripatetic influence in the role habit takes in acquiring virtue. He tells Elisabeth that in addition to knowledge, “practice also is required if one is to be always disposed to judge well.”<sup>154</sup> While the role of self-discipline and control could apply to any number of ethical traditions, he specifically credits the Schoolmen—“in this sense the scholastics are right when they say that virtues are habits.”<sup>155</sup> It is easy to dismiss Descartes on this point, as he is often guilty of appealing to potentially unfriendly or powerful audiences in Scholastic language rhetorically to make his ideas more palatable; this does not seem to be entirely the case with ethics. Though he often appeals to Aristotelian authority when defending his physics and metaphysics,<sup>156</sup> these appeals are often directed towards an audience where such an articulation

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<sup>152</sup> Letter to Elisabeth, 15 September 1645. (CSMK, 266; AT IV, 293); He also seems to take on Aristotelian language in discussing courage and its excesses through acting irrationally on one hand and lacking irresolution and fear on the other. (Letter to Elisabeth, 3 November 1645. AT IV, 330-334).

<sup>153</sup> Seneca, *Epistles* 92; (1920), 446-470 and Epictetus, *The Principle Doctrines* 149-151. There are other cases where Stoics may seem more sensitive to the political life, such as in Seneca’s *On Clemency*. Seneca describes the kingdom as a body with the king as its head, and the king must perform certain duties in certain ways for his kingdom, this seems more akin to Epicurus’ advice to perform whatever role one finds him or herself in excellently than a universal claim. (See Seneca *De Clementia*; (1927), 356ff and Epictetus, *Handbook* §29)

<sup>154</sup> 15 September 1645. AT IV, 295; CSMK, 267.

<sup>155</sup> 15 September 1645. AT IV, 295; CSMK, 267.

<sup>156</sup> Descartes at times makes his desire to undermine Aristotle quite explicit. Other times, usually when writing to an audience of Scholastics, he claims that Aristotle supports his claims, that his and Aristotle’s positions are indistinguishable, or that his claims reinforce an established Aristotelian belief. For correspondence exhibiting anti-Aristotelianism or attacking Aristotle’s foundation instead of getting caught up in Scholastic disputes, see the following letters: to \*\*\*, June 1645 (Huygens?) (AT IV, 223); to Mersenne, 11 November 1640 (AT III, 230/238); to Mersenne, 28 January 1641 (AT III, 293); to Mersenne, 31 March 1641 (AT III, 339); to Mersenne, 19 January 1642 (AT III, 480); and to Pollot, 6 October 1642 (AT III, 557). For correspondence where Descartes claims his philosophy is not contrary to Aristotle, see letters: to [Charlet], October 1644 (AT IV, 140); to Plempius, 15 February 1638 (AT I, 521); to [Charlet], October 1644 (AT IV, 140); to \*\*\*, 1644 (?) (AT V, 549); and to Charlet, 9 February 1645 (AT IV, 156).

would be pragmatically advantageous, such as to the Jesuits or the faculty at the Sorbonne. When addressing moral philosophy, Descartes' audience is always more familiar to him and lacking in ecclesiastical authority or influence; Descartes has nothing obvious to gain from drawing on Aristotle in writing on morality.

Descartes is not, of course, trying to advocate Aristotelian ethics either. Not only would that be unexpected for someone who frames his work as anti-Aristotelian, but he also specifically tells Elisabeth that he wants a moral philosophy that is attainable by anyone. This eliminates Aristotle whose morality is exclusive, requiring that someone have all the goods, interior and exterior, to reach happiness: someone without a high birth or good fortune is excluded. Descartes questions the Aristotelian assumption that these things are necessary for the good life, acknowledging that though someone with more exterior goods may be happier than someone who does not have them. For those who lack external goods, their smaller vessel can still be filled with contentment.<sup>157</sup> Tranquility, then, is obtainable without external goods, though perhaps to a lesser degree of overall satisfaction. Not only is this against Aristotle, but also it runs contrary to central Stoic themes by suggesting that virtue comes in degrees.

### **II.b. Descartes' (Late) Ethics**

As I have shown so far, Descartes equally draws from and criticizes the Stoic, Epicurean, and Aristotelian moral traditions. At times he seems to prefer one to the others, and still other times he makes claims that contradict all three. He rejects temperance as a virtue, for instance, saying that it is good for medicine and in this way good for the body against the passions, but it

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<sup>157</sup> Letter to Elisabeth, August 4, 1645 (AT IV, 263)

is not clearly good for the soul.<sup>158</sup> These tensions get fleshed out some in his discussion of the *summum bonum* in an August 1645 letter to Elisabeth. In this letter, he attempts to sketch out his idea of the Supreme Good, framed by a discussion of three major opinions from ancient philosophers—Aristotle, Zeno (of Citium), and Epicurus. These three traditions, of course, have a long history of tension beyond Descartes’ work, so it seems either bold or naive when he writes, “These three views can, I think, be accepted as true and as consistent with each other, provided they are interpreted favorably.”<sup>159</sup> He elaborates on this by discussing each tradition’s account of the supreme good.

According to Aristotle, the supreme good was something that consisted in all the perfections which humanity is capable of achieving, internal and external. Zeno believed it resided exclusively in virtue because that alone is controlled by a person’s free will, unlike Aristotle who requires external goods. Epicurus was committed to the idea that the end of human actions is pleasure or contentment and it is in this that happiness consists. Analyzing these accounts, Descartes argues that Zeno errs in making the supreme good solely intellectual, detached from the body; in doing so, the Stoics make virtue antithetical to pleasure.<sup>160</sup> Likewise, Descartes accepts that Epicurus is right against Zeno—happiness is not found in merely knowing the good in itself divorced from pleasure—but he is concerned that the hedonist does not focus enough on knowing the good.<sup>161</sup> Concerning Aristotle, Descartes does not offer any substantive criticism. Instead, he advises that most people will not do well to follow the Peripatetics because their account does not apply to anyone who lacks any human perfection. That is, since Aristotle teaches the supreme good consists of internal and external goods it only applies to the most

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<sup>158</sup> He discusses a man abstaining from food. See Descartes’ Letter to Gassendi’s “Champion,” Hyperaspites, dated August 1641. (AT III, 422)

<sup>159</sup> AT IV, 275; CSMK, 261

<sup>160</sup> AT IX, 275-7; Letter to Elisabeth, 18 August 1645.

<sup>161</sup> AT IX, 275-7; Letter to Elisabeth, 18 August 1645.

accomplished of most men. Descartes agrees that the best life will have both fortune (meaning external goods such as health and material comforts) and contentment, but rejects the notion good fortune is a necessary condition for contentment.<sup>162</sup>

Moving beyond the criticisms (and laying Aristotle aside for a moment) Descartes argues that both Zeno and Epicurus are correct, only in different senses. To illustrate his point, he gives an analogy of someone hitting a bull's-eye. A person is motivated to hit a bull's-eye because of a prize, but cannot win the prize if s/he does not see the bull's-eye. Likewise, even if someone clearly sees the bull's-eye, s/he will not bother to shoot at it if there is no reward for doing so. Though virtue must be known (like seeing the bull's-eye), we pursue it (like shooting at the bull's-eye) because of the reward, which is happiness or contentment.<sup>163</sup> Descartes believes that a correct view of the supreme good embraces both of these elements of Epicureanism and Stoicism.

However much Descartes shows his morality encompasses important aspects of each ethical tradition, one remaining problem is that his account of the *summum bonum* here fails to address external goods. This is especially problematic because the way that each tradition treats the body is central to how each forms its opinion of the supreme good. Epicurus teaches that avoiding physical pain to maximize pleasure is central to virtue and Aristotle claims that external goods (including those for the body) are necessary but not sufficient for the good life; the Stoics believe the body is at best instrumentally good, clothing for the soul where true virtue lies.<sup>164</sup> If Descartes believes that his system reconciles these schools of thought, he must account for this problem given that the body is one of the most pointed disagreements between the schools. The

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<sup>162</sup> AT IX, 275-7; Letter to Elisabeth, 18 August 1645.

<sup>163</sup> Epictetus also gives an example of obtaining virtue being like shooting at a target. (*Handbook* §27)

<sup>164</sup> See Epicurus, *The Principle Doctrines*, III (Diogenes Laetrius, X.139-141; 655); Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* Book I, Chap. 10 (1100a10-1101a20); and, Seneca, *Epistles* 92; (1920), 461-470, etc.

answer lies in the *Passions of the Soul*; if the *Passions* are understood foremost as a physics of man and not an ethics (as I argued in the first half of this chapter), there is interpretive benefit.

To expand on this point, according to Descartes, the passions are not inherently harmful; in fact they are quite natural and serve the important role of providing someone's soul with information as to what is good and bad for the body. He writes,

Now that we are acquainted with all the passions, we have much less reason for anxiety about them than we had before. For we see that they are all by nature nature good, and that we have nothing to avoid but their misuse or excess, against which the remedies I have explained might be sufficient if each person took care enough to apply them.<sup>165</sup>

The practice he refers to involves training the passions through habit.<sup>166</sup> Even with practice, however, “Our passions, too, cannot be directly aroused or suppressed by the action of our will, but only directly through the representation of things which are usually joined with the passions we wish to have and opposed to the passions which we wish to reject.”<sup>167</sup> To give an example, someone's pupil size cannot be changed on command; the will alone is insufficient to enlarge them. However, a person may change a pupil's size indirectly by fixing his or her gaze at a more distant object or by shining a light into them. Likewise, someone cannot simply will a passion to cease, but can accomplish its cessation through focusing on a different passion, redirecting the animal spirits.<sup>168</sup>

By reclassifying the passions from an intellectual sickness to a physiological event, there is no longer an immediate tension with the Stoic account. The passions are not caused by ignorance. Instead, they are a response to external stimuli, often beyond a person's control.

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<sup>165</sup> a. 211; CSM I, 403.

<sup>166</sup> Though a similar effect is brought about through an unexpectedly strong passion that causes the exiting movement of animal spirits to become associated with new passions—such as when someone drinks spoiled milk, s/he may become repulsed whenever smelling milk, good or bad, because the strong feeling created from drinking the milk that was sour. See Article 50 of the *Passions*.

<sup>167</sup> a. 45; CSM I, 345.

<sup>168</sup> a. 44-45

When passions are utilized by the will correctly, they can even be good and advantageous.<sup>169</sup> “Indeed in general the soul is pleased to feel passions arise in itself no matter what they are, provided it remains in control of them.”<sup>170</sup> The passions are good, even pleasing to the soul; passions are useful when they, guided by reason and resolute judgments, are used to redirect those that are harmful. Merely feeling anger, for instance, is not blameworthy, though giving in to the passion of anger and striking someone is. Since all passions by their nature are outside anyone’s immediate control, a person must often use one passion to counteract another that is harmful, as if taking her gaze off one object by looking at another. Thus, Descartes is able to maintain important aspects of Stoic virtue, that it is rational, while also maintaining that there is no need to rid oneself of passions altogether.

Another upshot here concerns goods outside the body. Descartes says that external goods are helpful but not necessary for contentment. Since the passions are not blameworthy, it is possible to find enjoyment in an external good so long as reason judges that it is not harmful. This allows for something like Peripatetic *eudaimonia*; happiness is maximized when internal contentment of virtue is combined with fortune and external goods.<sup>171</sup> Nonetheless, one can find pleasure in times of pain and misfortune if s/he is guided by reason. Even if bad fortune falls on someone and s/he experiences physical ills or suffers from material or relational loss, contentment is still possible. As the Stoa philosophy teaches, the best minds are those that

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<sup>169</sup> The Stoics do seem to think that passions can be used to subdue other passions, but this does not count as virtue. For more on this, see James (1993). There is also a tension with what Descartes says here and his more Stoic claim in Article 48 that there are souls which are neither strong nor weak, that use passions to control other passions. I believe one way of reconciling this may be that the morally conscientious person without a strong soul may just blindly use a passion to subdue another; the strong soul, however, may use reason to direct one passion to subdue another—perhaps in the case of feeling anger, the morally conscientious weak soul may subject himself to music in a minor key to change his mood while the strong soul will direct his thought toward something melancholy. In the first case, the subduing is intentional but externally caused, while in the second the movement begins with the will itself.

<sup>170</sup> Letter to Elisabeth, 6 October 1645 (AT IV, 309-11; CSMK, 270).

<sup>171</sup> Letter to Elisabeth, 1 September 1645

consider the benefits acquired through misfortune, produced by distancing oneself from the passion that rises from the suffering and “turning one’s attention away from the evils which this thing had been imagined to contain. For no events are so disastrous [...] that they cannot be considered in some favorable light by a person of intelligence.”<sup>172</sup> It is in this way that Descartes believes that his morality is in agreement with all three of these ancient traditions. The synthesis that he claims is reconcilable given his physiological classification of the passions in his physics of man; since the passions are amoral, they are non-blameworthy and external goods are beneficial, though not necessary, for the good life.

### **II.c. A Historical Precedent for Descartes’ Approach**

So far I have shown that Descartes discusses the Stoics, Epicureans, and Peripatetics in his letters, acknowledging their strengths and offering criticisms against each. He is constructing his own moral philosophy in which he believes these ancient traditions are not contradictory, and I have shown how their coexistence in a Cartesian morality is possible. Though most recent literature is guilty of collapsing Descartes’ moral philosophy into one of several moral traditions, this reductive approach has not always been preferred. Leibniz, for instance, writes to Molanus criticizing Descartes for not saying anything original in his ethics.<sup>173</sup> He claims that though Descartes shows the moral philosophies of Epicurus and Epictetus are not mutually exclusive to one another, this idea is plagiarized from Seneca. Leibniz’s criticism is not unwarranted. Seneca glosses and quotes Epicurus sympathetically and with frequency. To give just one example, Seneca praises Epicurus for saying his happiest days were when he suffered from strangury and an ulcer. Seneca concludes that, “Why, then, should those goods which virtue bestows be

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<sup>172</sup> Letter to Elisabeth, June 1645 (AT IV, 237; CSMK, 253).

<sup>173</sup> AG, 240-244. It is unclear to whom this letter was actually addressed.



incredible in the sight of us, who cultivate virtue, when they are found even in those who acknowledge pleasure as their mistress?”<sup>174</sup> To extend Leibniz’s criticism, Seneca also compares the cultivation of virtue to an athlete’s training, sounding very Aristotelian.<sup>175</sup> Descartes’ drawing from the three traditions does not appear terribly novel.

Although I agree with Leibniz that Descartes follows Seneca’s lead here, I believe that the similarity is a feature, not a flaw. There is significant historical precedent of members of one philosophical tradition citing the works of another competing school in order to articulate an aspect of their own thought. That is, Descartes is not original in recognizing the similarities between Epicurus and the Stoics (nor the Peripatetics), but he is not alone in this unoriginality—it is part of how many ancient, medieval, and Renaissance philosophers explain their morality.

For example, Augustine and Aquinas discuss Stoicism with some frequency, and not always with criticism. In *Civitate Dei*, Augustine articulates his understanding of the passions as taught by the Stoics and concludes that,

there is little or no difference between the opinions of Stoics and of other philosophers [the Peripatetics] on the subject of the disturbances – of passions – of the soul. Both sides champion the mind and the reason against the tyrant of the passions. And the meaning of the Stoic assertion that passions do not touch a wise man is probably that passions in no way cloud with error that wisdom in virtue of which he is wise, nor can they undermine and overthrow it.<sup>176</sup>

Aquinas expresses the same sentiment in the *Summa Theologica*. In the article addressing whether every passion of the soul is morally evil, he cites Augustine, answering that, “On this question the opinion of the Stoics differed from that of the Peripatetics: for the Stoics held that all passions are evil, while the Peripatetics maintained that moderate passions are good. This

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<sup>174</sup> Seneca, *Epistles* 92; (1920), 463-5.

<sup>175</sup> Seneca, *De Providentia* (1927), 7-11.

<sup>176</sup> *CD IX*, Chapter 5; 348.

difference, although it appears great in words, is nevertheless, in reality, none at all, or but little, if we consider the intent of either school.”<sup>177</sup>

This trend continues into the Renaissance. Neostoic author Guillaume du Vair approaches Epictetus in the same begrudgingly positive tone as Seneca:

And truly I cannot chuse but admire the words of Epicurus, but I would they had proceeded out of another mans mouth, because I would not have so worthie a sentence marred with the effeminateenes of the rest of his opinions: My bodie (quoth he) daunceth for joy, and my heart within me is ravished with pleasure, to think that I being content with bread & water, should bee able to contemne all the delicate fare of the world. And now if Epicurus gloried so much in the contempt of all dainties, what thinke you should the Stoicks doe?<sup>178</sup>

The tendency of appropriating multiple traditions is taken even further with the Neostoics, making them more eclectics than unadulterated Stoics.<sup>179</sup> They often synthesized a variety of traditions from antiquity to form something new of their own. Justus Lipsius and Gillaume du Vair, the first neo-Stoics, synthesize Stoicism with their Christian theology. Pierre Charron and Michel de Montaigne follow this model, incorporating Hellenistic skepticism with their Stoicism and Christianity.

Descartes’ tendency to appeal to various traditions is not unique. There is historical precedent for this approach of drawing from, expanding upon, and synthesizing multiple authorities. His tendency towards any one particular school of thought at any particular time makes him no more self-identify with that school than it makes Aquinas a Stoic or Seneca an Epicurean. He follows the sentiment of Seneca, who writes,

Any truth, I maintain, is my own property. And I shall continue to heap quotations from Epicurus upon you, so that all persons who swear by the words of another, and put a

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<sup>177</sup> ST I-II, Q.24, Art. 2.

<sup>178</sup> Du Vair (1951), 71-72.

<sup>179</sup> Sellars (2006), 10-25; this is of course a deviation from classical Stoicism where changing any doctrine was considered a rejection of the entire Stoic system of belief.

value on the speaker and not upon the thing spoken, may understand that the best ideas are common property.<sup>180</sup>

That Descartes is creating his own morality, then, should come as no surprise, even if he does frequently cite other ethical traditions, which should also now be unsurprising. This is after all what he tells Elisabeth when they first begins discussing Seneca:

When I chose Seneca's *On the Happy Life* to suggest to Your Highness as an agreeable topic of discussion, I took account only of the reputation of the author and the importance of his topic, without thinking of his manner of treating it. I have since given some thought to this and find it not sufficiently rigorous to deserve to be followed. But to assist Your Highness to make a judgement on the topic, I will try to explain how I think it should have been treated by such a philosopher, unenlightened by faith, with only natural reason to guide him.<sup>181</sup>

### III. Conclusion

Over the course of this chapter I argued that Descartes is offering his own moral philosophy, one that often draws from or synthesizes several philosophical traditions. As evident from the second section, Descartes often draws from the Stoics, Epicureans, and Aristotelians, both positively to help articulate his project and critically to draw out the distinctions between his morality and theirs. In this process, he shows that the three traditions are not contradictory on the *summum bonum* due to his account of the passions: if the passions are physiological events (as I argued in the first half of this chapter) and not an intellectual sickness, then he has grounds on which to make some passions amoral, subsequently removing their blameworthiness. I also demonstrated that my reading not only better reconciles various aspects of Descartes' writing, but it is also likely given the historical precedent: Cartesian ethics are not original in appealing to multiple ancient tradition, but this is not a weakness of Descartes' morality. Rather, it is a

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<sup>180</sup> Seneca, Letter 12; (1917), 73. There may also be some comparison to be drawn here with Augustine's "taking the gold from Egypt": the Christian should not fear what pagan authors had written because it was written by them, but should rather examine whether it is true, and if it is, it can be accommodated to describe his or her faith. (Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana* Book II, Ch. 40, 60)

<sup>181</sup> AT IV, 263; CSMK 256-257 (letter dated 4 August 1645)

symptom of how moral philosophy was often explained by ancient, medieval, and Renaissance moralists. Given the historical precedent, I maintain that Descartes' morality is something like the morality for which I argued: though he borrows heavily from Stoicism, he does not self-identify as a Stoic or any other moral tradition, but cites these ancient sources to support his own morality.

### CHAPTER THREE:

#### PASCAL ON THE GOOD LIFE: IF HAPPINESS FAILS, TRY STOICISM

Through the past century, Pascalian scholarship typically frames his moral philosophy in three orders: body, mind, and charity.<sup>182</sup> Under this reading (which I will refer to as the ‘accepted reading’), each order is given a particular ontological status analogous to Plato’s divided line. Along with this ontology, various ethical attributes are paralleled with each order. The order of charity is associated with an Augustinian philosophical theology, where loving God allows one to see the Good and obtain happiness, while the orders of mind and body are respectively associated with the intellect and carnal pleasures.<sup>183</sup>

I reject this reading and instead will offer one that more closely represents the structure and content of Pascal’s ethics. I believe that Pascal is offering a binary ethics, twice divided: first according to the objects of a person’s love, following Augustine’s two cities;<sup>184</sup> then divided again into those who are seeking God, living an adequately content life and those who remain blissful in their concupiscence. In arguing this, it is helpful to first investigate the composition of his thought: Augustine, Descartes, Montaigne, and the Stoics (such as Epictetus). Through this, each piece of his complex morality will become more pronounced. Under the accepted reading,

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<sup>182</sup> See for example Chevalier (1922), Baird (1975), Serres (1982), James [Garber, et al] (1998), MacKenzie (2008), and Pavlovits (2013).

<sup>183</sup> I speculate that a cause for this reading may be anachronistically reading Kierkegaard’s stages on life’s way—the aesthetic, ethical, and religious—back into Pascal.

<sup>184</sup> There is also a striking similarity here found in the Stoics who make a distinction between the morally conscientious person and the virtuous person, who does the right action for the right reason. (See James [1993], 294-5 and her discussion of Diogenes Laertius) This is no surprise since, “Tout ce que M. Pascal lui disait de grand, il l'avait vu avant lui dans saint Augustin.” (“All the great things that M. Pascal said to him, he had seen before in Saint Augustine.”) Pascal, *Entretien avec M. de Sacy* (1994), 91; translation mine.

the influences of Augustine are often exaggerated, and the influence from Descartes, Montaigne, and the Stoics are either underemphasized or misapplied; by understanding these influences correctly, his system more naturally follows.<sup>185</sup> To accomplish this goal, I divide my chapter into three sections: first, I examine Pascal’s use of the term ‘order’ in the *Pensées* to cast sufficient doubt upon the accepted reading; in the next I will discuss the role that Augustine, Descartes, Montaigne, and Epictetus take in shaping Pascal’s philosophical project; in the third and final section, I will present a reading of Pascal’s moral philosophy that is framed within these influences.

### **I. Pascal’s Use of “Order” in the *Pensées***

The phrase ‘order’ (*ordre*) is recurrent in the *Pensées*. Because of this, many present-day scholars are tempted to use ‘order’ as a key to unlock these fragments and the justification to do so is not entirely unwarranted. There are, however, at least four different senses in which he uses the term that proponents of the accepted reading fail to acknowledge.

Pascal’s first use is philosophically uninteresting.<sup>186</sup> Here, he invokes ‘order’ to describe a *sect or group*, as in an order of the Free Masons or an order of monks.<sup>187</sup> His second use

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<sup>185</sup> For Augustinianism, Carraud (2007) and for Cartesianism, Ariew (2007), Alexandrescu (2007), Carraud (2007), Lewis (2007), and Collette (2014). Adequate secondary literature on Montaigne and Epictetus’ influences is entirely lacking, at least in the Anglophone world, and from my research to date in French literature as well. I will be spending time in *Conversation of Pascal with M. de Saci on Epictetus and Montaigne* which includes a helpful introduction by Jean Mesnard and Pascale Mengotti-Thouvenin.

<sup>186</sup> While I understand dismissing senses as “philosophically uninteresting” may seem uncharitable, neither of these are the sense to which the accepted reading refers anyhow. Neither do I think it is very contentious to claim that Pascal does not mean anything philosophically interesting by the term *order* when he says, “Tyranny consists in the universal desire to dominate beyond one’s order. There are various compartments of the strong, the handsome, the sensible, the pious; each of them rules there but not elsewhere. Sometimes they intersect. And the strong and the handsome fight to see who is master, but this is foolish, for their mastery is of different kinds. They do not understand one another. Their mistake is to want to rule everywhere. Nothing can do this, not even strength, which is of no use in the realm of knowledge and governs only external actions.” (*Pensées* S92/L58) There are, of course, many interesting ideas in this fragment, but none of them seem dependent on the use of *order* other than perhaps clarifying its referent.

<sup>187</sup> *Pensées* S388/L356; S92/L58.

denotes *a proper role or use*, as when a set of affairs is ‘in order’ or that a child biting another is acting ‘out of order’. An example of this use is found in Pascal’s account of the will: he compares a person’s failure to act according to his or her proper function to a foot acting as though it were a different part of the body—in this illustration, the foot, like the human will, is acting out of order and as a result, abandoning its proper role.<sup>188</sup>

The third way Pascal uses ‘order’ is in *placing one thing before another*. This is the same sense where order is applied in mathematics: given  $2x+3 = 9$ , the correct order of operations is to subtract three before dividing by two. Placing subtraction before division leads to error. Pascal’s use in these cases is the same sense that Descartes often invokes concerning method.<sup>189</sup> In the first meditation, Descartes warns that “those who do not take the time to grasp the order and linkage of my arguments, but will be eager to fuss over statements taken out of context (as is the custom for many), they will derive little benefit from reading this work.”<sup>190</sup> In a brief diatribe, he expresses similar sentiment in the Preface to the French edition of the *Principles of Philosophy*, chastising his former disciple Regius for changing the order of his philosophy. The Cartesians in general share a concern with this kind of order as evidenced by the first Cartesian logic book, the *Port Royal Logic*. In this text, the authors describe ‘ordering’ as “the mental action in which different ideas, judgments, and reasonings are arranged on the same subject, such as the human body, in the best manner best suited for knowing the subject. This is also called *method*.”<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> *Pensées* S407/L374; This becomes important later in my discussion of divine participation.

<sup>189</sup> In Ariew, Des Chene, Jesseph, *et al* (2015), the entry on “Order” refers the reader to the entry on “Method.” This is the sense also that Martial Gueroult uses the term in his *Descartes slon l’ordre des raisons*. See Gueroult (1984, 1985).

<sup>190</sup> AT VII.9-10; AC, 6.

<sup>191</sup> Arnauld and Nicole, 23. This distinction is logical or concerning rhetorical order, not an order or distinction in nature itself.

Pascal himself authored sections of the *Port Royal Logic* and he was familiar with this sense of the word.<sup>192</sup>

When Pascal discusses ‘order’ it is most commonly in this third sense. He describes the order in which his ideas should be presented, or the correct way to present them for better philosophical clarity and rhetorical impact, such as when he sketches an outline of which sections should come first in his treatise.<sup>193</sup> He writes, “Order. After the letter about the necessity of seeking God, put in the letter about removing obstacles, which is the discourse on the machine, on preparing the machine, on searching through reason.”<sup>194</sup> And again:

Men despise religion; they hate it and fear that it is true. To cure this, we must begin by showing that religion is not contrary to reason, but worthy of veneration and respect. Next we must make it attractive, to make the good wish it were true, and then we must show that it is true.”<sup>195</sup>

This sense commonly appears in other fragments of the *Pensées* and his other literature including *De l'Esprit géométrique*, the work on method that contributed to the *Port Royal Logic*.<sup>196</sup>

The fourth sense in which Pascal uses ‘order’ concerns orders *of kind*, an ontological hierarchy where things are ordered according to their type: body, mind, or charity.<sup>197</sup> Susan James correctly assesses that in these instances Pascal “distinguishes three orders of *grandeur*, greatness—the order of the flesh, the order of the mind, and the order of charity—each of which constitutes a system of values and ends.”<sup>198</sup> The carnal order esteems earthly things and

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<sup>192</sup> *Port Royal Logic*, Part I, Chapter 12 in the 1638 ed., Chapter 10 in prior editions, and Chapter 9 in posterior editions; and Part IV. These sections were primarily borrowed from *De l'Esprit géométrique*.

<sup>193</sup> In one case like this, he outlines that arguments on man’s wretchedness without God and that nature best proves its own corruption should be followed by the discussion of man’s happiness with God and demonstrate that scripture proves there is a Redeemer. (*Pensées* S40/L6)

<sup>194</sup> *Pensées* S45/L11;

<sup>195</sup> *Pensées* S46/L12;

<sup>196</sup> *Port Royal Logic*, 10; 37-38.

<sup>197</sup> It would be interesting to research the connection between Pascal’s three orders of kind and Cartesian dualism, but that is too far a divergence from my current thesis. See Descartes’ letter to Princess Elizabeth, 21 May 1643 (AT III, 663).

<sup>198</sup> James (1998), 1387.



recognizes the *grandeur* of temporal power, such as a king, while the order of the mind values the intellectual and the order of charity (or the will) values the divine.<sup>199</sup> These orders are also incommensurable, in that carnal people who gain their power by exercising physical strength have no regard for matters of the mind while intellectuals gain their power through exercising reason and have no concern for spiritual things, which they perceive as foolish and weak.<sup>200</sup> Likewise, those who are charitable demonstrate their strength through earthly weakness, which is really strength since it is obtained through submitting one's will to God.

Following Jacques Chevalier, much of the Pascalian literature take this fourth sense of *order* to be a cipher which can be used by a reader to uncover Pascal's moral philosophy contained in the *Pensées*.<sup>201</sup> One commentator writes that, "The three orders describe Pascal's understanding of the human dilemma. The three orders provide the framework for the [*Pensées*] that he was developing... We can't understand Blaise [Pascal] apart from this context."<sup>202</sup> A.W.S. Baird, who offers the most extensive Anglophone survey of Pascal's ethics, also takes this approach, though more nuanced in its appeals to Pascal's mathematical interests. For example, in *Le Triangle arithmétique et les traités connexes*, Pascal observes that different geometric types are incommensurable: something of a lower order does not enter into a higher order by increasing its magnitude. A point is infinitely removed from a line, and a line is infinitely from a cube—increasing the length of a one (*e.g.*, a line) will make it no closer to becoming the other (*e.g.*, a cube), even if increased *ad infinitum*.<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> James (1998), 1387.

<sup>200</sup> *Pensées* S339/L308, etc.

<sup>201</sup> Baird argues that this is the same sense of 'order' that is meant throughout the *Pensées* and should be used this way. Baird (1975), 1-13. See Baird (1975), 2; Serres (1982) II, 648-712; MacKenzie (2008); and Pavlovits (2013).

<sup>202</sup> MacKenzie (2008), vi-vii.

<sup>203</sup> Pascal, *Œuvres* [1964-1992], II 1170. Other editions list this under the Latin subtitle "*Potestatum Numericarum Summa*" (See Brunschvicg, et al (1965), Vol III, 367). Chevalier's edition (*Œuvres* [1957], 1432) should be avoided here because there is an error in the text where instead of "*On découvrira les autres sans difficulté en s'appuyant sur ce principe qu'on n'augmente pas une grandeur continue lorsqu'on lui ajoute, en tel nombre que l'on voudra, des*

My concern with the accepted reading is not that it is altogether false, but that its conclusions go beyond what evidence warrants, making a minor point (relatively speaking) central to understanding his entire project. There are only two fragments in the *Pensées* where Pascal uses this fourth sense of ‘order’.<sup>204</sup> In comparison, he uses the third sense of ‘order,’ *placing one thing before another*, with frequency. Establishing methodological order plays a much more central role for Pascal and it is important to avoid equivocation on the two senses of the term. My criticism is not merely semantic, as if Pascal discusses these themes in other places without explicitly identifying them as ‘orders’. Other than these two fragments, the themes of order *qua* ontological hierarchy is all but absent. The *Pensées* contain many fragments which are both notably longer than the two dealing with ontological order and more central to his project: the role of imagination, skepticism and dogmatism, diversion, divine hiddenness, and the infinite are just a few examples.<sup>205</sup> It is not in the least bit obvious that orders of kind are central to Pascal’s project, let alone the secret to deciphering the fragments.

A second criticism is that although Baird’s mathematical examples do help clarify Pascal’s *order of kind*, there is no evidence outside of those two fragments where he discusses the metaphysical incommensurability of these ‘orders’ to motivate imposing this mathematical framework upon Pascal’s morality. Though Pascal’s ethics do arguably become tripartite as discussed later in this chapter, the accepted reading seems *ad hoc* and there is surprisingly underwhelming evidence to make it the secret key for understanding the other fragments.

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*grandeurs d'un ordre d'infinitude supérieur,*” Chevalier writes “*inférieur.*” This is important to note since this is the one of the editions that Baird (1975) references concerning this text and he draws a great deal of his scholarship from Chevalier.

<sup>204</sup> *Pensées* S339/L308 and with slight variation, *Pensées* S761/L933.

<sup>205</sup> For imagination: *Pensées* S78/L44, skepticism versus dogmatism: S164/L131, diversion: S168/L137, divine hiddenness: S182/L149, and man’s disproportion and how he is situated within the infinite: S230/L199.

I do not pretend my criticisms here are exhaustive as that would require a much more careful analysis too tangential for my current purposes. My intention at the moment is to raise sufficient doubt of the accepted reading in order to make space for an alternative approach, one that I believe is better supported by internal and external evidence. To this end, I will turn to the composition of his thought in Augustine, Descartes, Montaigne, and Epictetus.

## II. Pascal's Philosophical Anatomy

### II.a Pascal and Augustine

When commentators choose to discuss the conceptual genealogy of Pascal's work, they are most commonly eager to discuss Augustine's impact, though not without voices of dissent.<sup>206</sup> For one, Vincent Carraud rejects Pascal's Augustinianism, noting that, "Pascal had not been nourished by the thought of Augustine as essentially as that by that of Montaigne and Descartes," forwarding the even more controversial thesis that "he never thought as an Augustinian."<sup>207</sup> He provides three arguments for this claim: (1) Pascal was unfamiliar with Augustine's writing,<sup>208</sup> (2) When contrasting their *Cogitos*, Pascal's rejection of Augustine's to defend Descartes is violent;<sup>209</sup> and, (3) Pascal rejects the two cities analogy that is central to Augustine's *De Civitate Dei*.<sup>210</sup>

The first two of Carraud's arguments are compelling. Pascal refers to *De Civitate Dei* only a few times in the *Pensées*.<sup>211</sup> In two of these cases, as Carraud points out, Pascal cites Montaigne,

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<sup>206</sup> See Rescher (1985), 4 and James (1998), 1387. To the little extent that he discusses the topic, Graeme Hunter offers one of the few more balanced accounts. (Hunter [2013], 48; 55-58; etc.)

<sup>207</sup> Carraud (2007), 450-451.

<sup>208</sup> Carraud (2007), 454.

<sup>209</sup> Carraud (2007), 481-485.

<sup>210</sup> Carraud (2007), 459.

<sup>211</sup> Carraud (2007) lists four: S27/L408 and S713/L478 (since they reference the same text), S230/L199, S94/L60, and S268/L236. Carraud omits S802/L968. Pascal also makes several vague glosses, merely mentioning Augustine by name or using him as an authority on a doctrine but without citation as to where Augustine speaks to the topic (S329/L298, S452/L517, S480/L577, S747, S757/L930, S796/L960). He attempts to cite Augustine in S490/L591, but is not quite clear whether his reference is in 48 or 49 of Augustine's letters (it was from 48). Pascal also alludes to *Contra Pelagium* (S240/L208), *Sermon 141* (S222/L190), and *Of Christian Doctrine* (S283/L251) though it is unclear whether he read them or not. It would be surprising, though not impossible, for him to have read these lesser

completely unaware that Montaigne was quoting (or, misquoting) Augustine.<sup>212</sup> In a third reference, Pascal again misquotes Augustine by quoting Montaigne; though this time he correctly attributes the citation to Augustine, his treatment of it again reveals his ignorance of the text. Pascal writes “*Cum veritatem qua liberetur ignoret, expedit quod fallatur.*”<sup>213</sup> However, the text should read *inquirat* (meaning, “asks” or “seeks”) instead of *ignoret* (which translates “does not know”), a mistake Pascal again carries from Montaigne’s 1652 edition of the *Essays*, which contained several errors.<sup>214</sup> Similar errors occur in other references made to the *De Civitate Dei*: S230/L199 also contains an error transcribed from Montaigne, misquoting Augustine, and in other cases Pascal appears to be quoting the works of the theologian Jansen, not Augustine himself.<sup>215</sup> It is unclear to what degree Pascal is Augustinian if he is so ignorant of Augustine’s popular *De Civitate Dei*.

Carraud’s second argument is equally compelling. He describes Pascal’s defense of Descartes’s *Cogito* over Augustine’s as violent.<sup>216</sup> The occasion of this discussion begins in Descartes’ *Meditations on First Philosophy*. In the *Fourth Set of Objections* to the *Meditations*, Arnauld accuses Descartes of plagiarizing the *Cogito* from Augustine’s *On Free Choice of the*

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known texts and still not be familiar with *City of God*. The notes in Roger Ariew’s translation of the *Pensées* (Hackett, 2005) and Carraud (2007) were helpful in gathering this list with such detail.

<sup>212</sup> S27/L408 (“Two hundred eighty kinds of supreme good in Montaigne.”) and then again in S713/L478 (“For philosophers, 280 supreme goods.”). Carraud rightly notes that not only does he mistakenly attribute this to Montaigne, but he also misquotes Augustine based on a misprint in the 1652 edition of Montaigne’s *Essays* – an error that would be very difficult to make if he’d actually read *City of God* Book 19 where the number, 288, results from an obvious calculation and must be divisible by 3. (Carraud [2007], 454).

<sup>213</sup> *Pensées* S94/L60; “When he searches [*inquirat*] for the truth that would bring him freedom, it is good that he should be misinformed.”

<sup>214</sup> *Pensées* 1995, 17n. It is likely that Pascal knew this quote from Montaigne as well, who quoted this passage with marginal citation in his *Apology of Raymond Sebond*. (Carraud, 456, 456n21) To make matters worse for Pascal, he misreads Augustine. In the actual text of *De Civitate Dei*, Augustine is citing Varro who is in turn referencing Scævola. (*CD*, IV.27) The occasion of the citation is a refutation of Varro who defended pagan religion for its pragmatic value. When Pascal quotes the text, he offers it as Augustine’s own opinion. This misreading is easier to explain, of course, if Pascal is reading Montaigne’s *Essays* and not Augustine himself. See Carraud (2007), 456.

<sup>215</sup> Carraud (2007), 456-457.

<sup>216</sup> Carraud (2007), 453.

*Will*.<sup>217</sup> Less than a decade later, Pascal comes to the defense of Descartes, saying that though both Descartes and Augustine use the same words, they are not really saying the same thing:

In actuality, I am very far from saying that Descartes is not the real author of these, even if he only learned them by reading the great saint; for I know how much of a difference there is between writing a word by chance without making a very long and extended reflection about it and perceiving in this word an admirable series of consequences that proves the distinction of material and spiritual natures, and making of it a firm and sustained principle of a whole system of physics, as Descartes claimed to do.<sup>218</sup>

Pascal continues, deriding Augustine's *Cogito* as accidental, accusing him of writing it "by chance" and neglecting its logical consequences.<sup>219</sup> He compares Augustine's instantiation to a thrown out seed that flourished in Descartes' fertile soul and compares the difference between the two as that of "a dead man from a man full of life and strength."<sup>220</sup> Pascal's reaction is even more critical of Augustine than Descartes was himself. Descartes wrote to Colvius on the matter, saying:

I am obligated to you for drawing my attention to the passage of St. Augustine relevant to my *I am thinking, therefore I exist*. I went today to the library of this town to read it and I do indeed find that he does use it to prove the certainty of our existence. He goes on to show that ... we exist, we know that we exist, and we love the existence and the knowledge we have... In itself it is such a simple and natural thing to infer that one exists from the fact that one is doubting that it could have occurred to any writer. But I am very glad to find myself in agreement with St Augustine, if only to hush the little minds who have tried to find fault with the principle.<sup>221</sup>

Unlike Pascal, Descartes admits that his *Cogito* has the same force as Augustine's. He even welcomes the comparison, though also recognizing that given the principle's simplicity anyone could have written it. In contrast, Pascal is either insufficiently familiar with Augustine's *Cogito* to appraise it fairly, or so predisposed to defend Descartes that he is willing to overlook the upshot of

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<sup>217</sup> Carraud (2007), 21. Arnauld also makes a similar objection in 1648, referring to Augustine's *On Free Choice of the Will* (II.3) and *City of God* (XI.27)

<sup>218</sup> Pascal (1989), 116.

<sup>219</sup> Pascal (1989), 33-35

<sup>220</sup> Pascal (1989), 192.

<sup>221</sup> November 14, 1640. AT III, 247; CSMK, 159.

Augustine's rendition. In either case, it would be strange to say Pascal is acting as an Augustinian here.

Despite the success of his first two arguments, Carraud's third is less successful. He argues that Pascal rejects Augustine's two-cities analogy of *De Civitate Dei*. Augustine believes that the whole world is composed of two 'cities.' These are not geo-political or socio-economic cities, but rather its citizens are bifurcated throughout the world according to the objects of their love. Those who love God above all else comprise the city of God; as a result, the citizens in the celestial city also love lesser objects in their proper relation to God. Those who love themselves or other lesser objects greater than, or in place of, God reside in the city of man. Carraud claims that Pascal would be concerned with the idea that:

...the body of Christ, which is absolutely unified, be thought of as a society, *societas hominum*, an association, that is, an association of profane interests, in the manner of those cities that Plato and Aristotle, "who enjoy a laugh with their friends ... amused themselves" by laying down "rules" as if "for a madhouse".<sup>222</sup>

He argues that, for Pascal, those who love God are an organic unity whose wills are subordinate to God's will. Pascal believes that God's people are like a body, united with the one mind and will of Christ who is the head. Because of this, Carraud argues that the analogy of a celestial city is unworthy because it implies that each member still has its own will. He references letter fourteen Pascal's *Les Lettres provinciales* to support this point.

But there are two problems with Carraud's third argument. The first is that he misreads Pascal in the fourteenth letter. Pascal is not criticizing the city of God analogy itself whatsoever, and in fact endorses it:

There are two peoples and two worlds spread out over all the earth, according to St. Augustine: the world of children of God, who form a body of which Christ is the chief and

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<sup>222</sup> Carraud (2007), 459.

the king; and the enemy world of God, [in] which the devil is the chief and king. ...  
Recognize, therefore now, my fathers, in which of these two kingdoms you reside.<sup>223</sup>

His targets are the ecclesiastics, whose lifestyle does not represent the behavior of citizens in the divine city. His concern is not whether Augustine is wrong, but that clergy was consumed with self-love and casuistry—he assumes the cities analogy to be correct as a background for expressing his concern.

The second challenge to Carraud's third argument is that contrary to his claim, Pascal's metaphor for the people of God—the body of Christ united in his will—is nearly identical to Augustine's doctrine of *theosis*. Augustine believed, like many theologians, that humans experience a union with God in a literal, though immaterial, sense.<sup>224</sup> Not to be confused with a more gnostic notion of emanation, Augustine describes *theosis* using three images. The first is recapitulation: God and humanity are contraries where the greater (God) moves towards, identifies with, and then perfects the impoverished (humanity).<sup>225</sup> The second is an exchange: God became human so humans can become gods. Like Plato, one must become like the object of one's knowledge—as one must become sun-like to see the sun, he must become god-like to see God.<sup>226</sup> The third is the image of divine adoption: though all creatures are sons of God in a natural sense, the elect are sons of God through grace.<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>223</sup> *Les Provinciales* XIV: "Il y a deux peuples et deux mondes répandus sur toute la terre, selon saint Augustin: le monde des enfants de Dieu, qui forme un corps dont Jésus-Christ est le chef et le roi; et le monde ennemi de Dieu, dont le diable est le chef et le roi. ... Voyez donc maintenant, mes pères, duquel de ces deux royaumes vous êtes." (Pascal *Œuvres* [1998-2000], 746. Translation mine)

<sup>224</sup> Although the term *theosis* is less frequently used outside of Eastern Orthodoxy, the alternative terms "deification" and "divine participation" are even less appropriate. Deification lacks any precedent in the Latin texts and divine participation can easily be broader than intended in *theosis*. Meconi's argument, which I embrace here, is that one need not use the term "*theosis*" to communicate its meaning. (For an example of this, see Augustine on the Eucharist (s. 272 [Sermon 272]). See also *Confessiones* 11.9; *Civitate Dei*, XIV.13; *Sermo* 23b; *Sermo* 166.4; and *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 117.11). For a more detailed commentary, see Meconi (2013, 2014). With Meconi, I use *theosis* to capture these themes in Augustine where a better term is lacking.

<sup>225</sup> Meconi (2013), 215-216.

<sup>226</sup> Meconi (2013), 216-219.

<sup>227</sup> Meconi (2013), 220.

The conclusion of Carraud's third argument then does not follow. Pascal's notion of the will is overwhelming Augustinian.<sup>228</sup> Pascal assumes the two-cities distinction in *Les Lettres provinciales* and both believe the human end is metaphysical unity with God, where one's own will and thoughts become the will and thoughts of God. Rather than being anti-Augustinian, Pascal's ontology (at least on these points) could not be more Augustinian.

It is worth mentioning, also, that at the end of his article, Carraud notes that his conclusions are provisory and that Pascal's relationship with Augustine may need to be revisited.<sup>229</sup> I agree with this sentiment; Carraud's first two arguments make a sufficiently compelling case that we should question the degree to which Pascal embraces Augustinianism. It is an important corrective for the tendency to read Pascal as an unadulterated Augustinian. But Carraud's third argument is problematic and his conclusion that Pascal is anti-Augustinian is too severe a reaction.

Though it is true that Pascal's criticisms of Augustine are at times sharp (*e.g.*, on the *Cogito*), that is insufficient reason to deem him anti-Augustinian outright—no more than Augustine's deviations from Plato would make him anti-Platonist or Pierre-Sylvain Régis' deviations from Descartes would make him an anti-Cartesian.<sup>230</sup> Being Augustinian, like being Cartesian or Platonist, is more of a family resemblance than a strict set of necessary and sufficient conditions that which one must adhere.<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> It is true that Pascal likely did not read many of the texts of Augustine that carry these themes, but Pascal also was immersed in Augustinianism and could have easily learned them from M. Saci or Arnauld. He also may have discovered some these themes through Jansen's *Augustinus* II.2-4 and III. I defend Pascal's own doctrine of *theosis* later in this chapter.

<sup>229</sup> Carraud (2007), 448.

<sup>230</sup> Augustine rejects emanation (arguing that God creates freely) and also holds the body in a much more exalted position than Plato, for instance—though strangely his views are more Platonic than Plotinus, his source of Plato. See Williams (2003). Régis rejects Cartesian dualism. See Ariew (2014) and Schmaltz (2002)

<sup>231</sup> I discuss this in relation to Stoics in my introduction. See also Ariew (2014), xvi; Collette (2014). What actually defines someone as "Augustinian," "Platonic," or "Cartesian" is somewhat contentious. For more on this see Schmaltz (2002), Ariew (2006), Dobrhe and Nyden (2013), Ariew (2014), Collette (2014), and so forth.



There are several reasons to paint Pascal as an Augustinian with certain qualifications. While Pascal appears to have read little (if any) Augustine, he was immersed in Augustinianism. He was a Jansenist in residence at Port Royal. The Jansenists were a sect of religious enthusiasts known for their extreme piety and asceticism.<sup>232</sup> Their theology was interpreted through the writings of the theologian Cornelius Jansen, whose *magnum opus* was a commentary on Augustine titled *Augustinus*. For this reason the people of Port Royal also self-identified as Augustinian.<sup>233</sup> It would be shocking if Pascal, a well educated resident in an Augustinian abbey, did not understand Augustine's philosophy and theology, even if it was obtained second-hand through reading Jansen or from others in the abbey.<sup>234</sup>

Augustine was also pervasive in the mainstream 17<sup>th</sup> century intellectual culture, a lasting impact from the interest of *De Civitate Dei*, a 16<sup>th</sup> century 'best seller'.<sup>235</sup> By analogy, today most people in developed countries have not read Darwin. But nonetheless, a majority of Western Civilization is 'Darwinian' in a very weak sense, in that they are familiar with a sketch of the theory of evolution and to this degree of understanding, adhere to it. For all of these reasons, it is in this sense that I refer to Pascal's 'Augustinianism'.<sup>236</sup> He clearly rejects Augustine at points, but holds certain themes and doctrines that are easily identified as Augustinian at points. Pascal was an Augustinian, but not strictly and he often let his other commitments supplant his Augustinianism.

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<sup>232</sup> For more, see Knox (1950), 204-230.

<sup>233</sup> Though Pope Innocent X condemned their sect, Arnauld maintained that Jansen was merely teaching Augustine and that the contents of the condemnation were correct but did not correctly capture the meaning of Jansen's work. For more on this controversy, see Nadler (1989), 17.

<sup>234</sup> M. Saci was an expert on Augustine and Arnauld appears to have known his work also.

<sup>235</sup> Carraud (2007), 453.

<sup>236</sup> It has been brought to my attention that this analogy does not quite hold. It is true that the sense in which many Westerners are Darwinian is very weak—there is much more to being a proper Darwinian than embracing the theory of evolution, and it is not at all clear that most Westerners accept whatever else actual Darwinianism entails. While evolution is clearly a necessary condition, this belief alone is hardly sufficient to be a proper Darwinian. In the same way, however, I would suggest that we are Copernicans, and Newtonians, and Einsteinians. Most westerners today, even scholars, may not self-identify as any of these, but the effects of their ideas are pervasive. Perhaps I do mean Augustinian in a slightly stronger sense than this, but I think at least for the sake of an illustrating analogy it holds well enough. I maintain the comparison where the analogy holds, while gladly conceding that it is a limited analogy that does not hold strongly in other ways.

## II.b. Pascal and Descartes

Pascal's relation with Descartes and Cartesianism is more complex than that with Augustine. While Pascal was unfamiliar with some of Augustine's most popular writings, he was intimately engaged with the work of Descartes. I believe this is important for understanding Pascal's Cartesianism. Several recent scholars have rightfully argued for Pascal's Cartesianism based on his reception by contemporaries and also his self-identification as a Cartesian, as well as shared philosophical themes.<sup>237</sup>

Concerning Pascal's reception, I begin with his familiarity with texts, which extends beyond Descartes' published treatises to knowledge of unpublished manuscripts, some of which were closely guarded by Descartes and his confidants. The best known of these documents today was also one of the most guarded in their day—the manuscripts where Descartes discusses the Eucharist. There is good reason for their secrecy, as the documents were controversy waiting to happen. To offer a bit of a background, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Roman Catholic Church issued a strong reaction to the Protestant Reformation through an ecclesiastical council, the Council of Trent. One of the most significant statements to emerge here concerned the Eucharist, a doctrine outlined with precision and care during the Council. Any deviation from the account offered during the Council was pronounced anathema.<sup>238</sup>

Now, Descartes' editor, Mersenne, was an ecclesiastic who knew how delicate, if not volatile, this doctrine was. When compiling the manuscripts for the *Objections and Replies* to the *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Mersenne redacted part of Descartes' reply to the Fourth Set of Objections pertaining to the Eucharist. Mersenne's motivation for this grew out of concern of

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<sup>237</sup> Alexandrescu (2007), Ariew (2007), Lewis (2007), Collette (2014).

<sup>238</sup> See the 13<sup>th</sup> Session of the Council of Trent.

offending the ‘learned doctors.’<sup>239</sup> Clerselier, who became Descartes’ later editor, was equally wise to protect this document from untrusted eyes.<sup>240</sup> After Descartes’ death, the churchman Robert Desgabets ‘tested the waters’ by publishing this account in his *Considérations sur l’état présent de la controverse touchant le T. S. Sacrement de l’autel*; even though it was twenty years removed from Descartes’ death, the subsequent controversy that unfolded painfully reinforced that the caution shown by the editors was warranted.<sup>241</sup>

Despite this secrecy surrounding the Eucharist manuscript, Pascal read it. This is evidenced by a criticism he offers in the *Pensées*.<sup>242</sup> Even though Pascal’s account is critical, it is very unlikely that he would have seen this document at all unless Clerselier or another within Descartes’ trusted circle viewed him as a member of the Cartesian community.<sup>243</sup> If Descartes or his confidants felt safe showing Pascal the Eucharist fragment, it would not be unreasonable that Pascal saw other unpublished documents by Descartes as well; there were no others as incriminating or so well protected. Whoever the Cartesians were in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, they seemed to extend trust to Pascal in a degree expected for a member of their philosophical community.

Of course one person reading or commenting on the writings of another does not in itself qualify an author as the other’s disciple. If it did, then Leibniz and Hobbes would also be Cartesian, which is clearly false. However, the fact that Pascal’s knowledge extends beyond published works to unpublished manuscripts, especially those kept secretive due to fear of

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<sup>239</sup> See Letter to Huygens, 26 April 1642. (AT III, 785)

<sup>240</sup> Descartes’ Letter to Huygens, 26 April 1642 (AT III, 784); Descartes also tells Mesland (2 May 1644) that he is avoiding the topic of the Eucharist in the reply to the fourth objection because of the Counsel of Trent.

<sup>241</sup> Armogathe (1998) writes an extensive account on Desgabets’ publication and its condemnation.

<sup>242</sup> Pascal, *Pensées*, S794/L957. This places Pascal most likely seeing the Eucharist writing before Desgabets: Pascal died in 1662 and Desgabets published his work guardedly in 1671. For a more detailed treatment of this, see Alexandrescu (2007). For a more detailed account of Descartes, Desgabets, and the Eucharist, see also Schmaltz (2002), 34-47.

<sup>243</sup> Antoine Arnauld is another possible source. Arnauld, Pascal’s colleague at Port-Royal, co-authored the definitive Cartesian logic text, the *Port-Royal Logic* with parts that Pascal himself contributed. His fourth set of objections to Descartes’ the *Meditations on First Philosophy* was received well by Descartes, and he is known for his arguments with Malebranche over the correct interpretation of Cartesian ideas. That is, the concept of ideas in Descartes. See AT VII, 196; also, Schmaltz (2000).

censure, is revealing to Pascal's role as an actor in mid-17<sup>th</sup> century intellectualism. Pascal would not be shown such documents, let alone secretive documents, merely out of a generous spirit of inclusiveness: Descartes' reputation precedes him as someone who is not shy about ostracizing those he did not like or trust. He asks Mersenne, for example, to withhold unpublished views from Hobbes in addition to ignoring his letters.<sup>244</sup> Pascal's reception by the Cartesians leads to a reasonable conclusion that Pascal was accepted as one of them.

This reception is again evidenced by the inclusion of Pascal's writings in the *Port Royal Logic*. Authored by Antoine Arnauld and Pierre Nicole, two of Pascal's colleagues at Port Royal, the *Port Royal Logic* was the definitive Cartesian logic in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The book is largely a paraphrase of Descartes' writings on method expanded upon with their own additions, including those to make it more recognizable as a logic textbook. Included among their additions are excerpts from Pascal's pamphlet on method, *De l'Esprit géométrique*, which was composed around 1658—the same period when he was composing the *Pensées* fragments. Arnauld and Nicole make the source of these sections clear in the introduction, telling the reader that chapter 9 of Part I is taken from “a small unpublished essay by the late Pascal which he titled *On the Geometric Mind*.”<sup>245</sup> It would be strange for them to include Pascal's writings on method if they did not believe him to be Cartesian.

It is sensible that Arnauld and Nicole chose this selection for inclusion in their text—Pascal's writing on method is where he exposes the strongest affinity to Descartes. In *De l'Esprit géométrique*, Pascal draws explicitly from the *Discourse on Method*. In addition to copying the rules of method nearly verbatim, he imitates Descartes' style, repeating the same skeptical arguments found in the first part of the *Discourse*. Pascal also seems to draw from the *Regulae*,

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<sup>244</sup> Descartes' letter to Mersenne, 4 March 1641 (AT III, 319)

<sup>245</sup> Arnauld and Nicole (1996), 10.

setting about the same task (distinguish between things that are similar) and uniquely referring to their methods as an art, a term typically reserved for rhetoric.<sup>246</sup> To expand on these themes, Descartes famously adopts Montaigne's style and thought in the first three parts of the *Discourse*, especially concerning suspension of judgment. Once he calls into question those opinions formed through anything less than certain judgments, he establishes rules modeled in the geometric fashion that are intended to uncover apodictic knowledge. These rules are,

- 1) Never accept anything as true that was not self-evidently so, basing all basic truths on indubitable, clear, and distinct ideas free of "hasty judgment and prejudice";
- 2) Divide each problem being considered into "as many parts as possible" to evaluate each idea as carefully as possible;
- 3) Always proceed "in an orderly fashion", by embracing (1) as a foundation, then slowly building towards more complex knowledge composed of self-evident and derived principles; and,
- 4) Proceed systematically and in consistently reviewing that there is surety "of having omitted nothing".<sup>247</sup>

Pascal borrows both of these aspects of the *Discourse* in his pamphlet. Like Descartes, Pascal follows Montaigne in suspending judgment, showing the difficulty of finding knowledge through the senses. For every pleasure there is another person who prefers its opposite. The pleasures of a rich person differ from those of the poor, a person in good health experiences different pleasures than another who is ill, and even the same person's pleasures will vary according to her health, age, and mood. Given these weaknesses, a new, different path must be followed, a method that leads to knowledge so certain that "once ... admitted remain firm and will never be denied" and that can demonstrate the "connection of truths with their principles."<sup>248</sup>

To this end, Pascal prescribes the following rules:

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<sup>246</sup> There is, of course, a long tradition of the Art of Rhetoric beginning with Aristotle's text of that title and carried through to contemporaries such as Hobbes, who authored treatises such as *A Whole Art of Rhetoric* and *The Art of Sophistry*. The term 'art' is not unique, but it is typically identified with rhetoric, not knowledge.

<sup>247</sup> AT VI, 18; The wording follows the translation by Roger Ariew (2000), 54.

<sup>248</sup> "Or il y a un art, et c'est celui que je donne, pour faire voir la liaison des vérités avec leurs principes, soit de vrai, soit de plaisir, pourvu que les principes qu'on a une fois avoués demeurent fermes et sans être jamais démentis." *Œuvres* (1964-1992), 417. (translation mine).

- 1) *Rules for definitions*: Define only clear, not ambiguous, terms and when offering a definition, only use ideas self-evident or that clearly follow from self-evident ideas;
- 2) *Rules for axioms*: Only accept clearly evident ideas as axioms; and,
- 3) *Rules for demonstrations*: Prove all propositions that are slightly obscure, using only axioms as determined by (2) and always conceive of an actual object when considering a definition, with restrictions that come from (1), to avoid confusion arising from poorly defined terms.<sup>249</sup>

These are, of course, almost exactly the same rules of method from the *Discourse*.

As I also noted, in the same pamphlet, Pascal seems to draw from Descartes' *Regulae*. In the *Regulae*, Descartes refers his reductive process of finding certainty in judgment as the "art of method". Analogous to a blacksmith who first must make or find tools (e.g., an anvil and tongs) before he takes on the task producing in his craft, a person who desires sound judgment must acquire and learn to use these tools of reason before s/he is able to produce genuine knowledge.<sup>250</sup> Pascal also refers to his method—which also consists of reducing then carefully analyzing ideas—as an art in *De l'Esprit géométrique*. The term 'art' in this sort of discourse is very common, with the tradition going back to Aristotle's art of rhetoric. It is not even unique in the seventeenth century—Thomas Hobbes, for instance, authored several texts as 'arts' including *A Whole Art of Rhetoric* and *The Art of Sophistry*.<sup>251</sup> Nor is a geometric method itself uniquely Cartesian; appealing to mathematical models in search of epidemic certainty is pervasive throughout early modernity.<sup>252</sup> But Pascal does not argue for an art of rhetoric here, in spite of the subtitle of the second half of the pamphlet, *L'Art de persuader*. Rather than presenting an actual rhetoric, like Descartes Pascal calls the geometric method itself an art.<sup>253</sup> If Pascal is

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<sup>249</sup> Pascal, *Œuvres* (1964-1992), 419-421. (The English is adapted from Popkin's 1989 translation.)

<sup>250</sup> AT X, 397; AC, 19

<sup>251</sup> See Hobbes, *EW* VI, 419ff.

<sup>252</sup> Hobbes' resolute-compositive method in Part I of *Leviathan* and *De Corpore*, for example.

<sup>253</sup> Based on a paper given by Daniel Garber at the American Philosophical Association 2013 Eastern Division Meeting, these references to the art of method may be missing from the Cambridge manuscript. If this is indeed the case, it has some potentially interesting implications for when Pascal saw the manuscripts. (Garber, "Descartes' *Regulae*: A New Manuscript," Colloquium, Descartes Society meeting at the American Philosophical Association 2013 Eastern Division Meeting, Baltimore, MD, December 28, 2013.)

borrowing from the *Regulae* in addition to the *Discourse*, it shows evidence of Cartesianism from the text, while also offering additional external evidence of another unpublished manuscript to which Pascal had access.<sup>254</sup> Beyond textual similarities, perhaps the clearest internal evidence of Pascal's Cartesianism comes during his discussion of method and persuasion, in his defense of Descartes' *Cogito* over Augustine's. As I showed in the previous section on Augustine, Vincent Carraud offers a careful analysis of this discussion, describing Pascal's defense of Descartes as "violent."<sup>255</sup>

Pascal's Cartesian method extends beyond *De l'Esprit géométrique*. In his *Préface sur le Traité du vide*, Pascal makes a clear distinction between 'matters of reason' and 'matters of tradition'. Tradition serves those things that have been written and are unchanging—history, geography, law, language, and theology. However, this is not the case for those fields of study that use reason or senses such as "geometry, arithmetic, music, physics, medicine, architecture, and all of the sciences that are subject to experience and reasoning."<sup>256</sup> For these disciplines, authority is useless; they require reasoning. Matters of reason are not stagnant; knowledge pertaining to them is augmented as new ways to reason and experiment are discovered; thus, books from the past are unhelpful. Descartes makes a very similar distinction: "...I generally distinguish two aspects of mathematics, the historical and the scientific. By 'history' I understand everything which has been discovered already and is contained in books. By 'science' I mean the skill to solve every problem, and thus to discover by one's own efforts everything capable of being discovered in that science by means of our native human

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<sup>254</sup> AT X, 368.

<sup>255</sup> Carraud (2007), 481ff. He is referring to a passage in *De l'Art de persuader* (*Œuvres* III, 424).

<sup>256</sup> *Œuvres* (1964-1992) II, 779. "C'est ainsi que la géométrie, l'arithmétique, la musique, la physique, la médecine, l'architecture, et tous les sciences que sont soumises à l'expérience et au raisonnement, doivent être augmentées pour devenir parfaits." (Translation mine.)

intelligence.”<sup>257</sup> So both in his general approach to method, distinguishing between matters of reason and matters of tradition, and in his specific application of method, his criteria of knowledge and the geometric method, Pascal exhibits Cartesianism.

An objection, of course, is that Pascal may have been a Cartesian at least to some degree early in his public life, but that he distanced himself upon religious conversion, focusing then exclusively on theology and mysticism.<sup>258</sup> However, such an argument is strange considering the intellectual climate at Port Royal and its sympathies to Cartesianism. The *Pensées* fragments confirm this, showing continued strains of Cartesian influences.

One example of shared philosophical themes in the *Pensées* is dualism. Few themes are more central to Descartes’ philosophy than his quest to prove the distinction between mind and body.<sup>259</sup> Rather than accepting an Aristotelian *hylomorphism* (or opting for other modern options),<sup>260</sup> Pascal accepts Descartes’ view that there is an immaterial mind and a material body,

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<sup>257</sup> Letter to Hogelande, 8 February 164 (AT III, 722; CSMK, 144). Pascal is concerned that the schoolmen treat matters of reason as matters of tradition as it results in unsuccessful and obscure terms as definitions. Pascal mocks the Scholastic definition of light, that it is “*La lumière est un mouvement lumineux des corps lumineux; comme si on pouvait entendre le mot de lumineuse et de lumineux sans celui lumière.*” (*Oeuvres* III, 396.) Descartes writes in his *Rules for the Direction of the Mind* that “...the learned are often inclined to be so clever that they find ways of blinding themselves even to facts which are self-evident and which every peasant knows. This is what happens whenever they try and explain things which are self-evident in terms of something even more evident: what they do is to explain something else or nothing at all...when people say that motion, something perfectly familiar to everyone is ‘the actuality of a potential being, in so far as it is potential’, do they not give the impression of uttering magic words...?” (AT X, 426; CSM, 49). Likewise, in *The World*, Descartes writes sarcastically that he left Aristotle’s definitions untranslated because they are nonsensical enough even in their original Latin. (AT XI, 39-41; CSM, 93-94). It is worth noting, however, that this tendency is broadly modern. Hobbes similarly mocks scholastic definitions in Chapter 1 of the *Leviathan*. Nonetheless, like other early Cartesians such as Jacques Rohault (Régis’ teacher), Pascal believes that axioms do not need to be defined because of their extreme clarity: axioms have the certitude of demonstrations even if lacking the conviction of them. (*Oeuvres* III, 401ff-428; Also, Rohault, 18)

<sup>258</sup> MacKenzie, for instance, sees Pascal’s mathematical and scientific pursuits as an effort to fulfill an existential void inside of him, one that was released as pride of which he felt guilty. (MacKenzie [1973], 114-116) MacKenzie does believe he maintained a scientific mindset, but now applied it to religion. (164) Hunter notes that Pascal apologizes to Saci for venturing into theology, a conversation presumably post-conversion. (Hunter [2013], 9)

<sup>259</sup> He believed that if he was able to show that the soul and body are distinct that it would prove the immortality of the soul. Though the Fifth Lateran Council said that the immortality of the soul was possible, this remained a controversial topic with figures such as Pietro Pomponazzi who continued to argue that the soul requires matter for existence. (Garber [1998], 761).

<sup>260</sup> Other modernist options such as Gassendist atomism or Hobbesian materialism. For further reading, see Ariew (2011), 19; 128ff and Garber (1998), 764-773.



which are actually distinct from one another.<sup>261</sup> Like Descartes, Pascal describes animals as machines, automata that act out of habit not reason. Parrots, for instance, wipe their beaks even when they are clean.<sup>262</sup> This wiping is done intermittently as a mechanical function, not with rational intentionality to clean what is dirty. The human body is also such a machine, “For we must not misunderstand ourselves: we are as much automata as minds,” and this for this reason it is important to know that, “Proofs only convince the mind; custom provides our strongest and most firmly believed proofs. It inclines the automaton, which drags the mind unconsciously with it.”<sup>263</sup> As for the mind or soul, Pascal asks:

What is the self? A man goes to the window to see the passersby; if I pass by, can I say he went there to see me? No, for he is not thinking of me in particular. But does someone who loves another because of her beauty really love her? No, because the smallpox, which will destroy beauty without destroying the person, will cause him to love her no more. And if someone loves me for my judgment, for my memory, does he love me, myself? No, because I can lose these qualities without losing myself. Where, then, is this self, if it is neither in the body nor in the soul? And how to love the body or the soul, except for its qualities that do not constitute the self, since they are perishable? For would we love the substance of a person’s soul in the abstract, whatever qualities might be in it?<sup>264</sup>

Though this fragment raises its own questions, such as what Pascal means by the self if it is separate from the soul and body, like Descartes he is distinguishing between the mind and body. In asking where the self is, Pascal acknowledges that it is found in neither of two places, the soul or in the body, which closely resembles Descartes’ account in the second meditation:

But then were I perchance to look out my window and observe men crossing the square, I would ordinarily say I see the men themselves just as I say I see the wax. But what do I

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<sup>261</sup> “All bodies, the firmament, the stars, the earth and its kingdoms, are not worth the least of minds. For minds knows all of these, and itself, and bodies know nothing” (*Pensées*, S339/L308).

<sup>262</sup> *Pensées*, S139/L107. See also S140/L108. Compare Pascal’s parrot example with the following from the *Discourse on Method*, “I made special efforts to show that if any such machines had the organs and outward shape of a monkey or of some other animal that lacks reason, we should have no means of knowing that they did not possess entirely the same nature as these animals.” (AT VI, 56; CSM I, 139) Descartes continues here to list parrots as an example for uttering words without comprehending them (AT VI, 57).

<sup>263</sup> *Pensées*, S661/L821.

<sup>264</sup> *Pensées*, S567/L688.

see aside from hats and clothes, which could conceal automata? Yet I judge them to be men.<sup>265</sup>

In addition to this mind/body distinction, Pascal also embraces a Cartesian account of the intellect and will. Descartes ascribes the role of assenting to the truth or falsity of an idea to these faculties. Those ideas accepted by means of the intellect are active judgments in accordance with his criteria of truth (clear and distinct ideas). Those assented through the will are passive and formed through habit and custom. In this second case, the intellect fails to discern which beliefs to accept, so a belief is passively accepted by conditioning; this can occur because either a person lacked necessary focus to establish a clear and distinct idea or because the person making the judgment is indifferent towards which belief to prefer over another. In each case, when a person is not intentionally guiding the will with the intellect through clear and distinct judgments, the will continues assenting to beliefs on its own through conditioning, detached from the intellect.<sup>266</sup>

This relation between the intellect and will is central to Pascal's philosophical project of the *Pensées*. It is the structure for understanding his Wager and "Discourse on the Machine": since the body is a machine, when the intellect fails, habit and custom move the will to form beliefs. He writes that, "Both parts of us must be made to believe: the mind by reasons that need only to be seen once in a lifetime; and the automaton by custom, and by not allowing it any inclination to the contrary."<sup>267</sup> Concerning rational belief formation, Pascal also accepts Descartes' clear and distinct ideas,<sup>268</sup> though given his Cartesian themes in *De l'Esprit*

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<sup>265</sup> AT VII, 32.

<sup>266</sup> See the Fourth Meditation (AT VII, 53-62).

<sup>267</sup> *Pensées*, S661/L821

<sup>268</sup> See the *Pensées* S670/L512, for example, or his argument against skepticism beginning with clear and distinct ideas, intuitive concepts he calls the "heart" in S141/L109.

*géométrie* and *Préface pour un Traité du vide* it is not so surprising. He often refers to these self-evident first principles known through intuition as the ‘heart’ in the *Pensées*.

Although there is compelling evidence for Pascal’s reception as a Cartesian among his contemporaries, and there are clear correlations between several of Descartes’ texts and Pascal’s, Pascal’s self-identification qua Cartesian is less explicit. Towards this end, it is worth recalling the *Cogito* selection discussed in the last section. In discussing Pascal and Augustine, I showed that Vincent Carraud convincingly argues that Pascal’s Cartesianism supplants his Augustinianism at times. This was illustrated by Pascal’s reaction to the *Cogito*: he “violently” defends Descartes, using the point to demonstrate a Cartesian principle of drawing careful distinctions. His reaction is severe, as expected from someone who identified with Descartes, rushing to his defense.

Even if Pascal’s Cartesianism traces the span of his bibliography, commentators appeal to alternative evidence to make the case for his anti-Cartesianism. Someone who does this is Richard Popkin. He claims that, “After his religious conversion Pascal objected vehemently to the philosophy of Descartes. He kept contrasting the God of the philosophers—namely, Descartes’ God—with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.”<sup>269</sup> One need not be a careful reader of Pascal to see the genesis of this interpretation. The source of these criticisms are typically correct as there are plenty of cases where Pascal disagrees with Descartes: to name two, there is disagreement on the vacuum and Pascal’s Jansenism leave him pessimistic concerning the reach of human knowledge in the postlapsarian state.<sup>270</sup> To the benefit of those who present an anti-Cartesian Pascal, the *Pensées* also contain fragments appearing to be explicit censures

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<sup>269</sup> Popkin (2003), 181.

<sup>270</sup> Descartes’ foundationalism focuses on apodictic certainty in matters of reason, through reason alone, but Pascal contrarily thinks our reason and will are both corrupted. (*Pensées*, S164/L131)

including, “Descartes. Useless and uncertain,”<sup>271</sup> and, “Write against those who delve too deeply into the sciences. Descartes”.<sup>272</sup> All of these things on a first impression rightly undermine a Cartesian Pascal.

As a partial response to these anti-Cartesian themes, Pascal’s censures are not as condemning of Pascal’s Cartesianism as they may first appear. Even in spite of their differences in natural philosophy, Pascal himself spent some time in the sciences, and his distinction of matters of reason and matters of tradition help frame what he may mean in these fragments. As seen by their shared method, Pascal agrees that the surest way towards rational certainty begins with clear and distinct ideas, providing an epistemic foundation, which is then expanded through reasoning and experimentation.<sup>273</sup> Their disagreements on the Torricelli experiments, for example, are never methodological nor do they concern the reliability of the data itself, but rather are on how to interpret evidence.<sup>274</sup> Even Pascal’s opinion that religious belief cannot be obtained through the understanding alone is not anti-Cartesian (that is, sacred teachings cannot be known through the intellect alone when unaided by divine illumination). Descartes also believes that theological beliefs are assented to by the will. The only difference is that while Pascal makes these points explicit, Descartes avoids the topic, deferring to ecclesiastical authority.<sup>275</sup>

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<sup>271</sup> *Pensées* S445/L887.

<sup>272</sup> *Pensées* S462/L553; Roger Ariew discusses these fragments in detail; See Ariew (2007).

<sup>273</sup> Pascal references the evil demon in a discussion concerning apodictic certainty and its implications, for instance: “What then shall man do in this state? Shall he doubt everything? Doubt whether he is awake, whether he is being pinched, whether he is being burned? Doubt whether he doubts? Doubt whether he exists? We cannot go that far, and I advance as fact that there never has been a fully effective skeptic.” (*Pensées* S164/L131)

<sup>274</sup> AT VI, 98; CSMK, 327 (Letter to Mersenne, 13 December 1647); See also AT V, 365; CSMK 329 (Letter to Carcavi, 11 June 1649) and Garber (1992).

<sup>275</sup> See Rule Three in Descartes’ *Regulae* (AT X, 366) and Pascal’s in *De L’esprit Géométrique* (*Œuvres* III, 360); It is specifically worth considering the similarity in the discussion of the intellect and will concerning theological knowledge here.

Still, Pascal finds Descartes' nearly exclusive focus on natural philosophy misplaced. Religion is a matter of higher importance than science because it deals with eternity. To these ends, though science and mathematics are correct, they are also useless. He writes in a letter to Fermat, "For to speak to you candidly of geometry, I find it to be the highest exercise of the mind, but at the same time I know it to be so useless, I make little difference between a man who is only a geometrician and a skilled artisan."<sup>276</sup> Though Descartes' approach to physics and mathematics may successfully lead to knowledge of temporal and finite things, they are comparatively useless until someone's eternal fate is secured and known:

...that is why I will not undertake here to prove by natural reasons either the existence of God, or the Trinity, or the immortality of the soul, or anything of that kind; not only *because I would not feel myself sufficiently capable of finding in nature arguments to convince hardened atheists, but also because such knowledge without Jesus Christ is useless and barren.* If a man were convinced that proportions between numbers were immaterial truths, eternal and dependent on a first truth to which they subsist, called God, I would not consider him as having made much progress towards his salvation.<sup>277</sup>

It is pragmatically irrational to focus on the temporal while still ignorant of the eternal. Pascal draws comparison between this and a convict awaiting capital punishment: aware of his sentence, it would be irrational for this convict to spend his remaining hours playing cards instead of pleading an appeal.<sup>278</sup> This is why Pascal writes concerning physics that, "We must say in general: 'This happens through shape and motion,' because it is true."<sup>279</sup> Yet, the more important eternal matters, shape and motion have nothing to do with 'the machine', training the will towards belief; to these ends, we must say that, "it is useless, uncertain, and laborious. And

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<sup>276</sup> Pascal, *Œuvres* IV, 923: The "Lettre à Fermat, le 10 août 1660": "**Car pour vous parler franchement de la géométrie, je la trouve** le plus haut exercice de l'esprit; mais en même temps je la connais pour si inutile, que je fais peu de différence entre un homme qui n'est que géomètre et un habile artisan" (Translation and emphasis mine). He also writes: "Mathematics keeps [the correct method or order that leads to certainty], but it is useless in its depths" (*Pensées*, S573/S694).

<sup>277</sup> *Pensées* S690/L449 (Italics mine).

<sup>278</sup> *Pensées* S195/L163; Lara Buchak makes a similar argument using Bayesian analysis. The point being that something can be uncertain epistemically but a person can still be pragmatically rational in accepting that belief with limited evidence given that odds are high enough. See Buchak (2012).

<sup>279</sup> *Pensées* S118/L84

if it were true, we do not believe all of philosophy to be worth an hour of labor.”<sup>280</sup> Pascal takes Descartes to be ‘useless and uncertain,’ but not without important qualifications. His work is only ‘useless’ in that it cannot answer existential questions about eternity and it is ‘uncertain’ in that no empirical demonstration can bridge the epistemic gap between our finitude and the infinity of eternity. That is, Descartes delves too deeply into natural philosophy at the expense of questions pertaining to eternity. Pascal’s most forceful criticism of Descartes is not a criticism towards the correctness of his philosophy, but the ends towards which they are directed: he applies his brilliance towards the wrong, less urgent end.<sup>281</sup>

Of course, as I said earlier, this is only a partial response to the objections of Pascal’s anti-Cartesianism. Pascal was no unadulterated disciple of Descartes, and it is clear that sometimes he rejects themes central in Descartes: his metaphysics are often more Augustinian than Cartesian, he favors the existence of a vacuum over the plenum, and they disagree on the infinite, just as a few examples.<sup>282</sup> Nonetheless, it does not detract from an abundance of similarities in their thought, change his reception as a Cartesian by his contemporaries, or change his self-identification as Cartesian. Of course the conditions that identify anyone as Cartesian (or Aristotelian, Stoic, et cetera) are fuzzy; however, Pascal’s reception and identification indicate that he met whatever nebulous qualities contribute to this family resemblance. Pascal is a Cartesian, though not purely and not always.

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<sup>280</sup> *Pensées* S118/L84

<sup>281</sup> Ariew (2007).

<sup>282</sup> As to metaphysics, Pascal rejects the ability for knowledge of God outside of revelation. I consider this as a matter of his metaphysics and not strictly epistemology because the origins of Pascal’s tension with Cartesian epistemology originate with his ontology of *theosis*, which I discuss later in this chapter. Concerning the infinite, Descartes makes an epistemic distinction that matter is indefinitely divisible and is only willing to attribute actual infinity to God, and that the infinite can be known in part though not in its entirety. Pascal allows for the existence of an actual double infinity but denies that we can know its nature. See Descartes’ Letter to Mersenne, 15 April 1630. (AT I, 146-147) and *Pensées* S102/L68, S141/L109, S167/L135. Also, Ariew (1987); Garber (1992), 120-2, 270-2; and Collette (2016). For more on defining Cartesianism, see Ariew (2014), Collette (2014), and Schmaltz (2002).

### II.c. Pascal and Montaigne

While my readings of Pascal's Augustinianism and Cartesianism deviate from much of the traditional literature, there is broad consensus among scholars of the importance of Montaigne's influence on Pascal.<sup>283</sup> Montaigne's presence is constant in Pascal's writing. His name appears twenty times in the *Pensées* and Pascal consistently alludes to Montaigne's *Essays* in the form of allusion, gloss, and paraphrase. In the *Entretien avec M. de Sacy sur Épictète et Montaigne*, Pascal speaks of Montaigne, praises that:

I acknowledge...that I cannot, without joy, see in this author proud reason wounded so invincibly by its own weapons, and this so bloody revolt of man against man, which throws him down into bestiality away from God's company, to which he has raised himself by the maxims (of his feeble reason).<sup>284</sup>

In same text, Pascal credits Montaigne as one of the two most significant influences on his own thought.<sup>285</sup> Although there is dispute amongst scholars concerning the exact role that Montaigne plays in Pascal's thought, the disagreement concerns the degree to which he embraces Montaignian skepticism, not whether he does.<sup>286</sup>

Of the many Montaignian threads in Pascal, a reoccurring theme in Montaigne's *Apology for Raymond Sebond* is that humans are no greater than other creatures; traditionally, it was reason that set humans apart from other animate beings, but Montaigne calls this into question both by elevating the rational abilities of other beasts while also questioning human rationality. Towards the first, Montaigne offers pages of travel accounts, observations, and stories from

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<sup>283</sup> Mesnard (1969), Carraud (2007), 450; Hunter (2013), etc.

<sup>284</sup> "Je vous avoue pourtant, Monsieur, que je ne puis voir sans joie dans cet auteur la superbe raison si invinciblement froissée par ses propres armes, et cette révolte si sanglante de l'homme contre l'homme, qui, de la société avec Dieu, où il s'élevait par les maxims des stoïques, le précipite dans la nature des bêtes par celles des pyrrhoniens." (Pascal [1994], 117-118; I use Popkin's 1987 translation)

<sup>285</sup> Jean Mesnard argues compellingly that this document is trustworthy. It is likely that the dialogue itself was constructed, but there is good reason to believe the content itself is reliable and represents Pascal's position at the time. (See Pascal [1994], "Introduction.")

<sup>286</sup> For a more thorough account of this discussion, see Hunter (2013), 13-15.

antiquity depicting animals acting rationally, living in community, and performing other intellectually advanced behaviors that are associated with human rationality in order to undermine the belief that humans are different from and greater than the beasts.<sup>287</sup> He often uses this first point to make his second that humans are weaker than they typically believe, as demonstrated in this travel account:

If you let loose even some of our flies, they will have both the power and the courage to disperse the horde. In recent memory, when the Portuguese were besieging the city of Tamly in the territory of Xiatime, the inhabitants of that place brought to the wall a great quantity of hives, in which they were rich. And with fire they drove the bees so fiercely at their enemies, that they were put to rout, since they could not support their attacks and their stings.<sup>288</sup>

Montaigne suggests that humans are so weak that even a mighty army can be defeated by the smallest of creatures, tiny insects. He reinforces human weakness by repeating typical Pyrrhonian arguments, such as the inability of our senses to produce reliable observations, and so forth.<sup>289</sup>

In so far as Pascal is emulating the skeptical mode, he mimics Montaigne nearly to the point of plagiarizing. “The power of flies,” Pascal writes, “they win battles, hinder the activity of our souls, eat our bodies.”<sup>290</sup> Though he modifies the turn of the phrase from bees, he maintains that even the smallest of insects can incapacitate a person. This incapacitation can occur physically (as in Montaigne’s travel account of a defeated army or insects feasting upon a corpse) or intellectually (as even something as small as a buzzing fly can distract someone from focusing).<sup>291</sup>

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<sup>287</sup> For a nice concise summary of these points, see Schneewind (2005), 212-215.

<sup>288</sup> *Essays* II, chap. 12; *Apology*, 39. See 10n24 of Ariew’s translation.

<sup>289</sup> Montaigne (2003), 150-160.

<sup>290</sup> *Pensées* S56/L22; See 10n24 of Ariew’s translation.

<sup>291</sup> See also *Pensées* S81/L48.



Another point where Pascal follows Montaigne is on the power of the imagination and its role in forming beliefs, even when there is knowledge to the contrary. “Put the world’s greatest philosopher on a plank hanging over a precipice,” he writes, “but wider than it needs to be. Although his reason will convince him of his safety, his imagination will prevail. Many could not bear the thought of it without getting pale and sweating.”<sup>292</sup> When standing upon the plank, reason is useless to make the philosopher believe that he is safe, even when he knows the board is strong enough to support his weight. Montaigne gives almost the same example in the *Apology*:

Put a philosopher in a cage of small bars of thin iron suspended at the top of the towers of Notre Dame de Paris, he will see for obvious reasons that it is impossible for him to fall, and yet...he will not be able to keep the vision of that height from frightening and astonishing him. Set a plank between those two towers, of a size such as is needed for us to walk on it: there is no philosophical wisdom to such firmness as to give us the courage to walk on it as we would do if it was on the ground.<sup>293</sup>

Similar arguments from Montaigne’s *Apology* are repeated through the *Pensées*.<sup>294</sup>

Though these influences are overt, many commentators overemphasize the degree of Montaigne’s influence and as a result categorize Pascal as a skeptic. Richard Popkin offers the most popularized Anglophone account of this opinion. According to Popkin, Pascal hopes that doubt will drive the reader to despair, and that despair will drive the reader to seek divine intervention to find his prelapsarian condition: “So Pascal, in most ingenious ways, tried to make the reader first become a sceptic, then to realize his actual state of affairs and to cry out for help.”<sup>295</sup> For Popkin, Pascal is a Christian Pyrrhonist, a skeptic.

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<sup>292</sup> *Pensées* S78/L44. See 13n29of Ariew’s translation

<sup>293</sup> *Essays* II, chap. 12; *Apology*, 155.

<sup>294</sup> See *Pensées*, S94/L60 and *Apology*, 140. For additional references see *Pensées* S123/L89, S134/L101, S168/L136, S111/L76, *et cetera*.

<sup>295</sup> Popkin (2003), 183.

I do believe Popkin is correct in his premises – Pascal teaches that human cognition is corrupted, and subsequently we are unable to know truth or the good through reason. That is, Pascal pushes his reader towards skepticism to emphasize human depravity and its subsequent despair. Conditionally for Pascal, ignorance is the human state, so the Pyrrhonian description is correct: it is a ‘new nature’ since the old, true nature is lost.<sup>296</sup> But while early modern scholarship is indebted to Popkin for his groundbreaking contributions in the history of philosophy, I reject his conclusion here. He is right that Pascal intends his reader to overcome skepticism through divine intervention, but it is this very point that calls into question Pascal’s true skepticism. The goal of the skeptics, particularly in the Pyrrhonian tradition, was to find *ataraxia*. Sextus Empiricus writes:

Our assertion up to now is that the Sceptic’s end, where matters of opinion are concerned, is mental tranquility; in the realm of things unavoidable, moderation of feeling is the end. His initial purpose in philosophizing was to pronounce judgment on appearances. He wished to find out which are true and which false, so as to attain mental tranquility. In doing so, he met with contradicting alternatives of equal force. Since he could not decide between them, he withheld judgment. Upon his suspension of judgment there followed, by chance, mental tranquility in matters of opinion.<sup>297</sup>

When someone is not a skeptic, Sextus believes that person suffers because false belief such as that s/he lacks good things and that the things following him or her are bad. When that person acquires something s/he believes is good, s/he is filled with an unreasonable joy in acquiring it while also anguishing in fear of losing it. The skeptic, however, “leaves undetermined the question what things are good and bad by nature. He does not exert himself to avoid anything or to seek after anything, and hence he is in a tranquil state.”<sup>298</sup> Montaigne’s account is Christianized and more eclectic, with some tones of Epicureanism and Stoicism, but ignorance remains the means towards a better life:

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<sup>296</sup> *Pensées*, S16/L397

<sup>297</sup> Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*: I, XII.

<sup>298</sup> Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*: I, XII.

We need hardly more duties, rules, and laws for living in our community than the cranes and ants in theirs. And despite this, we see that they conduct themselves in a very orderly way without learning. If man were wise, he would fix the true price of each thing according to its greatest utility and fitness for his life.

Whoever rates us by our actions and behavior will find a much greater number of excellent people among the ignorant than among the learned: I say in every sort of virtue. The old Rome seems to me to have supported men of greater worth, both for peace and for war, than that learned Rome that ruined itself. Even if the rest were exactly equal, at least integrity and innocence would remain on the side of the old, for it dwells particularly well with simplicity.<sup>299</sup>

Quite contrary to this, Pascal invokes skepticism in order to lead his reader to anxiety and despair, as Popkin notes; however, this is antithetical to the Pyrrhonian aim. Montaigne is a skeptic, for example, in that he believes placing all claims into skeptical equilibrium will lead his reader to *ataraxia*: peace is not found in knowledge of the good, but in following custom and knowing oneself.<sup>300</sup> Popkin's conclusion that Pascal is a skeptic does not follow. Doubt is something Pascal believes his reader should rise above to find the Good, a sharp contrast with the skeptical program.<sup>301</sup> Against the Pyrrhonians, resignation to doubt does not bring peace—"Nothing brings tranquility but the sincere search for the truth," Pascal concludes.<sup>302</sup>

These differences between Montaigne and Pascal are made sharper when discussing another important deviation, the ability to have probable knowledge. Apart from revelation, Montaigne rejects the possibility of human knowledge, repeating many of Sextus Empiricus' arguments from his *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*:

The Pyrrhonians use their arguments and reason only to destroy the apparent facts of experience, and it is remarkable how far the suppleness of our reason has followed their plan of opposing the evidence of facts: for they confirm that we cannot move, that we

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<sup>299</sup> Montaigne (2003), 49.

<sup>300</sup> Montaigne (2003), 48-58.

<sup>301</sup> José R. Maia Neto wants to read Pascal's skepticism as Charronian and less Montaignian. Although Maia Neto highlights interesting correlation between Charron and Pascal, it seems that most of what he discusses can be interpreted just as easily with Montaigne, Augustine, and Descartes; adding Charron seems to be an unnecessary complication, especially since Montaigne and Descartes are prominent in Pascal while Charron is barely mentioned. This discussion is a diversion from my thesis, however, and will need to be a focus for future writing. (Maia Neto [2014], 127-142)

<sup>302</sup> *Pensées* S496/L599

cannot speak, that there is nothing heavy or hot, with the same kind of forceful arguments by which we confirm more probable facts.<sup>303</sup>

But Pascal believes that, though reason fails to move a person's volition towards belief, it can decide that one belief has more probability of truth than another, rejecting Pyrrhonian equilibrium. This difference is also fundamental precondition for Pascal's Wager—one can say *I believe this is likely true, and I wish it were*. In an earlier fragment of the *Pensées*, Pascal claims, "For we should work for what is uncertain, according to the rule of probability that was demonstrated."<sup>304</sup> He also says Augustine was right that we often work for what is uncertain—people wage wars we have no certainty of winning and go to sea when they do not know what they will find or encounter—but is wrong to neglect the rule of probability that proves that we should.<sup>305</sup>

With these differences, the case for Pascal's skepticism becomes much weaker. Popkin's conclusion does not follow from his premises. He is right that Pascal embraces Montaigne's skepticism, but it is a mistake to call him a skeptic because of this. Pascal's skepticism is methodological. It is true that Montaigne's influence on Pascal is pervasive. Pascal imitates Montaigne's skepticism in describing the postlapsarian condition, specifically the limits of human reason and the lowliness of mankind. However, this skepticism is methodological. As a result, Pascal is influenced by Montaigne, but in a way similar to Descartes. He is not a skeptic.

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<sup>303</sup> Montaigne (2003), 133.

<sup>304</sup> *Pensées*, S478/L575. Also, "Let us see whether we seek God sincerely, by comparing the things we care about. It is probable that this food will not poison me. It is probable that I shall not lose my suit by not prosecuting it." (S600/L722) Pascal thought a great deal about probability and corresponded with Fermat about it. (Pascal, *Œuvres* IV, 923)

<sup>305</sup> *Pensées*, S478/L575; also, S600/L722.

## II.d. Pascal and Epictetus

Having discussed the three authors who are typically discussed in relation to Pascal, I now turn to a source that I believe is no less significant but is altogether neglected in present-day Anglophone literature, Epictetus. For those scholars who spend their entire research project in the *Pensées*, this oversight is understandable. After all, Epictetus is only mentioned by name six times in the *Pensées*, thirteen times if general references to the Stoics are included. But by comparison, Augustine's name only appears fifteen times in the text. So if scholars emphasize the influence of Augustine so strongly, the role of Epictetus deserves at least some investigation. This prevalence should be no surprise given that in the *Entretien avec M. de Sacy sur Épictète et Montaigne*, Pascal describes Epictetus as the other philosopher so influential upon his thought.<sup>306</sup>

Pascal believes that Epictetus understood the duties required of man better than any other philosopher. Like Epictetus, Pascal argues that God is the principal object and persons should submit to him cheerfully. Epictetus believed that this disposition and acceptance of divine will halts complaints and murmurs: if my house is foreclosed, I did not lose it; if my child dies, I did not lose her. Instead, I restored these things to God, to the universe, from which they came.<sup>307</sup> Pascal agrees with Epictetus, then, that people should not worry who took these things away from us or why—it should only matter that who lent it to us has asked for it back. Human duty extends beyond what is taken into what we are currently given. Regardless of the role in which someone finds himself—a king or beggar—a person should perform that role like an actor giving his best performance. Pascal offers other Stoic themes found in Epictetus: good resolutions should be concealed and accomplished in secret, so as not to be indulging in the vanity of approval from other people, for example. Pascal believes the sum of our duty, and the part of his

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<sup>306</sup> The other is Montaigne, as I mention above.

<sup>307</sup> *Handbook* §3, §26.

philosophy that Epictetus gets correct, is that the whole study of man is to perceive the will of God and pursue it.

Like his treatment of Augustine, Descartes, and Montaigne, Pascal's appraisal of Epictetus is not without criticism. Pascal criticizes the Stoics for teaching that humans are able to accomplish all of these duties through self-effort. A person's cognitive and volitional powers are free, the Stoic believes, and through them, it is possible to obtain tranquility or happiness on one's own. Pascal writes:

Stoics. They conclude that we can always do what we can sometimes do, and that, since the desire for glory makes those whom it possess do a particular thing well, others can also do it well. [...] Epictetus concludes that, since there are constant Christians, every man can easily be so.<sup>308</sup>

Not only does Pascal believe Epictetus' conclusion here is false, in that our intellect and will are corrupted and incapable of obtaining these goals, but also the pride that comes from accepting this conclusion leads to other errors of theology and right living. Pascal uses suicide as an example of how contradictory the Stoic exhortation towards contentment becomes, "There is a contradiction," Pascal criticizes, "because in the end they advise suicide. Oh! What a happy life, of which we rid ourselves like the plague!"<sup>309</sup> Among Pascal's other concerns, he attacks Stoic monism. The mind is easily conflated into a part of divine substance in Stoic cosmology, which is different from divine participation—in the former, the transcendent divinity is collapsed into creation, while in the latter, there is a clear distinction maintained between creator and creature.

Although secondary literature has neglected Epictetus in Pascal, he himself draws a great deal of attention to this Stoic and the Stoic intellectual tradition. Though Pascal criticizes Epictetus at points, he is no more critical of him than he is of Descartes, Montaigne, or even

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<sup>308</sup> *Pensées*, S179/L146. Pascal cites Epictetus' *Discourses* 4.7. Seneca holds a similar opinion in the letter *On the God Within U* (Seneca [1917], 273)

<sup>309</sup> *Pensées*, S180/L147. References condoning suicide as a worthy option for exiting life is found in various Stoics including Epictetus' *Discourses* 4.10.27 and Seneca's *De Providentia*.

Augustine at times. The autonomy of Pascal's thought is complex and a synthesis of multiple traditions that do not always seem like they should go together. Pascal makes his debt to Epictetus clear, nonetheless, and a goal in the next section is to begin to sort through what the implications of these influences on his thought are.

I do not believe that I have exhaustively treated all that can, or should, be said about Pascal's complex reception of Descartes, Augustine, Montaigne, and the Stoics, as well as how they influence his thought. A sufficient sketch has been made, however, in order to move on towards a new vision of Pascal's ethics that is framed within these influences.

### **III. Pascal on Morality and The Good Life**

In the last section, I outlined the four major influences upon Pascal's thought. Now I will show how Pascal draws themes from these different influences to arrive at an ethical theory that both is indebted a great deal to others while also uniquely his own. Pascal establishes a binary ethics modeled after Augustine, which is then subdivided into accounts shaped by Epictetus, Montaigne, and possibly Descartes.<sup>310</sup>

It is helpful to begin framing Pascal's ethics within his Augustinianism. As discussed earlier, Pascal outlines two cities, the city of God and the city of man. In the Fourteenth Provincial Letter (quoted earlier), he appeals to the Jesuits, urging them to decide whether they are representatives of Christ or not, for their casuistry is incongruent with their claims to love God. That letter is also a helpful summary, not only in understanding this binary structure in

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<sup>310</sup> I have not provided extensive secondary literature on these points, largely because they have not been expressed by many; this is especially true of the Stoic themes in his work. Still, the curious reader may find more said on these in general in Mesnard (1969), Mesnard's introduction to Pascal (1994), or Hunter (2013). For another interpretation, see Chevalier (1922). There is work by Rescher (1985) and Jordan (2006), but it is narrowly focused on the Wager.

general, but how it applies to his ethical framework in particular: two groups of people, divided according to the objects of their love.

As a philosopher of science and religion, Pascal is aware of the degree to which perspective can shape a person's epistemic framework.<sup>311</sup> Like all knowledge, ethics or the art of living-well, requires the right perspective:

It is the same with pictures seen from too far or too near. And there is only one indivisible point, which is the right place. The others are too near, too far, too high, or too low. Perspective determines that point in the art of painting. But in truth and in morality who will determine it?<sup>312</sup>

But while a successful artist is one who knows the proper perspective in which to capture a picture, which conditions satisfy the correct perspective on truth and right living are not immediately clear.

Since Pascal believes all truth—including knowledge of the Good—can be understood when analyzed from the correct perspective, he believes the perspective in which moral good can be understood is found in understanding human nature.<sup>313</sup> Though humans now lack proper perspective, this has not always been true: in a prelapsarian state, humans loved and knew God, and subsequently people knew their true nature. Like many moralists, Pascal believes that thinking well is the principle of morality, virtue, and the true good. Though Pascal's opinion of thinking well resembles divine illumination—God is the light that allows a subject's intellectual gaze to perceive intellectual objects—he intends something more robust. The Good Life and happiness consist not only in the intellect but also in the will. Before the fall, humans were joined with God ontologically. *Theosis* is a necessary precondition for knowledge and thus must

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<sup>311</sup> In the Torricelli experiment on the vacuum, for example, he and Descartes agreed on the outcome of the experiment, but disagreed as to how to interpret the data. In a sense, it is a lesson in theory ladenness—so long as Descartes believed in subtle matter, and Pascal rejected it, the data would 'prove' either. See Garber (1992).

<sup>312</sup> *Pensées*, S55/L21.

<sup>313</sup> *Pensées*, S12/L393; S232/L200



include the will: true human nature is one that loves and submits to God in such a way that it joins the divine, not merely in a metaphorical sense, but as a foot is actually part of a physical body that follows the will of the head:

To be a member [of Christ's body] is to have life, existence, and motion only for the body and through the spirit of the body. It cannot by its nature love another thing except for itself and to subject it to itself, because each thing loves itself more than anything else. But, in loving the body, it loves itself, because it only exists in it, through it, and for it. He who adheres to God is one spirit.<sup>314</sup>

Therefore, thinking well (and as a result living well) has as a precondition in the act of the will—submitting oneself to the divine will allows for divine illumination. In this act of the will, a person finds her true nature and therefore gains the correct perspective for thinking well.<sup>315</sup>

With a correct perspective, humans know the Supreme Good, which Pascal identifies differently.<sup>316</sup> At times he identifies it with God, stating that God alone is the Supreme Good.<sup>317</sup> Given this claim, it may seem odd that he also identifies it as peace, which he uses interchangeably with happiness. Happiness and Peace are also the Supreme Good, a *eudaimonia* that all people seek:

All men seek to be happy. This is without exception, whatever different means they use. They all strive towards this end. What makes some go to war, and others avoid it, is the same desire in both, accompanied by different perspectives.<sup>318</sup>

Even those who go to war do so for this purpose, to achieve peace on their terms.<sup>319</sup> Note the similarity to Augustine. In *De Civitate De*, Augustine claims that peace is, “the end of our good... For peace is a good so great, that even in this earthly and mortal life there is no word we hear with such pleasure, nothing we desire with such zest, or find to be more thoroughly

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<sup>314</sup> *Pensées* S404/L372. Pascal may have also noticed similar metaphors in the Stoics as well. In *De Clementia*, for instance, Seneca compares the body to a city and the king is the soul of the state, the state the king's body. (Seneca [1927], 367)

<sup>315</sup> There is similarity to Descartes' atheist geometer from the Fifth Meditation. (AT 7, 71)

<sup>316</sup> Mesnard (1976), 226

<sup>317</sup> *Pensées* S116/L81

<sup>318</sup> *Pensées* S181/L148

<sup>319</sup> *Pensées* S116/L81

gratifying.”<sup>320</sup> Pascal, then, identifies three different goods as the Supreme Good. But rather than claiming there are multiple highest goods, he believes that God is the only true good. But in knowing God, the elect also experience eternal peace and happiness by participating in the divine will, so in a sense these are also the Supreme Good. Though they are conceptually distinct, none can be understood without the others.<sup>321</sup>

Pascal believes that humans no longer have this perspective, though. Whatever peace and happiness humans had were lost: “It is quite certain that there is no good without knowledge of God, that we are happy to the extent we get closer to him, and that ultimate happiness is to know him with certainty; that to the extent we get farther from him, the more wretched we are.”<sup>322</sup> According to the traditional Christian narrative, humanity is fallen. As a result, Pascal believes the intellect and will are both corrupted: “[mankind] has obviously gone astray and fallen from his true place, lacking the power to find it again. He looks for it everywhere anxiously and unsuccessfully, in impenetrable darkness.”<sup>323</sup> Separation from God, given Pascal’s ontology of *theosis*, is a literal loss—an ontological dismemberment and shift in human nature. True human nature participates in God, and in losing divine participation the accompanying cognitive and volitional perspectives are also lost.<sup>324</sup>

One consequence of a corrupt intellect is losing moral knowledge, resulting in moral skepticism. This is a descriptive state for Pascal, as it merely describes the present human condition without prescribing how it ought to be. He finds robust resources for describing this state, the city of man, in Montaigne’s *Apology for Raymond Sebond*. After offering many traditional Pyrrhonian arguments, Montaigne concludes in his work that religious and moral

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<sup>320</sup> *De Civitate Dei* XIX, 11; translation from Bettenson’s translation, Augustine (2003), 866.

<sup>321</sup> *Pensées* S181/L148

<sup>322</sup> *Pensées* S661/L821

<sup>323</sup> *Pensées* S19/L400

<sup>324</sup> *Pensées* S120/L86

knowledge cannot be obtained, at least through natural means.<sup>325</sup> Since he lacks knowledge, reasoning cannot bring man to happiness or lead him to the good. These things can be gained only through authority and custom, not reason. Morals are arbitrary and relative to one's culture and customs: convention instructs right living.<sup>326</sup>

Pascal agrees—having lost true human nature, and subsequently moral knowledge, a new second nature is created through power and custom.<sup>327</sup> This also means that tyranny becomes the new 'justice':

The only universal rules are the laws of the country in ordinary things and of the majority in others. ... Since we are unable to make might obey justice, we have made it just to obey might. Unable to strengthen justice, we have justified might, so that justice and might should unite and there be peace, which is the supreme good.<sup>328</sup>

Peace, the Supreme Good, occurs when power and justice exist in harmony with one another, and since peace cannot be obtained through those in power acting justly, tyranny enforces its own ideals, making a false peace under a new 'justice.' While tyranny and justice should be antithetical, power is the only way to obtain peace without true justice.

This state has a drastic effect on the life of man. He realizes his own ignorance, and how that impedes his desire to be happy; as a result, he will die alone and unhappy.<sup>329</sup> If someone is left to his own thoughts he is miserable. Finding this way of living unbearable, instead of contemplating the source of his unhappiness, he instead seeks diversion and distraction to avoid thinking at all. When not busying himself with games, going to the theater, hunting, and so forth—for it is not the win or the hare people seek, but activity itself—he also distracts his mind

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<sup>325</sup> Montaigne (2003), 7. He also writes here that, "We are Christians in the same way that we are Perigordians or Germans." (*Ibid*)

<sup>326</sup> Montaigne (2003), 68-9

<sup>327</sup> *Pensées* S159/L126; See also *Pensées* S181/L148

<sup>328</sup> *Pensées* S116/L81

<sup>329</sup> *Pensées* S170/L138

by focusing it in places other than the present.<sup>330</sup> When not consumed by distracting activity, people deflect their thought from the present where they feel their nothingness; they instead contemplate the future and wish for the past, but never live in the unbearable moment. Pascal writes:

Examine your thoughts, and you will find them wholly occupied with the past or the future. We almost never think of the present, and if we do so, it is only to shed light on our plans for the future. The present is never our end. The past and the present are our means; only the future is our end. So we never live, but hope to live, and, as we are always planning to be happy, it is inevitable we should never be so.<sup>331</sup>

Although diversion is a solution to mitigate despair, ironically it becomes the greatest source of our misery: by avoiding the anguish of the moment, a person no longer searches for truth. This momentarily eases the misery, but its price is satiating that person's dreadful march to death in ignorance—"diversion amuses us and guides us imperceptibly to death."<sup>332</sup> A person's passions are also of terrible disservice here: they are both antithetical to the Supreme Good, training the will to love things above God, and their nature of immediacy further distracts someone from happiness. Pleasures that flow from passions are false pleasures, another diversion and substitute for happiness that brings a person into further wretchedness.<sup>333</sup>

The remedy for this misery in the city of man is found in knowing and loving God. If someone is able to enter into union with God, s/he is able to have knowledge and happiness once again—s/he enters into the city of God. However, as a people with a dysfunctional cognition and volition, none can know God through self-effort and mere reason. In the case of *a priori* proofs, such as the ontological argument, Pascal complains that:

The metaphysical proofs of God are so remote from men's reasoning and so complicated that they make little impression. And when they are of service to some, it is only for the

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<sup>330</sup> *Pensées* S168/L136

<sup>331</sup> *Pensées* S80/L47; See also *Pensées* S70/L36

<sup>332</sup> *Pensées* S33/L414

<sup>333</sup> *Pensées* S107/L73

instant during which they see this demonstration. But an hour later they fear they have been mistaken.<sup>334</sup>

Human reason is weak and an individual's concentration is easily broken. It does not take a loud cannon to distract someone from deep contemplation—all it takes is a small object's creaking or a fly's buzzing to render someone incapable of sound reflection.<sup>335</sup> Even when a person properly follows such an argument, its conclusions lacks any conviction, and s/he quickly forgets the soundness of the reasoning, and begins doubting it or is easily swayed to believe contradictory claims.

Pascal also has little confidence in the ability of *a posteriori* arguments to demonstrate truth with any conviction. When considering cosmological or teleological arguments, for instance, he is clear that nature cannot prove God exists.<sup>336</sup> The book of nature—observing the sky and birds, and so forth—offers no conclusions beyond what the onlooker already believes; what it tells the observer depends entirely on the epistemic perspective in which s/he is already operating. Only those who already believe that God exists find these arguments compelling proofs for God's existence.<sup>337</sup>

Given these limits to human understanding, Pascal believes a different type of 'proof' is needed. Instead of more traditional arguments, there are other kinds of proofs that function to show religion is reasonable and that it understands man: arguments from morality (which are focused on man's unhappiness and desire to be happy), miracles, prophecies, and figures (that is, ancient types in Hebrew literature such as Moses prefiguring Christ).<sup>338</sup> Pascal believes these 'proofs' show that religion is not irrational and that is worthy of respect because it explains the

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<sup>334</sup> *Pensées* S222/L190

<sup>335</sup> *Pensées* S81/L48

<sup>336</sup> *Pensées* S38/L3

<sup>337</sup> *Pensées* S38/L3

<sup>338</sup> *Pensées* S21/L402

human condition with better clarity than competing narratives and because its narrative has prevailed over enmity and difficult circumstances for millennia.<sup>339</sup> He also offers up proto-existential arguments—theology best explains the reason for existence at all, as well as existence at a particular time and place.<sup>340</sup>

However, even if someone is able to overcome his or her intellectual limits with these different proofs, s/he is no closer to knowing God. Knowing God requires loving him, and love is volitional, not intellectual. The strongest proofs are still only able to move the intellect, not the will. Even if someone is able to overcome his cognitive barriers—which is unlikely—he faces further difficulty, since his will is also corrupt.

Pascal's answer to this is the machine, commonly known as Pascal's Wager. As I showed earlier in this chapter, unlike Montaigne, Pascal believes someone who seeks God can at least know that his religion has a higher probability of being true than not being true. This is a fundamental necessity for the Wager—that one can say *I believe this is likely true, and I wish it were*. In an earlier fragment of the *Pensées*, he writes, “For we should work for what is uncertain, according to the rule of probability that was demonstrated.”<sup>341</sup> If knowing God is foremost volitional, then someone who finds religion attractive and believes it is likely true should focus on the disposition of her will. In this sense, some contemporary philosophers of religion rightly refer to Pascal's Wager as a theology of hope.<sup>342</sup> By immersing oneself in religion, and participating in religious rites, exercises, and community—what Daniel Garber calls the *Pascalian Regimen*—that person becomes more disposed towards embracing religious

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<sup>339</sup> *Pensées* S46/L12

<sup>340</sup> *Pensées* S102/L68

<sup>341</sup> *Pensées*, S478/L575; Also, S600/L722: “Let us see whether we seek God sincerely, by comparing the things we care about. It is probable that this food will not poison me. It is probable that I shall not lose my suit by not prosecuting it.”

<sup>342</sup> Resher (1985), 104-18 and Jeff Jordan (2006), 166-196. I do find other aspects of their evaluations problematic, but I do appreciate the sentiment of hope that is emphasized here in understanding this part of Pascal's thought.

faith.<sup>343</sup> Still, the hopeful believer has no guarantee of faith however much the Pascalian Regimen may dispose his will towards belief. As a Jansenist, Pascal believes that faith, and subsequently loving and knowing God, are beyond the postlapsarian human's own ability. God is hidden and remains hidden to those whom he has not dispensed effective grace.

This, of course, is disconcerting for Pascal's interlocutor in the *Discourse on the Machine*. It is true that happiness and knowledge of the good are found in God; it also the case that the interlocutor does not have this at the moment. S/he is in the city of man but desires to be in the city of God. In Pascal's ideal case, if the interlocutor undergoes the Pascalian Regimen, then God bestows effective grace upon him or her. But for those who do not receive this effective grace, Pascal does not want to just abandon them to a life of concupiscence. Although effective grace is a divine gift, practically speaking, someone who attends to religious rites, practices, and community is more disposed to receive grace than someone who spends his free time indulging in a vicious life of sensual pleasures and excesses: the sincere church-goer is more likely to find God than someone who is getting drunk in a casino with a prostitute. Nonetheless, if divine favor is a necessary condition for faith and it cannot be gained through self-effort, what is the use trying? ““But this is what I am afraid of,” his interlocutor states.<sup>344</sup>

As a reassurance, Pascal offers an alternative morality: Neostoicism.<sup>345</sup> The resident in the city of man may never have happiness, but so long as s/he is living a life in ignorance of the good, s/he can focus her efforts on making her life less miserable. The Pascalian Regimen not only inclines the will to be more predisposed towards faith, but it also trains one in some general Stoic exercises, allowing for a more content life than the alternative. As I showed earlier, Pascal

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<sup>343</sup> Garber (2009), 14.

<sup>344</sup> *Pensées* S680/L418

<sup>345</sup> Many of the Neostoics have eclectic tendencies, synthesizing parts of Stoicism with other systems of belief—Justus Lipsius and Guillaume du Vair with their Christian faith, and in a more qualified sense, Montaigne with his skepticism. I discuss this more in other places of the dissertation, including the introduction.

believes that the passions are an obstacle to achieving the Good Life as they keep a person attached to his concupiscence instead of seeking the source of potential happiness. However, by reducing one's passions it is also the case that, "You will be faithful, honest, humble, grateful, generous, a sincere, true friend. Certainly you will not be taken by unhealthy pleasures..."<sup>346</sup> This is different from *ataraxia*, the tranquility of the skeptics. Although Pyrrhonism has a moral force as I discussed concerning Montaigne, Pascal's doubt is anti-skepticism in the end, for it seeks to distress the doubter, not console him. According to Pascal:

to doubt is then to be unhappy, but there is an indispensable duty to doubt. And thus anyone who doubts and does not seek is at once unhappy and wrong. If, in addition, he is cheerful and presumptuous, I can find no words to describe so extravagant a creature.<sup>347</sup>

The primary goal of the doubt is to cause discomfort and move one towards finding true peace in the city of God.<sup>348</sup>

However, by seeking, the hopeful believer is able to find truth even in the city of man; though s/he cannot find truth with certainty, s/he can find it with some probability. As the Stoics taught, s/he will realize that the divine will is beyond his control. Since this is the case, s/he cannot initiate her love of God. Instead, s/he can focus on that which is within her control—know thyself and reduce one's passions:

...the righteous man takes nothing for himself from the world or its applause, but only for his passions, which he uses as a master, saying to one, *Go* and [to another] *Come*. *Your desire shall lie below you*. The passions thus subdued become virtues... we must use them as slaves, leaving them their nourishment, but prevent the soul from taking any. For when the passions are masters, they become vices, and then they give their food to the soul, and the soul nourishes itself upon it and is poisoned.<sup>349</sup>

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<sup>346</sup> *Pensées* S680/L418

<sup>347</sup> *Pensées* S661/L821

<sup>348</sup> I discuss this in more detail above in the section on Montaigne. It is true that Pyrrhonian skepticism has a moral force—by refraining from judgment, one is able to find peace in realizing it is a mistake to become anxious over not knowing that which one cannot know, or that one may be wrong about that which there is no compelling proof for or against. Pascal's project is different: like the Stoics, it requires knowing truth to find this tranquility.

<sup>349</sup> *Pensées* S500/L603



Pascal is synthesizing his Augustinianism with Stoicism. In addition to what seems to be a clear ‘two cities’ distinction in his morality, Pascal consistently draws from and admires the Stoic (and Neostoic) literature, particularly in Montaigne and Epictetus. In ways, Pascal models Montaigne’s solution: when ignorant of the good, the wise man knows himself, learning to accept that which he cannot control and in turn follows customs and authority.<sup>350</sup> The difference is of course that Pascal believes knowing oneself and subduing one’s passions cannot lead to tranquility, though they are a better life than a life of diversion and concupiscence. As I outlined in the previous section of this chapter, Pascal also attributes a great intellectual debt to Epictetus in the development of his own philosophy. I showed that Pascal’s criticism with Epictetus is not that he was incorrect, but that he taught human duties can be fulfilled through a person’s own volition.<sup>351</sup> Pascal’s familiarity with Stoicism allows him to comfortably borrow from it, synthesizing it with his own system similar to his appropriation of skepticism. The Stoic themes in Epictetus again resonate with Pascal’s hopeful believer: like Epictetus, Pascal believes that God is the principle object and that people should gladly submit to the divine will. Also, it is God who dispenses all things, and therefore both fortune and misfortune should be accepted as good. And so forth.

In concluding, I want to acknowledge that there are two cases where Pascal’s moral philosophy as outlined in this chapter may be accounted for with a different explanation. The first is that it is possible given Pascal’s Cartesianism that he draws this Neostoicism from Descartes’ *morale par provision* in the *Discourse on Method* instead of directly from Epictetus or Montaigne. This is not an implausible reading as Pascal had closely read the *Discourse* as I argued in the first half of this chapter. However, given the variety of Stoic and Neostoic

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<sup>350</sup> I argued in my first chapter that some interpretations of Montaigne classify him as a Stoic.

<sup>351</sup> *Entretien avec M. de Saci*. Pascal (1994), 96-98. See also *Pensées*, S179/L146

influences on Pascal, I suspect this fact is overdetermined; regardless of the answer, it does nothing to undermine the structure of Pascal's moral philosophy that I suggest.<sup>352</sup> The second case is that the classical Stoics make a two-fold distinction between someone who performs the right action but not in accordance to nature, and who performs the same type of action but is motivated by reason and not passion: that is, a distinction between a morally conscientious person and someone who is genuinely virtuous.<sup>353</sup> Though other parts of Pascal's morality are clearly Augustinian, such as his *theosis*, I would gladly concede that the binary division of his ethics follows from the Stoics and not Augustine—after all, everything that Pascal learned about Augustine he already found in Montaigne and Epictetus.<sup>354</sup> In either case, it also does little to undermine the structure of Pascal's philosophy I offered.

At the end, Pascal's ethics are actually tripartite, not dual. There is the city of God, where true happiness and good are obtained. However, the city of man can be subdivided into those who seek God and learn to control their passions—a Neostoicism to make life more bearable while awaiting effective grace—and those who revel in misery, indulging in passions and concupiscence. These two, or three, categories make understanding his morality through the three orders of kind (charity, mind, and body) tempting, and it is understandable why the three orders are imposed as a framework for understanding his morality given the similarity. However, while evidence does not support the three orders reading, a two-cities structure with Neostoicism as a 'second best alternative' seems to more naturally follow from his four major influences.

Neostoicism is not ideal, but it better predisposes one towards loving and knowing the Supreme

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<sup>352</sup> Pascal is not the only Augustinian Cartesian to develop an ethics following the two cities distinction. Nicolas Malebranche takes a similar stance on moral philosophy. In his *Treatise on Ethics*, Malebranche separates his morals twofold: an eternal society and one enslaved by the passions. Though he works through the details of this distinction in his own unique way, where the passions actually serve a positive purpose to draw the reprobate towards God, there is enough resemblance to give contextual support to my reading, to prefer an Augustinian two-cities distinction as the basis for understanding Pascal's moral theory.

<sup>353</sup> *On the Philosopher's Mean*; Seneca (1917), 20ff.

<sup>354</sup> Pascal (1994), 83ff

Good—which is that for which one should hope—and if that fails, it is an alternative morality, an adequate placeholder for him who God has not chosen.

## CHAPTER FOUR: SPINOZA'S ANTI-STOICISM, OR, SPINOZA AMONG THE NEOSTOICS

Of the popularized philosophical literature from the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Spinoza's work draws the most obvious affinities with Stoicism. A *précis* of the *Ethics* may closely resemble the Hellenistic philosophy with its pantheistic monism and description of the passions as an illness of the intellect with the centrality of rational beliefs prescribed as its cure. The distinctively Stoic quality of Spinoza's *Ethics* and *Short Treatise on God, Man, and His Well-Being* did not go unnoticed by his contemporaries. Leibniz, for instance, criticizes Spinoza with these accusations:

The sect of the new Stoics believes that there are incorporeal substances, that human souls are not bodies, and that God is the soul of the world, or, if you wish, the primary power of the world, that he is the cause of matter itself, if you wish, but that a blind necessity determines him to act; for this reason, he will be to the world what the spring or the weight is to a clock. [...] In fact, these are Spinoza's views, and there are many people to whom Descartes appears to be of the same opinion.<sup>355</sup>

Though Stoicism was a central criticism of Spinoza in his time, these themes were neglected in contemporary literature until recently.<sup>356</sup>

Since then, the tide of scholarship has returned to being more sensitive to these correlations.<sup>357</sup> In general, much of this literature shows a careful analysis of Spinoza's texts and a keen understanding of the Stoics. Nonetheless, I believe that it is not without its problems.

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<sup>355</sup> AG, 282. *Two Sects of Naturalists*.

<sup>356</sup> This criticism was central because the Stoics were known for their heterodox theology: if Spinoza was a Stoic, and the Stoic teachings of pantheistic monism are false and dangerous, then Spinoza (by extension the philosophy of the Stoics) is also false and dangerous. As far as contemporary treatment, in 1930, C.D. Broad offered the first significant contemporary study on Spinoza in his *Five Types of Ethical Theory* (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1930). The reason for the neglect in this and subsequent works could be because of only a more recent shift towards doing the history of philosophy contextually in the Anglophone world or because Spinoza only mentions the Stoics once in his *Ethics*, and that is a criticism. (PV, Preface)

My first concern is that, from my experience, the majority of commentators who take on the task of examining these affinities state their position too strongly, overemphasizing Spinoza's Stoicism. In the introduction to my dissertation, I discussed the problem of what it means to be a *Stoic* and I arrived at the conclusion that whatever family resemblance one might identify as 'Stoic', self-identification seems to be an important factor when recognizing an author as an actor within a particular intellectual tradition. In this sense, Spinoza is not so comfortably classified as a Stoic.<sup>358</sup> He views no tradition as off limits for appropriation or criticism, drawing from and criticizing a variety of philosophical schools, both ancient and modern, while making no exception for Stoicism. He rarely refers to the Stoics—only once in the *Ethics*, and in that instance, in order to offer a criticism.<sup>359</sup> Furthermore, as far as Stoic doctrines go, in spite of similarities, there are also central Stoic themes that he rejects, such as teleology.<sup>360</sup> It is not entirely clear that it is fair to identify Spinoza as a Stoic in this strong sense of some commentators.

Also, with an exception of one recent monograph by Jon Miller,<sup>361</sup> the literature on Spinoza and the Stoics strongly, if not exclusively, focuses on his morality. Spinoza is presented as a Stoic ethicist—not metaphysician or physicist. In this context, he is presented as a unique champion of Stoic thought in his time. So my second concern is that there is a tendency to

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<sup>357</sup> Several articles investigating Spinoza and his relation to the Stoic philosophy have been published in both journals and collected volumes (James [1993], Long [2003], Miller [2003]) and at least two monographs now exist on the subject. (DeBrabander [2004], Miller [2015])

<sup>358</sup> Though like I said above, some of Spinoza's contemporaries accused him of Stoicism. See AG, 282.

<sup>359</sup> PV, Preface; In addition to the one citation in the *Ethics*, he also mentions the Stoics in the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* (70) in a discussion on the soul.

<sup>360</sup> I will address this in the second section of this chapter.

<sup>361</sup> Miller (2015). Jonathan Israel also discusses the Spinoza and the Stoics, but it is a historical survey of how contemporaries of Spinoza responded to him and not an attempt by himself to classify Spinoza in any particular way. It seems that the reception of Spinoza was mixed in whether or not he was identified with the Stoic philosophy, which is telling and corresponds with some of my later conclusions. (Israel [2006], 457-470)

present Spinoza's Stoic ethics as a 17<sup>th</sup> century novelty, a shocking moral view for his time.

Susan James writes, for instance, that:

Although twentieth-century scholars have largely lost sight of the Stoic elements in the *Ethics*, these would unquestionably have been evident to many of Spinoza's contemporaries. To be sure, it is difficult to tell what proportion of his readers would have possessed a sufficiently detailed knowledge of Stoicism to appreciate the full extent of his intellectual debt. But it is clear that many of them would have recognized the provenance of specific doctrines which were widely identified as Stoic. For example, the claim that all passion is inimical to virtue, so that in so far as we become virtuous we become free of passion, was regularly decried by seventeenth-century philosophers and moralists as a Stoic aberration.<sup>362</sup>

Although Spinoza's work is indeed novel, and he was harshly accused of Stoicism by some of his contemporaries, the Stoic morality was hardly a fringe position in his time. Stoicism's rebirth during the Renaissance as Neostoicism had lasting influence into following centuries. As a result, Stoic themes, especially Stoic morality philosophy, are pervasive throughout early modernity.<sup>363</sup>

In light of the recent literature that has emerged on this topic, in this chapter I do not intend to provide an exhaustive account of any particular Spinozistic doctrine, nor of his relation with Stoicism. Recent literature has allowed for significant gains in scholarship pertaining to both of these topics and I do not feel the need to repeat what has already been said well by others. Nonetheless, for the two concerns stated above, I believe that the present-day discussions continue to mischaracterize the role that Stoicism plays in Spinoza's thought. In this chapter, then, I aim to resituate Spinoza's morality with a greater sensitivity to his anti-Stoicism and to the philosophies of other Neostoics in his day. Doing this will allow for a better frame of reference from which to understand his moral philosophy.

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<sup>362</sup> James (1993), 291. She cites Henry More, J.F. Senault, N. Coeffeteau, and Nicolas Caussin as evidence of those who "decried" these qualities as a "Stoic aberration." (*Ibid*, n.10)

<sup>363</sup> To get a feel for what some of these influences were, see Long (2003) and Kraye (1998).

In this chapter, I will argue that rather than offering an altogether unique morality for his time (as the literature suggests), Spinoza is part of an established Neostoic tradition. This will be accomplished through the following three sections: in the first section, I will give a brief survey of Spinoza's Stoicism as portrayed in contemporary literature, showing areas of neglect and problems to be resolved; in the second, I will push back against these readings by showing predominant anti-Stoic themes in Spinoza's morality; and, finally, in the third, I will place Spinoza into the tradition of Neostoicism by comparing his Stoicism (and anti-Stoicism) with others in the Neostoic tradition.

### **I. Some Interpretations of Spinoza and the Stoic Morality**

As outlined above, there are two present-day views pertaining to Spinoza's Stoicism. The first are those that neglect Stoic themes altogether; this is typical of less recent scholarship. These commentators are interested in other philosophical problems in Spinoza's work, such as meta-ethics. For example, Edwin Curley examines Spinoza's moral psychology against claims that he is a psychological egoist. In Curley's analysis he is not concerned with Stoicism, though he does identify the end towards which Spinoza's ethical theory is aimed as an enduring state of mind, writing:

What is of primary importance, morally, is the quality of consciousness from which action flows, and one of the main problems of moral philosophy is deciding whether there are, '...any techniques for the purification and reorientation of an energy which is naturally selfish, in such a way that when moments of choice arrive we shall be sure of acting rightly'.<sup>364</sup>

The quote that Curley includes in this explanation is from Freud, which he finds to be an apt paraphrase of themes in *Ethics* Part IV where Spinoza describes a gradual formation of a

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<sup>364</sup> Curley (1973), 374. He is quoting Iris Murdoch's *The Sovereignty of the Good* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), 70-71. Curley also provides an astute commentary on Spinoza's moral philosophy in Curley (1988), but that also does not make the Stoic connection. This is not necessarily a weakness in this work but rather just not where Curley intends to focus.

character less prone to harmful emotions.<sup>365</sup> There are shadows of Stoicism lurking behind Freud's analysis cited here; Martha Nussbaum, for instance, frames Stoic morality as a form of psychotherapy, drawing Freudian comparisons.<sup>366</sup> But Curley does not draw this connection.

Likewise, there are many other authors who provide strong enough summaries of Spinozistic philosophy in the *Ethics* but neglect its correlations with Stoicism. Stuart Hampshire's succinct introduction to Spinozism highlights several influences on Spinoza's thought, such as Hobbes and Descartes, and like Curley, he also draws correlation between Spinoza and Freud, but there is no mention of the Stoics or their influences on his philosophy.<sup>367</sup> The same is true for Genevieve Lloyd. In her detailed analysis of the *Ethics*, she focuses on topics where Spinoza has clear affinities with Stoicism, such as substance, and could provide a suitable place for introducing similarities in their thought, but she does not.<sup>368</sup>

Most of these texts are models of excellent scholarship in as far as the authors achieve what they set out to accomplish. Fully acknowledging each of the traditions which influence an author's work may not be a necessary condition for interpreting his or her writings correctly. Nonetheless, there certainly is good motivation for exploring these similarities.<sup>369</sup> One way this need is evident in particular is that though much recent literature has ignored Spinoza and the Stoics, the issue of Spinoza's Stoicism was important to his contemporaries. Jonathan Israel

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<sup>365</sup> See *Ethics* P.IV, Appendix 14-16, 27-28, etc. Curley similarly notes that in *Ethics* PV, Spinoza prescribes techniques designed to accomplish this goal of character formation.

<sup>366</sup> In *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics*. See Nussbaum (1994), 439, etc; Susan James makes this connection between Freudian and Spinozistic psychotherapy explicit, drawing also from Nussbaum. See James (1993).

<sup>367</sup> Hampshire (1987), 98-132.

<sup>368</sup> There are others, but Curley, Lloyd, and Hampshire serve as effective examples. There is a great deal of topical literature as well that deals with themes relevant to the question of Spinoza's Stoicism: Kashap (1987), Lin (2006), Kisner (2013), and so forth. I am indebted to Miller (2015) for his analysis as it has helped me frame some of this literature as I have.

<sup>369</sup> Though context may not be a necessary condition for interpreting a philosopher correctly, it certainly helps a great deal in drawing an interpretation and safeguarding against misinterpretation. Without context, there is the danger of philosophy texts becoming nothing but a mirror of the reader's own existing beliefs, an unfortunately common occurrence among historians of philosophy who reject external evidence.



describes the intellectual climate well; many criticisms advanced against Spinoza were accusations of Stoicism given their resemblance to some of the themes in his work:

While these modern [that is, present-day] scholars do not, of course, share the motives which inspired earlier comparisons of Spinozism with Stoicism, the effect, were their reading correct, might well be similar. For by labeling Spinoza a ‘Stoic’, Early Enlightenment critics questioned both his originality and integrity, reminding readers that Christianity had long since disposed of the arguments of the Stoics, back in late antiquity.<sup>370</sup>

While I do not share Israel’s confidence that Christianity disposed of Stoicism – there is overwhelming evidence that it was appropriated, not disposed<sup>371</sup> – the overall force of his claim is helpful. Understanding Spinoza’s relation with Stoicism, seeing to what extent he identifies as a Stoic, and reconsidering where he rejects Stoic thought all help to illuminate the thought of Spinoza himself.

Towards this end, a second set of present-day literature turns its attention towards Spinoza’s Stoicism. One of the first to do so is Paul Oskar Kristeller. Kristeller sets Stoicism against an alleged Aristotelianism, arguing that Spinoza is better identified as a Stoic and Neoplatonist than an Aristotelian: in short, he claims it is false that Spinoza is influenced by Aristotle because he is a Stoic. He appeals to Spinoza’s morality, highlighting the correlations between their theories of the passions. In Kristeller’s account, *conatus* is “nothing but the impulse of self-preservation which occupies a central place in the Stoic system of ethics.”<sup>372</sup>

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<sup>370</sup> Israel (2006), 458

<sup>371</sup> The Renaissance Neostoics Lipsius and Du Vair exemplify this. See also Troels Engberg-Pedersen’s “Stoicism in the Apostle Paul: A Philosophical Reading” and Richard Sorabji’s “Stoic First Movements in Christianity” (found in Strange and Zupko (2004), 52-75 and 95-107) for examples of how even the canonical Christian texts incorporate important Stoic themes. A great number of medieval references to Stoicism are not critical, and sometimes are used to illustrate an author’s point. See my appendix for a list of these.

<sup>372</sup> Kristeller, 5-6. I do find Kristeller’s article troubling in that he seems to set out to solve a problem that never existed: Spinoza’s rejection of Aristotelianism seems obvious and the evidence used to support Spinoza’s Neoplatonism is lacking. It is true that Spinoza uses terms such as substance, attribute, and mode that originate in Aristotle. However, he seems to be borrowing these from Descartes, who wrote the *Principles of Philosophy* in the tone of a scholastic textbook, not from Aristotle himself. Descartes’ original plan was to publish the principles alongside a traditional scholastic textbook, but later abandoned this idea to publish his own “Summa” of philosophy. (See letter to Mersenne, 25 December 1639; AT II, 626) Kristeller also makes the case that Spinoza’s geometric

Although credit is due for being among the first modern scholars to note the similarities between the two philosophies, even at the points where Kristeller is right in his article, he overemphasizes the role that Stoicism plays in Spinoza's thought. In treatment of Spinoza's *Ethics*, he quickly identifies him as Stoic while overlooking aspects that run contrary to Stoic thought.<sup>373</sup>

Another author who discusses Spinoza's Stoicism is Susan James. While others argue similarly, I find her account the most compelling.<sup>374</sup> She approaches her discussion from the place of Spinoza's definition of virtue, which can be summarized as freedom from passion resulting from a complex process of moral growth. She notes that Spinoza's concept of virtue is composed of two parts that are analogous to the Stoic opinion. The first is that virtue is living in agreement with nature, or assenting only to actions that are in accordance with nature. However, she notes that, according to Spinoza, the person who is merely living in accordance with nature is likely to choose things that are morally indifferent, such as helping a sick friend because of pity; this is a passion, instead of a rational emotion. This person, though morally conscientious, lacks virtue. Because of this, the virtuous person requires an additional quality: living according to right reason. James argues that following the Stoic doctrine that Diogenes describes as "knowing your proper function,"<sup>375</sup> Spinoza's conception of virtue requires more than right action. Moral worth resides not in what action is done, but whether that action is done with a virtuous

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method is Neoplatonic, though he also admits that there is no tangible evidence for Spinoza's Neoplatonism: "If we try to find earlier examples for the application of the method of geometry, that is, of Euclid, to a philosophical treatise, we do not find it in the Aristotelian tradition and not even in Descartes, but in the *Elements of Theology* and in the *Elements of Physics* of the Neoplatonist Proclus who also composed a commentary on the first Book of Euclid. The analogy strikes me as significant, *although there is no clear evidence that Spinoza knew or imitated Proclus.*" (Kristeller, 3; italics are mine)

<sup>373</sup> Kristeller, 6-7. To be fair to Kristeller, he seems to be drawing broad strokes in order to draw attention to the Stoic aspects in Spinoza that had been entirely neglected before him.

<sup>374</sup> She frames her article in rejecting Spinoza's Cartesianism, a thesis I reject. See Collette (2014). A.A. Long offers a list of others in Miller and Inwood (2003), 27n9. This was a helpful list of resources in exploring literature for this chapter. The list includes Dilthey, who he quotes: "Spinoza's entire individual ethics, the aim of his work, is based on the Stoa – in fact in such comprehensiveness and with such agreements in detail that it seems unavoidable to assume his using the most widely read of the reworkings of the ancient tradition by the Dutch humanist Lipsius, his *De Constantia.*" Dilthey (1977), 285. Translation by Miller.

<sup>375</sup> James (1993), 292

disposition. She concludes that Spinoza's morality is best understood as Stoic, then, and identifies his Stoicism as an early modern aberration, appealing to criticisms raised against Spinoza by Henry More and John Locke where he is accused of Stoicism.<sup>376</sup> James makes Spinoza into an unwavering champion of the Stoic philosophy; with most of the literature on the topic following this opinion, it would be easy to believe that Spinoza's morality is unquestionably Stoic.

The bulk of present-day commentators, then, can be identified with these two views, those who neglect Spinoza's Stoicism and those who classify his morality as wholly Stoic and an early modern novelty. There are two exceptions worth mentioning that do provide a more balanced account. One is Steven Nadler's introduction to the *Ethics* where he acknowledges that, "Plato, Aristotle, and the ancient (and modern) Stoics all belong to the intellectual background of the work."<sup>377</sup> He also notes some similarities Spinoza shares with the Stoic theory of the passions as well as a their prescriptions to the good life, living according to nature.<sup>378</sup> To Nadler's credit, though he makes connections between the two schools of thought, it is without overstating the influence of one upon the other, realizing that, "The deeper one goes into the *Ethics*, and the further one proceeds from the metaphysics and epistemology of the early propositions into the domain of psychology, social and political philosophy, and moral philosophy, the wider range of intellectual contexts within which Spinoza's ideas can be situated."<sup>379</sup> Nadler recognizes many other intellectual traditions besides Stoicism that also help shape Spinoza's ideas: Hobbes, Descartes, Jewish rationalism, and so forth. Nadler's approach is refreshing, but it is a generalist

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<sup>376</sup> She also argues that in 17<sup>th</sup> century, the idea that virtue is incompatible with the passions is criticized.

<sup>377</sup> Nadler (2006), xiii.

<sup>378</sup> Nadler (2006), 196, 226, 235.

<sup>379</sup> Nadler (2006), 248.

introduction and as a result he does not intend to provide a detailed analysis of the Stoic themes in particular.

The second exception is Jon Miller, whose recent, aptly titled monograph, *Spinoza and the Stoics*, provides the most detailed treatment of the topic to date. He does not set out to establish Stoic lines of influence on Spinoza, but embarks on a much safer project, to explore their conceptual affinities. I commend Miller's work here, and there is value in his approach—this is an area of investigation still in its infancy, and it is a much more difficult task to prove an author's influence than to highlight similarities.<sup>380</sup> Compared to the Stoics, there is much stronger record of Spinoza's familiarity with Cartesian and Jewish texts than the Stoic writings.<sup>381</sup> It is unclear whether all of his Stoic influences are direct, or if they are indirect through someone else, such as Descartes.<sup>382</sup> This is not a problem, then, of Miller's work, but it is helpful to acknowledge what he is and is not accomplishing. Another strength in this work is that his account is also more extensive. Where the other commentators strictly focus on Spinoza's morality,<sup>383</sup> Miller's analysis parallels the five parts of the *Ethics*, following correlations between the Spinozistic and Stoic philosophies in metaphysics, epistemology, philosophical psychology, meta-ethics, and normative ethics. The result is a more robust presentation of how Spinoza's philosophy relates with, and often resembles, Stoic philosophy. Miller's work is an important contribution to present-day Spinoza scholarship for this reason.

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<sup>380</sup> Especially problematic is that the evidence can be both underdetermined and overdetermined. Underdetermined in that it is not always clear which books an author had in his or her library, actually read, etc. Thus separating a similar but original thought from a true influence in these cases can be difficult. Overdetermined in that there may be many places where an author learned a particular doctrine, and it is difficult to say that s/he drew it from one tradition rather than another. Pascal, for instance, says everything he learned from Augustine was already present in Montaigne and Epictetus. Which actually influenced him, if not all three, is a challenging if not impossible question to fully answer.

<sup>381</sup> This is evidenced by the *Principles of Cartesian Philosophy* and *Metaphysical Thoughts* as well as his *Hebrew Grammar*. See Nadler (2006), xiii, etc.

<sup>382</sup> Spinoza draws the comparison between the Stoics and Descartes himself in the Preface to PV .

<sup>383</sup> This is also true for the only other monograph on the subject, DeBrabander (2007).

Thus, Miller accomplishes what he sets out to do, but for this very reason he does not treat anti-Stoic themes in Spinoza's works. And while an important first step, I would question the lasting philosophical payoff of merely drawing comparisons between two philosophies without taking the further steps to say that the correlations are more than mere happenstance.<sup>384</sup> Finally, in making a weaker argument, it also sidesteps the question in the second set of literature as to how unique Spinoza's Stoicism really was in his day.

Thus, what remains is literature that neglects Spinoza's affinities with Stoicism, and literature that discusses it but either neglects his anti-Stoicism or portrays Spinoza as Stoic moral philosopher, unqualified and unprecedented. I am aware that my treatment of the literature in this section is hardly exhaustive, but my task was to give a sketch of the climate of present-day literature and nothing more, at least to this point. In the next section I will turn directly to examining Spinoza and the Stoics, emphasizing the anti-Stoic themes are also prevalent in his work.

## **II. Spinoza's Anti-Stoicism**

In the last section I gave a brief survey of present-day commentaries on Spinoza. I showed that while the majority of authors ignore Spinoza's Stoicism, those who acknowledge their affinity provide accounts that are misguided in that they overemphasize the Stoic influence on his morality, underplay his anti-Stoicism, or both. Left to the current state of literature, then, Spinoza should be taken as a Stoic. But Spinoza's contemporaries were not always so quick to draw this connection, which is a good reason to at least give pause and examine the issue more

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<sup>384</sup> I do not mean to say that Miller's work is not valuable nor that his work does not have lasting philosophical payoff. Like many important works, it makes significant gains on its own while also creating space where additional work must be done. I mean that to stop here and accept what Miller has done as the end of this investigation is inadequate.

closely before drawing that conclusion. Israel identifies Bayle's shift in tone towards Spinoza, noting:

In his late work, though Bayle ceased identifying Stoicism as the prime ancient parallel to Spinozism, [...] he also highlighted what he now saw as serious inconsistencies in Stoicism [...] All the affinities between Spinoza and the Stoics in the end, Bayle came to see, are more apparent than real.<sup>385</sup>

As Bayle saw, in spite of similarities between the two, the case for Spinoza's Stoicism becomes less compelling when their inconsistencies are also included in the analysis. In this section I will reject the notion that Spinoza is a Stoic in a strict sense. Since the present-day literature focuses on Spinoza's morality, it is there where I will also focus in emphasizing anti-Stoic themes prominent in the *Ethics*.

It is true that there are many disagreements amongst the Stoics themselves, which may complicate establishing what exactly is an inconsistency or which ideas qualify as *Stoic* as opposed to *anti-Stoic*. Among the Stoics, variations in doctrine are unexceptional: Aristo believed that some external objects are indifferent and can be preferred over others; Posidonius rejected a monist psychology, replacing it with a Platonic tripartite division; and late Stoics, such as Seneca and Epictetus, had much less to say about physics and almost entirely neglected logic; just to give a few examples.<sup>386</sup> There are nonetheless particular themes that are persistent throughout the Stoic literature. Three of these themes are teleology, free will, and moral perfectionism, all of which Spinoza rejects.<sup>387</sup>

The first, teleology, is central to the Stoic project. Stoic teleology shapes their physics and metaphysics, which serves as a basis for their moral psychology, meta-ethics, and normative ethics. According to the Stoics, the universe is divinely orchestrated according to providence.

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<sup>385</sup> Israel (2006), 462.

<sup>386</sup> Sellars (2006), 5-13.

<sup>387</sup> There is a fair amount of literature on each of these topics individually. However, most of it explores one of these three topics, and not their relation to Stoicism. I will discuss each below.

Furthermore, humans are created as rational beings, a quality held in common with the divine. As a result, the universe is designed with specific purposes and predefined goals designed to point humans towards the good life. The Stoics, of course, define the good life as living in accordance to nature, which is exchanging harmful passions for rational beliefs.

Seneca, for instance, takes it as obvious that the universe has a caretaker that orchestrates all things towards the good end of humanity:

What, then, is the part of a good man? To offer himself to Fate. It is a great consolation that it is together with the universe we are swept along whatever it is that has ordained us so to have, so to die, by the same necessity it binds also the gods. One unchangeable course bears along the affairs of men and gods alike. Although the great creator and ruler of the universe himself wrote the decrees of Fate, yet he follows them. He obeys forever, he decreed but once. [...] I suffer nothing against my will, and I am not God's slave but his follower, and the more so, indeed, because I know that everything proceeds according to law that is fixed and enacted for all time.<sup>388</sup>

Epictetus likewise describes humans as endowed by nature for greatness.<sup>389</sup> After defending divine providence through something like teleological argument, he explains,

... while for us, to whom He has made the additional gift of the faculty of understanding, these things are no longer sufficient, but unless we act appropriately, and methodically, and in conformity each with his own nature and constitution, we shall no longer achieve our own ends. [...] God has brought man into the world to be a spectator of Himself and His works, and not merely a spectator, but also an interpreter. Wherefore, it is shameful for a man to begin and end just where the irrational animals do; he should rather begin where they do, but end where nature has ended in dealing with us.<sup>390</sup>

While Seneca and Epictetus represent the opinions of later Stoics, the early and middle Stoics share this doctrine as well.<sup>391</sup> Diogenes Laertius reports that, “Zeno first, in his book *On Human Nature*, said that the goal was to live in agreement with nature, which is to live according to virtue. And similarly Cleanthes in *On Pleasure* and Posidonius and Hecaton in their books *On*

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<sup>388</sup> *De Providentia*; Seneca (1928), 39 and 37; See also, 3-5.

<sup>389</sup> *Discourses* I.II, p.23-25.

<sup>390</sup> *Discourses* I.VI, p. 41-45.

<sup>391</sup> That is, ones from the third through first centuries BCE such as Zeno and Chrysippus, contrasted with the later Stoics in first and second centuries CE such as Seneca and Epictetus.

*the Goal.*”<sup>392</sup> For each of the Stoics, teleology permeates their vision of what it means to exist in the world. Furthermore, it plays an important role in solving potential Stoic difficulties, such as the problem of evil. That is, they believed everything is both determined and good, two concepts that are difficult to reconcile together with human suffering. Teleology serves as an important explanatory function, in that it can say that suffering exists because it is divinely orchestrated to cultivate virtue, which is our end.<sup>393</sup>

There is some disagreement concerning how to interpret Spinoza on teleology. Bennett suggests that he rejects all three forms of teleology available for consideration: divine providence, goal-directed human action, and what Martin Lin describes as “unthoughtful teleology.”<sup>394</sup> Several others reject Bennett’s thesis, directly and indirectly, by arguing that Spinoza allows for at least one kind, teleological explanation of human actions.<sup>395</sup> In either case, what is nearly uncontroversial is Spinoza’s rejection of divine teleology. In the Appendix to Part I of the *Ethics*, Spinoza observes the qualities of nature that are often attributed to teleology and divine providence, noting that,

Now all the prejudices which I intend to mention here turn on this one point, the widespread belief among men that all things in Nature are like themselves in acting with an end in view. Indeed, they hold it as certain that God himself directs everything to a fixed end; for they say that God has made everything for man’s sake and has made man so that he should worship God. [...] men always act with an end in view, to wit, the advantage that they seek. Hence it happens that they are always looking only for the final causes of things done, and are satisfied when they find them, having, of course, no reason for further doubt. But if they fail to discover them from some external source, they have no recourse but to turn to themselves, and to reflect on what ends would normally determine them to similar actions, and so they necessarily judge other minds by their own. Further, since they find within themselves and outside themselves a considerable

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<sup>392</sup> Diogenes Laertius 7.87; Long and Sedley (1987), I. 63.

<sup>393</sup> Consider Seneca, who writes, “Do not, I beg of you, shrink in fear from those things which the immortal gods apply like spurs, as it were, to our souls. Disaster is Virtue’s opportunity.” (*De Providentia*; Seneca [1927], 27) And, “Also so, in the case of good men the gods follow the same rule that teachers follow with their pupils; they require most effort from those of whom they have the surest hope. [...] Why, then, is it strange if God tries noble spirits with severity?” (31)

<sup>394</sup> Lin (2006), 318-9; Bennett reads Spinoza as rejecting all three. See Bennett (1983) and Bennett (1984).

<sup>395</sup> See Curley (1988), Della Rocca (1993), Garrett (1999), Manning (2002), and Lin (2006)



number of means very convenient for the pursuit of their own advantage—as, for instance, eyes for seeing, teeth for chewing, cereals and living creatures for food, the sun for giving light, the sea for breeding fish—the result is that they look on all the things of Nature as means to their own advantage. And realizing that these were found, not produced by them, they come to believe that there is someone else who produced these means for their use. For looking on things as means, they could not believe them to be self-created, but on the analogy of the means which they are accustomed to produce for themselves, they were bound to conclude that there was some governor or governors of Nature, endowed with human freedom, who have attended to all their needs and made everything for their use.<sup>396</sup>

Spinoza seems aware of the arguments, the same types advanced by the Stoics, that the world is made in such a way as to serve human needs. He rejects the notion that just because humans find ways that make the world fit their ends that there is any divine principle orchestrating these things towards any particular end.

Though Spinoza's rejection of divine providence is uncontested, Miller denies that Spinoza is advancing his criticism against Stoic teleology, arguing instead that he targets Judeo-Christian instantiations. Miller appeals to *Ethics* I, P33Sch2 as an example of this; here, Spinoza discusses how everything necessarily follows from God based on his nature, and criticizes those saying God created freely.<sup>397</sup> Stoics agree, says Miller, there is nothing outside of nature that it could take as a goal for its actions. However important immanence is here, Spinoza's criticism does not quite so carefully avoid the Stoic account as Miller suggests. The argument he rejects strongly correlates with Stoic accounts of divine providence in other ways. Seneca writes, for instance, that,

it is unnecessary to show that this mighty structure of the world does not endure without some one to guard it, and that the assembling and the separate flight of the stars above are not due to the workings of chance; that while bodies which owe their motion to accident often fall into disorder and quickly collide, this swift revolution of the heavens, being ruled by eternal law, goes on unhindered, producing so many things on land and sea, so many brilliant lights in the sky all shining in fixed array; [...] But let such matters

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<sup>396</sup> *Ethics*, PI Appendix; 239.

<sup>397</sup> Miller, 56

be kept for their fitting time,—all the more so, indeed, because you do not lack faith in Providence, but complain of it.

Likewise, Epictetus says while for the irrational animals,

it is sufficient to eat and drink and rest and procreate, and whatever else of the things within their own providence the animals severally do; while for us, to whom He has made the additional gift of the faculty of understanding, these things are no longer sufficient, but unless we act appropriately, and methodically, and in conformity each with his own nature and constitution, we shall no longer achieve our ends. [...] But God has brought man into the world to be a spectator of Himself and of His works, and not merely a spectator, but also an interpreter. Wherefore, it is shameful for man to begin and end just where the irrational animals do; he should rather begin where they do, but end where nature has ended in dealing with us.<sup>398</sup>

The distinctions that Miller intends to draw between Judeo-Christian and Stoic teleology are not at all clear. Although the Stoics believe the universe is created from necessity and deny God's transcendence, they also believe nature favors certain kinds of individuals—the universe is structured for the benefit of rational beings. Spinoza rejects this aspect of teleology as well: for him, nature is indifferent to humans, equally beneficial and harmful to all beings. There is no unique bond between nature and humans due to a shared essence of reason. All differences according to Spinoza are differences of degree, and without a special connection with humans, there is no reason to prefer them to other beings.<sup>399</sup>

After denying that Spinoza intends the Stoics as his target of teleology, Miller then tries to reconcile the Spinozistic and Stoic accounts of divine providence to show that the targets of Spinoza's criticism were directed elsewhere, but that the two are not irreconcilable. He claims it is possible that the Stoics only held their teleological position because of inferior science and because of this, it is not a necessary condition for Stoicism.<sup>400</sup> Miller believes that the Stoics, though well intended, did the best they could with their obsolete natural philosophy, and if they

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<sup>398</sup> Epictetus *Discourses* I.VI; (1956), 41-45. Miller attributes this to Becker.

<sup>399</sup> Miller compares this to Garrett's *Incremental Naturalism*. Garrett (2008), 18-19

<sup>400</sup> Miller (2015), 57

only lived today they would have rid their project of immature teleological notions and formed a Stoicism *sans* teleology. I do not find Miller's attempt to reconcile these two satisfying. Stoic philosophy is systematic, and to remove its metaphysics and physics is to dismantle the entire project. Removing teleology from Stoicism would be similar to removing the logic from Stoicism, which may seem inconsequential to us, but which Epictetus warns that, "without receiving exercise in these matters [that is, logic], or even being, by me at least diverted from the study of morality, we nevertheless make no progress toward the beautiful and the good."<sup>401</sup>

Furthermore, in order to maintain Stoicism without teleology, Miller is forced to reduce 'Stoicism' down to something so vague that it could include anyone who meets the broadest affinities with this Hellenistic school. Under these conditions, Kant could also be understood as a Stoic; he explains moral psychology in terms of conflicting natural inclinations that are shared with irrational creatures, and rational inclinations that resemble the divine will.<sup>402</sup> Kant also argues that an action is praiseworthy if and only if it is done freely out of duty alone, following *a priori* motivations, and not natural inclinations. This is similar to Epictetus, who writes that,

As it is, however, we are not inasmuch as these two elements were comingled in our begetting, on the one hand the body, which we have in common with the brutes, and the other, reason and intelligence, which we have in common with the gods, some of us incline toward the former relationship, which is unblessed by fortune and is mortal, and only a few toward that which is divine and blessed.<sup>403</sup>

For both Kant and Epictetus, morality is grounded in acting rationally, which is also to act well. Although there may be these Stoic similarities with Kant's metaphysics of morals, I would be

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<sup>401</sup> Epictetus, *Discourses* I, VIII; (1956), 61.

<sup>402</sup> Kant, *Religion* 6:46-7, etc.

<sup>403</sup> Epictetus *Discourses* I.III; (1956), 25..

remiss to identify him as a Stoic.<sup>404</sup> Stoicism cannot be reduced to such a vague set of principles without resulting in these problems.

So when Miller offers a construction of Spinoza's conception of nature *sans* teleology, it seems to compromise the entire Stoic framework. Whatever the Stoics were in the ancient and early modern world, teleology was essential to their philosophy as a whole, and it is a feature that Spinoza rejects. Although Miller is correct that Spinoza's rejection of divine freedom aligns with the Stoic account of a necessary creation, it seems that given the differences between the two views outlined above that it is unfair to exclude Stoic teleology from the scope of Spinoza's attack.<sup>405</sup> Regardless of whether Stoicism was Spinoza's only target in the Appendix to Part I, arguments that it was not at least one of the objects of his criticism are unconvincing. Spinoza rejects divine providence, which is central to the Stoic philosophy.

Moving on, Spinoza's second important deviation from Stoicism concerns free will. Free choice of the will is a fundamental part of human existence, and a precondition for virtuous living, according to Stoic teachings. Although external matters, such as good fortune, are determined, free will is implicit throughout the Stoic writings as it is required in order to respond to these determined events in a virtuous way. Seneca, for example, believes that it is not what the virtuous person bears but how s/he bears it that is important.<sup>406</sup> He writes,

There await us, if ever we escape from these low dregs to that sublime and lofty height, peace of mind and, when all error has been driven out, perfect liberty. You ask what this

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<sup>404</sup> That does not mean that there may not be Stoic influences on Kant, but that it is incorrect to call him a Stoic. This is a topic I will leave for future research as it raises additional problems that I am not willing to digress into here: *e.g.*, various Cartesians rejected in some capacity or another nearly every doctrine that Descartes held central and dear, so why wouldn't Kant be a Stoic? Part of it seems to be identification. Cartesians such as Regis who rejected the method of doubt and Empiricist Cartesians such as Rohault self-identified, and identified by others, as Cartesians. I am not aware of anyone who identified Kant as a Stoic, nor did Kant self-identify with this Hellenistic tradition, yet it seems that according to Becker's account, Kant meets sufficient conditions for Stoicism.

<sup>405</sup> See also Seneca (1927), *De Providentia*, 43. Seneca says, "Whatever it is that has ordained the mode of our life and the mode of our death has bound the gods, too, by the same necessity. The course that carries human affairs and divine alike is irrevocable."

<sup>406</sup> Seneca (1927), *De Providentia*, 9

freedom is? It means not fearing either men or gods; it means not craving wickedness or excess; it means possessing supreme power over oneself. And it is a priceless good to be master of oneself.<sup>407</sup>

Freedom is essential to transcending the passions, applying the intellect to overcome them.

Epictetus also refers to this in *Discourses*, where he writes,

But I have never been hindered in the exercise of my will, nor have I ever been subjected to compulsion against my will. And how is this possible? I have submitted my freedom of choice unto God. He wills that I shall have fever; it is my will too. He wills that I should choose something; it is my will too. He wills that I should desire something; it is my will too. He wills that I should get something; it is my wish too. He does not will it; I do not wish it. Therefore, it is my will to die; therefore, it is my will to be tortured on the rack. Who can hinder me any longer against my own views, or put compulsion upon me? That is no more possible in my case than it would be with Zeus.<sup>408</sup>

For Epictetus, it is his will that allows him to live in accordance with nature, to replace irrational, destructive passions with rational emotions.

Contrarily, Spinoza denies free will. There is only one place where Spinoza explicitly addresses the Stoics in the *Ethics* and it is to criticize them on this point. In the Preface to Part V, he writes,

Now the Stoics thought that the emotions depend absolutely on our will, and that we can have absolute command over them. However, with experience crying out against them they were obliged against their principles to admit that no little practice and zeal are required in order to check and control emotions.

After comparing this view to Descartes, showing where the *Passions of the Soul* makes analogous claims, Spinoza levels a tirade against Cartesian freedom, which also applies to Stoicism by extension.

The third notable deviation that Spinoza takes from Stoicism is on moral perfectionism.<sup>409</sup> In short, this is the belief that complete virtue is attainable in this life. More

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<sup>407</sup> Seneca (1920), Epistle LXXV, *On The Diseases of the Soul*; 147.

<sup>408</sup> Epictetus (1952), *Discourses* Book IV, 275.

<sup>409</sup> Firman DeBrabander offers an astute discussion of Spinoza's treatment of this in his article and book on the topic. See DeBrabander (2004; 2007). He writes that there are many appealing aspects of Stoicism, including

particularly, this teaching in Stoic doctrine consists of three parts: (1) the unity of the virtues; (2) that either a person is entirely virtuous or does not express virtue at all; and, (3) completeness of virtue, or moral perfection, and as a result, also tranquility, are attainable in this life.

To the first, the Stoics believe that if someone has a single virtue, then s/he has them all.

Reporting on Stoic perfectionism, Plutarch describes that,

They say that the virtues are inter-entailing, not only because he who has one has them all but also because he who does any action in accordance with one does so in accordance with them all. For they say that a man is not perfect unless he possesses all the virtues nor an action either, unless it is performed in accordance with all the virtues.<sup>410</sup>

They believe that the virtues as a whole cannot be separated from one another, and it is impossible for someone to have a single virtue detached from the others. Plutarch's report also leads into the second part, that virtue is not acquired in degrees. Since there is a unity of the virtues, if someone embraces one virtue, s/he has them all; it is the same with those who lack of virtue, that they have none. It is Stoic doctrine, Diogenes Laertius writes, "that nothing is in between virtue and vice, though the Peripatetics say that progress is in between these. For as, they say, a stick must be either straight or crooked, so a man must be either just or unjust, but not either more just or more unjust, and likewise with the other virtues."<sup>411</sup> This second part also

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happiness in this life that is attainable for all rational beings. This is found in specific doctrines. The first is their immanentist theology; God, or the universe, can be fully apprehended by the human mind. The second is that virtue is indicated by natural impulses. Third, that the primary obstacle to virtue is the diagnosis of passions. Fourth, that psychotherapy is the means to happiness. DeBrabander, like many other commentators, is glad to acknowledge that Spinoza resembles the Stoics in several ways—their accounts of God as nature, the similarity between their accounts of the role of virtue in relation to the passions which disrupt the cognitive lives of men, and that a psychotherapy is at the center of their ethics, are just a few examples he offers. (198-201) However, DeBrabander shows that Spinoza deviates from Stoicism in rejecting the idea that any person can have absolute control over his or her passions; that is, he denies moral perfectionism. In fact, Spinoza's only specific mention of the Stoics is on this point. Spinoza says that humans are part of the universe and desiring otherwise leads to suffering; however, the Stoics say that virtue places man in another region of the universe. (See Seneca *De Constantia* 15.3, for instance.)

<sup>410</sup> Plutarch, *On Stoic self-contradictions* 1046E-F (*SVF* 3.299, 243); Long and Sedley (1987), 379. See also *On Stoic self-contradictions* 1050F, 1051A-B (*SVF* 2.1181, part; 1182); Long and Sedley (1987), 382.

<sup>411</sup> Diogenes Laertius 7.127; Long and Sedley (1987), 380. The unity of the virtues is also a common Stoic doctrine. See Stobaeus 2.63,6-24.

applies to the degrees in which one may express the virtues as a whole. Stobaeus reports that the Stoics think the wise man does all things well concluding,

In their opinion, the doctrine that the wise man does everything well is a consequence of his accomplishing everything in accordance with right reason and in accordance with virtue, which is expertise concerned with the whole of life. By analogy, the inferior man does everything that he does badly and in accordance with all the vices.<sup>412</sup>

The virtuous person is morally perfect. Plutarch states this more strongly, also appealing to the third part of this doctrine, where moral perfection and its resulting tranquility can be established in this life. Subsequently, those who are not complete in their virtue do not obtain any virtue or tranquility:

... just as in the sea the man an arm's length from the surface is downing no less than the one who has sunk five hundred fathoms, so even those who are getting close to virtue are no less in a state of vice than those who are far from it. And just as the blind are blind even if they are going to recover their sight a little later, so those progressing remain foolish and vicious right up to their attainment of virtue.<sup>413</sup>

Moral perfectionism is prominent in how the Stoics see virtue and the good life, which is the end for their teaching.

In Spinoza's case, it seems that he is willing to admit the unity of the virtues.<sup>414</sup> However, his account of human nature is bleaker than the Stoic view. Although moral perfectionism cannot be easily divorced from how the Stoics see the ethical life, Spinoza still must reject one of the last two parts of this doctrine. He believes that human power is limited and is subject to an insurmountable amount of external forces. These forces influence a person's ability to successfully have all of his or her irrational passions changed into rationally grounded adequate beliefs. In the Appendix to Part IV of the *Ethics*, Spinoza claims that: "human power is very limited and is infinitely surpassed by the power of external causes, and so we do not have

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<sup>412</sup> Stobaeus 2.66,14-67,4 (*SVF* 3.560), Long and Sedley (1987), 379-380.

<sup>413</sup> Plutarch, *On common conceptions* 1063A-B (*SVF* 3.539, part); Long and Sedley (1987), 382.

<sup>414</sup> See James (2011), 227.

absolute power to adapt to our purposes things external to us.”<sup>415</sup> And he confirms this in the

Preface to Part V:

Above all I shall be showing the degree and nature of its command over the emotions in checking and controlling them [that is, the power of the mind or reason]. For I have already demonstrated [in Part IV] that we do not have absolute command over them.<sup>416</sup>

For Spinoza, moral perfection is impossible. As such, if virtue and its resulting tranquility are to be achieved at all, then virtue must be present but imperfect. This forces Spinoza to deny (2) or (3): either it is possible to be virtuous in varying degrees that are less than complete and still have virtue, or the good life is not possible in this life.

Firman DeBrabander takes this criticism further, noting that it is not just because of external causes that people always fail to be fully virtuous, but that there are internal reasons as well. For Spinoza, he argues, it is impossible for a person to have completeness of virtue because there is always a laden desire motivating all rational judgments. He notes that Spinoza’s *conatus*, the internal striving common to all rational agents, motivates all of a person’s judgments. As a result, desire is implicit in any cognition, for the motivation to be virtuous is itself a non-rational desire. Virtue is acquired for Spinoza when a person transforms beliefs from mostly passive to mostly active—turning inadequate ideas into adequate ideas. So a belief stops being a passive emotion when it is clear and distinct. The principle of Spinozistic ‘psychotherapy’, then, is the ability for reason to produce new, more powerful emotions to combat and offset the passions.<sup>417</sup> The goal is not to altogether transform or eradicate the passions, but to control and overcome

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<sup>415</sup> PIV, Appendix 32.

<sup>416</sup> PrPV

<sup>417</sup> DeBrabander (2004), 204; *Ethics* Pr. 49, II:96; Sch. Pr. 9 III:109. The term psychotherapy is, of course, an anachronism. However it is the one used in a great deal of the literature, including DeBrabander and James, so I will use it to avoid confusing things.



them by producing stronger rational emotions.<sup>418</sup> It is impossible, then, to rid oneself of desires and emotions because they are a necessary and irremovable part of one's own cognition.

Spinoza clearly rejects (2), then. Complete virtue cannot be attained in this life due to the strength of external causes combined with the inability for someone to fully separate his or her desires from the process of forming rational beliefs. If Spinoza were a Stoic, this would be the end of his story, where the failure of reason at the hands of passions is inevitable, and the morally hopeful person is left unable to reach the good life.

However, in the Appendix to Part IV Spinoza allows for (3), that virtue is possible in this life. Different than the Stoic view, rather than worrying if one will reach perfection, which Spinoza has already rejected, the prescription is resignation—to accept that moral perfectionism is unattainable, but persevere in pursuing the Good Life nonetheless.<sup>419</sup> There is still a sense of futility involved, but it is not nihilistic. Consistently replacing passions with adequate ideas is enough to lead to tranquility, even if this practice is not complete. Perpetual combat against the passions will always be necessary; life is an ongoing pursuit of tranquility, of making all ideas adequate. True moral perfection can only be achieved when fully reunited with the infinite substance.<sup>420</sup> Until then, the impossibility of moral perfection only becomes clearer as one pursues and gets closer to it. DeBrabander describes Spinoza's ethics as one that transcends the Stoic ethical ideal: where the Stoics are “fatally optimistic” concerning the wise man's victory

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<sup>418</sup> DeBrabander (2004), 207. This difference is analogous to the difference between setting an object on fire (which entirely transforms, if not eradicates, the object) versus controlling a wild animal on a chain. In the case of the animal, it is very much the same as it was before the chain was attached, but it is kept from destructive behavior since the person holding the chain is stronger. The Stoics believed the passions could be eradicated and replaced with or transformed into rational emotions, but Spinoza believes the passions will always be present, but can be controlled by producing a stronger emotion. This is reminiscent to Descartes in the *Passions of the Soul* where he says that it is not possible to choose not to fix one's gaze at something, but must direct the gaze at a different object and thus indirectly remove the first object from sight. (Article 44)

<sup>419</sup> “...that part of us which is defined by the understanding, that is, the better part of us, will be fully resigned and will endeavor to persevere in that resignation.” (*Ethics IV*, Appendix 32)

<sup>420</sup> DeBrabander (2004), 210.

over fortune, Spinoza instead prescribes resignation over the existential condition. The wise man in Spinoza's mind is only "saved" in recognizing "his normalcy." The only difference, then, between the wise and ordinary man is "a few degrees of intellectual clarity."<sup>421</sup> The whole life is an ongoing endeavor to reach the mind of God; it is only fully reached upon death when it reunites with the one substance.<sup>422</sup>

On moral perfectionism, then, though Spinoza accepts (1), he emphatically rejects (2), believing that it is possible to obtain virtues incompletely. As for (3), though like the Stoics he believes virtue, and tranquility as a result, is attainable in this life, what this actually means is very different given Spinoza's rejection of (2). The virtuous person is one who is not morally perfect, but one who acknowledges this perfection is impossible, but perseveres in the becoming more virtuous anyhow.

To step back, then, and consider this section as a whole, moral perfectionism now joins teleology and free will as central Stoic themes that Spinoza rejects. It is more challenging to see him as a Stoic with this in mind, even if in broad strokes his account resembles their story that the passions are a sickness of the intellect whose cure is found in reason. Furthermore, all three of these anti-Stoic doctrines are important parts of the ethical theories of both schools of thought; to imagine a Spinozism with free will and teleology is just as unimaginable as a Stoicism without them. Since present-day literature draws special attention to Spinoza's Stoic ethics, it is disconcerting that he repeatedly rejects these doctrines in his moral philosophy.

The question remains what to make of Spinoza and the Stoics, then. One option is the approach taken by present-day commentators, to maintain that Spinoza is a Stoic. But I have spent this second section discrediting that opinion: there may be resemblance, but Spinoza

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<sup>421</sup> DeBrabander (2004), 210.

<sup>422</sup> DeBrabander (2004), 210.

cannot be a Stoic moralist in a robust sense if he rejects central ideas of Stoic virtue, free human action, and teleology. Another option would be to outright reject his Stoicism while admitting that there is some correlation between them. Under this option, we could agree that there are too many reasons to reject Spinoza's Stoicism to give it any credence. However, I do believe the commentators are right in drawing out the similarities between the two philosophies. Spinoza is recognized as a Stoic not only recently, but even Spinoza's contemporaries accused him of Stoicism.<sup>423</sup> Because of this, I believe it is unfair to entirely dismiss Spinoza's Stoic tendencies. This leads me to a third option, which I believe is the best solution. Under this option, the way to make sense of the problem at hand is to identify Spinoza not as a Stoic, but as a Neostoic. Neostoicism is the tradition of commentators, interpreters, and philosophers during the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries that held Stoicism as foundational to their intellectual framework while appropriating it to fit their other intellectual commitments. As a Neostoic, Spinoza is part of an established tradition of moral philosophy. Rather than being a 17<sup>th</sup> century novelty as James and others suggest, he is an important part of a vibrant school first established in the Renaissance. It is helpful to understand Spinoza from this context, which is where I will now turn in the third section.

### **III. Spinoza Among the Neostoics**

At the beginning of this chapter, I quoted Susan James, who advances two claims concerning Spinoza's Stoicism: first, that Spinoza is best identified as a Stoic, and from that, second, Spinoza was advancing a controversial tenet of Stoicism *through his morality*. As for the first, that Spinoza is a Stoic, at the end of the last section I arrived at the conclusion that he is not

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<sup>423</sup> I showed Leibniz's criticism at the beginning of this chapter (AG, 240-244) and as I will soon discuss, James also mentions Senault, Coeffeteau, and Caussins.

best identified as a Stoic, but as a Neostoic. Concerning her second claim, that Spinoza's Stoicism is moral in nature and controversial in its reception, it is entirely false.

Controversy undoubtedly follows Spinoza. He is excommunicated by the Dutch Jews. His philosophy is condemned by philosophers and theologians alike. The *Ethics* was only published posthumously for fear of its reception, an even bolder treatise following the publication of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, which was itself a "scandalous treatise" that Steven Nadler aptly refers to as "a book forged in hell."<sup>424</sup> What we do not see, however, is a widespread condemnation of his morality. This does not mean there are not exceptions: Henry More found problem with it, as well as some theologians such as Jean-François Senault, Nicolas Coeffeteau, and Nicolas Caussins.<sup>425</sup> James appeals to these critics at the beginning of her argument. Her sample set is weak, however. All four of them had very specific theological motivations that were threatened by both Spinoza and Stoicism. Henry More was among the Cambridge Platonists, religious apologists whose efforts focused on defending doctrines such as dualism against Hobbes and Spinoza. Their criticisms have a common flair for rhetoric, if not for arguing *ad hominem*, which included levying accusations such as atheism, aimed to discredit opponents.<sup>426</sup> The Cambridge Platonists' accounts of others should be treated cautiously when not supported by other evidence. As for Senault, Coeffeteau, and Caussins, they were theological moralists and preachers—while what they have to say should be taken into consideration, conclusions should not be drawn based on these minor theologians alone while ignoring what influential contemporaries such as Leibniz and Bayle also have to say.

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<sup>424</sup> See Nadler (2011), 7-8 for more on these issues including the excommunication. In this chapter I also show Leibniz's criticisms as well as note ones that Jonathan Israel and Susan James cite including the Cambridge Platonists.

<sup>425</sup> James (1993), 291n10

<sup>426</sup> See Kraye (1998), 1292 and Armogathe (1998b), 305-313, etc.

If this sample set is expanded, it becomes evident that Stoic morality is not as exceptional as James makes it out to be, but a fairly common 17<sup>th</sup> century manifestation that emerges from the Renaissance. Neostoic morality begins with the Renaissance Humanists such as Justus Lipsius and Guillaume du Vair. They published popular translations of Seneca and Epictetus, as well as each publishing his own Neostoic philosophy. These Neostoic treatises “baptized” Stoicism, giving a palatable Stoic morality to the Christian west.<sup>427</sup> They replaced a pantheistic monism with the monotheistic Judeo-Christian God. They also minimized what would have been more embarrassing Stoic themes for their day, such as panpsychism. In addition to Lipsius and du Vair, others during the 16<sup>th</sup> century, such as Michel de Montaigne and Pierre Charron, began producing more complex philosophical accounts that were clearly Stoic but also took liberties in their adaptations. Even more than those preceding them, these Neostoics were eclectics, synthesizing multiple traditions together, rejecting aspects of each school when needed to fulfill their philosophical vision. In their case, they synthesized Christianized Stoicism with Pyrrhonism.

These Renaissance Neostoics have a tremendous impact on the 17<sup>th</sup> century. In the first three chapters, I showed that Descartes and Pascal both draw significantly from the Stoic tradition in forming their morality.<sup>428</sup> This is not to mention other philosophers who, though lesser known, shared similar moral accounts. Among them was Princess Elisabeth, whose correspondence helped Descartes in forming his morality, and Pierre-Sylvain Régis, an early

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<sup>427</sup> This was not too far a deviation from the later Roman Stoics anyhow; Epictetus placed much greater emphasis on the moral elements of Stoic thought than its physics and metaphysics.

<sup>428</sup> Less strongly, Hobbes is clearly working through Cicero and Seneca in his work, and though he is influenced by Stoicism to a lesser degree, it is treated much more fairly than nearly all other sources he writes on, ancient and modern. His politics could be influenced by Stoicism at points. For example, though his appeal to the Commonwealth being a body with the Sovereign as a head may be a biblical reference (*Lev.* Part II, Ch. 22-23), Hobbes also may be referring to a text like Seneca’s *On Clemency* where the same analogy is used. See also Oestreich (1982).

Cartesian who interpreted the *Passions of the Soul* as a physiological text and prescribed Neostoic morality as the way to the Supreme Good.

Among the Cartesians there was also Antoine Le Grand, whose importance as a systematizer of Cartesian ethics I discussed in my last chapter. Though he became yet another prominent Cartesian to promote a Neostoic morality, his Neostoicism predated his Cartesianism, publishing a pamphlet promoting Stoicism, *Le Sage des Stoïques, ou l'Homme sans Passions* (1662), several years before his Cartesian textbook.

So by the time Spinoza writes his morality, there has already been a thriving tradition of Neostoics for almost a century. Typically, they maintained free will and divine providence, but reject an imminent theology along with monism and pantheism. However, what they all have in common is that they interpret and appropriate a Stoic morality into their own philosophical systems, selectively picking which parts cohere with their system and leaving behind those parts they find cannot be reconciled. This is, of course, exactly what Spinoza is doing with Stoicism. Spinoza enters into a tradition of Neostoicism, which is not to question the originality of his work—Spinoza's addition to the Neostoic tradition is important. Also, the goal of identifying Spinoza as a Neostoic is not to downplay the other important influences on his thought, such as Hobbes or Descartes; Spinoza's philosophy is undoubtedly complex, and I gladly admit that his Neostoicism allows for a diversity of influences, like Montaigne and Charron exhibited in the previous century. I do believe it is helpful to understand him in this tradition, however, because it is corrective against the first two options I laid out above, that Spinoza is either not a Stoic at all, or that his morality is a robust Stoicism unparalleled in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The Stoic influence on Spinoza is symptomatic of a more widespread Stoic impact in the 17<sup>th</sup> century that affects many others. Rather than his morality being considered a fringe “Stoic aberration” as James claims and

many others infer, Spinoza's morality is strikingly ordinary in the face of the 17<sup>th</sup> century conversation filled with eclectics, Neostoics, Epicureans, Scholastics, and many others who embraced a variety of ancient traditions that were stirred up in the Renaissance.

Still, it would be disingenuous to say that Spinoza's Stoicism is not unique among the early moderns, even among the Neostoics. What makes Spinoza particular, then, and especially controversial, is that he is the only major figure in modernity that dares to leave intact the more 'embarrassing' aspects of Stoic physics (and metaphysics in a more qualified sense) which the other Neostoics avoided. That is, like those of the Stoics, Spinoza is a pantheist, panpsychic, and monist; he advances a theology of immanence and denies divine transcendence. Although this itself deserves a more detailed study, I do not believe it changes the status of Spinoza in relation to this Hellenistic tradition; his morality is less Stoic than other Neostoics, while his physics is clearly more-so. This simply fits the Neostoic tendency to selectively embrace certain themes in classical Stoicism while rejecting others; Spinoza is unique in how he practices his Neostoicism, not in that he is one.<sup>429</sup>

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<sup>429</sup> For both Spinoza and the Stoics, the line between physics and metaphysics is often blurry. To explore some of these topics apart from discussions of Stoicism properly, I recommend Curley (1969) as well as Melamed (2013). There is no major investigation of Spinoza and the Stoic physics. I hope to pursue this question someday.

## CONCLUSION

Over the course of this dissertation I examined the moral philosophies of René Descartes, Blaise Pascal, and Benedict Spinoza. My first point of investigation was the *morale par provision* of Descartes from the third part of the *Discourse on Method*. In this first chapter, I defended the traditional reading that the provisional morality is a temporary morality, a ‘shelter’ from where to provide moral guidance until a more permanent ‘structure’ is established. Many who reject this traditional reading believe Descartes should be understood as a Stoic. I showed that though it is true that he should be understood as a Neostoic in the *morale par provision*, it is an extension of his writing under a veil of doubt. He enters this mode in the first part of the *Discourse* and does not emerge until the fourth part, after the *morale*. In taking on a skeptical mode, he is mimicking the doubt of Montaigne and Charron who both complete their skeptical accounts by providing a guide to living the good life when ignorant of the good, a life presented as a Stoic Sage. For Descartes, the *morale* is provisional because the doubt is also.

In the second chapter I continued my investigation into Descartes’ ethics, turning to the moral philosophy outlined later in his life through correspondence, most notably with Princess Elisabeth, Pierre Chanut, and Queen Christina. In these letters, Descartes claims that his ethics satisfies the competing traditions of Aristotle, the Stoics, and Epicurus. Creating a moral philosophy that comfortably draws from all three of these traditions, Descartes believes that the Supreme Good is virtue, which is primarily an internal state that is pleasurable in itself, and it can also include external goods. He also claims virtue is obtained through cultivating habit and



practice. In the first half of this chapter, I showed that Descartes creates the intellectual groundwork for doing this through his physics of man, the *Passions of the Soul*. This synthesis is made possible by relocating the cause of the passions: the passions for Descartes are not an intellectual illness that grows from ignorance, but an amoral physiological event. Descartes embraces Stoicism, but not exclusively; he is not forwarding any morality but his own, but his doctrines are often, as he makes clear himself, similar to those of the Stoics, but not exclusively.

I turned to Pascal in my third chapter, arguing that he accepted Stoicism as an alternative morality for those who lack moral good and happiness. An Augustinian in his theology, Pascal provides a binary ethics that divides humanity into two groups based on the objects of their affections, God and created things. Happiness and the Supreme Good, he believes, are only obtained through knowing and loving God. As a Jansenist, Pascal believes that in the postlapsarian state, loving God requires a movement of the will that a person is incapable of making on his or her own, requiring effective grace. However, this means many people will never know true happiness and will remain ignorant to the nature of the good. Since he hopes all people will nonetheless pursue the good life, Pascal does not want to abandon those who do not know God to concupiscence. His answer for the person who does not know the good is to continue to seek God and embrace a Neostoic morality. By reducing one's passions and resigning oneself to the omnibenevolent divine will, though the morally hopeful person lacks tranquility, s/he can still live a moderately content life, markedly better than a wretched life enflamed in the passions. And from this place, s/he can continue to seek God, who is both the source and essence of the *summum bonum*. When Pascal embraces Stoicism, it is not the good life, but an acceptable alternative morality for those who cannot achieve their highest end.

The fourth chapter, on Spinoza, took on a different approach than the previous three. While the previous chapters argued that Descartes and Pascal exhibit Neostoic tendencies in previously misunderstood articulations of their morality, this chapter encountered a Spinoza who is already portrayed as a Stoic moralist by recent commentators. My aim here, then, was to resituate his morality, agreeing that there are many affinities with Stoicism but refusing to accept these similarities at the cost of reducing him to an unqualified Stoic. I showed that in addition to their likeness, Spinoza also has a strong sense of anti-Stoic themes in the *Ethics* that should disqualify him from being an unadulterated Stoic. Given Spinoza's mixture of Stoicism and anti-Stoicism, I more carefully situated him within the Neostoics; this allows for Stoic themes to still be acknowledged in his work, but with the necessary correction that Stoic themes should not be attributed where they are absent.

It is fitting that my final chapter is on Spinoza. The chapters do follow the chronological and philosophical development of these philosophers, beginning with Descartes, then moving to Pascal who enters the discussion of Cartesian thought, and is then followed by Spinoza who enters modernity as it advances from its earliest stages. All else aside, this is already an effective arrangement. But by concluding with Spinoza, I am able to bring attention to the Neostoic tradition in which he falls. That is, there is a broader implication that I intend to draw from this dissertation study beyond better understanding the ethical theory of these authors individually. There is an inclination towards Stoicism in early modernity that begins to emerge when seeing themes common to them all. Stoicism is the 'gravity' of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, a background force that is easily overlooked if a reader is not attentive; but it is always there, lurking just below the surface, shaping and bending the intellectual landscape of authors who otherwise may have little in common. And, like gravity, if attention is paid to the effects of Stoicism during this time, the

impact is not just present but significant. This is the overarching theme that I have worked to demonstrate beyond the examination of each individual philosopher. I end with Spinoza, seeing him as a member of a tradition, Neostoicism, that was shared with Pascal, and before him, Descartes.

There is much more research that deserves to be done on these topics, but this dissertation provides a foundation for these new studies by uncovering the breadth of Stoic influence and the diversity of forms in its adaptation. By design, I hardly think that this research program is over. Many other early modern authors discuss Stoicism, both positively and critically, and my research program provides a framework from which to consider these additional texts. Although the diversity in the thought in Descartes, Pascal, and Spinoza make an effective sample group, by expanding the scope of authors considered in this investigation, the claims that I forwarded will be strengthened or, if necessary, qualified. I am open to the hypothesis, for example, that 17<sup>th</sup> century Neostoicism is a broadly Cartesian phenomenon. This is certainly true of early Cartesians, such as Le Grand and Régis, and though identifying Pascal and Spinoza as Cartesian is contentious, it would not be a radical claim to call some of the Stoic themes in their morality ‘Cartesian.’<sup>430</sup> It could be beneficial to begin one of these future studies with Leibniz, whose turn from Cartesianism is absolute and emphatic, and whose Stoic epithets of Spinoza are intended to be anything but positive. Leibniz’s relation to Stoicism would be a productive first step in testing the thesis of whether Neostoicism is a strictly Cartesian tendency in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. His work would also be an interesting object of study since in his philosophy he embraces themes opposite to Spinoza, such as teleology. Whether this teleology is in some way Stoic, though, I leave for this future project.

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<sup>430</sup> This warrants further investigation for several reasons, including that there is already an exception: Le Grand’s Stoicism predates his Cartesianism.

There is also further work that should be done towards the moral philosophies of the authors I have discussed individually. Concerning Descartes' early morality, a more detailed analysis in the thought of Pierre Charron *vis-à-vis* Descartes is warranted. Richard Popkin and José R. Maia Neto have already contributed important research towards this end,<sup>431</sup> but I believe a slower (and lengthier) study limited to Charron's *On Wisdom* and Descartes' morality in the third part of the *Discourse* would be fruitful. Concerning Descartes' later morality, a broader analysis of the *Passions of the Soul* qua physics of man will help further highlight the relation between Descartes' physics and the applied philosophies (medicine, mechanics, and morals). In Spinoza, a lengthier treatment on teleology, free will, and moral perfectionism as they pertain to Stoicism would be helpful in filling an area of commentary that is still lacking; the same is true for unpacking the correlations between Spinoza and the Stoic physics. At the moment there is a great deal of literature on these topics in isolation<sup>432</sup> and they would provide a fertile ground for developing these ideas further in a Stoic context. A robust account of Spinoza and the Stoic physics still remains to be written, and unlike his morality, I believe it would better bring out the unique aspects of Spinoza's philosophy that are more clearly Stoic.

Pascal leaves the most work still to be done. If I have accomplished nothing else in this dissertation as it pertains to Pascal, my hope is that a reader may become more sympathetic to him as a philosopher, someone who has more to contribute to philosophy than 'the Wager' (for analytic philosophers) or marginal proto-existentialism (for the continentals). Needless to say, there is a great deal to still uncover, including and beyond his Stoicism. A good place to start here may be looking at his *Discours sur les passions de l'amour*. I also would like to see an English translation of the latest manuscript of *Entretien avec M. de Sacy sur Épictète et*

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<sup>431</sup> Popkin (1954) and Maia Neto (2003; 2014).

<sup>432</sup> Curley (1969), Kashap (1987), Della Rocca (1993), Lloyd (1994), Garrett (1999), Manning (2002), Smith (2003), Lin (2006), Youpa (2009), Kisner (2013), Melamed (2013), Kisner and Youpa (2014), and so forth.

*Montaigne* with Pascale Mengotti and Jean Mesnard's introduction. All of the existing translations are of an older and less complete manuscript, and the introduction helps counteract some of the popular misconceptions that currently exist concerning the document's reliability.

Nonetheless, by understanding the Stoic themes present in the moralities of Descartes, Pascal, and Spinoza, it allows for a clearer reading of their texts, reconciling what are apparent inconsistencies in their work and correcting misinterpretations that prevail in present-day commentaries. There are certainly drawbacks with focusing my study on these three authors instead of just choosing one of them; that is, I have had to strike a balance between depth and breadth. However, if I had focused on only one as some others have, it would have lost the greater benefit of uncovering the Stoic inclinations present throughout the period, and that is the ultimate goal of this project.

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## APPENDIX

### MEDIEVAL REFERENCES TO STOICISM

I am sure I have overlooked a great number of references from both major and lesser-known medieval texts, but the list of some references from two of the major figures, Augustine and Aquinas, is helpful to illustrate how the Stoic philosophy was received in the period. That is, they were not forgotten and not always viewed so badly. These are based on occasions of the terms ‘Stoic’ and its variations, plus individual Stoic philosophers (‘Seneca’, ‘Cicero’, ‘Epictetus’, *et al*) as they appeared in *Civitate Dei* and *Summa Theologica*.

#### Augustine

##### Major References

CD IX.4	Stoics agree with Platonists and Peripatetics in different words
CD XIV.8	Stoics believe perturbations in the soul are allowed in the place of grief or sadness.

##### Quotes, Glosses, Minor References

CD I.11	Quotes Antonius on human ends and that godliness is better than wealth
CD IV.30	Stoics still teach a shadow of truth regarding religion
CD V.2	Posidonius the Stoic says twins born and conceived under the same constellation (he read too much astrology)
CD V.9-10	Cicero is wrong to dismiss all foreknowledge in his criticism of the Stoics. Stoics do not say things happen out of necessity but out of destiny. Necessity in the will.
CD VIII.5	The first Principle of Stoicism is Fire; Plato is Better
CD XIV.2	Stoics were wrong to only value the spirit over the body; both will live on in afterlife.
CD XVIII.41	Against Epicureans, Stoics hold that the world was ruled and defended by the gods
CD XIX.1	Discussion on Varro’s accounts of the supreme good. Stoics: supreme good is only in virtue. <sup>433</sup>
CD XIX.4	Perplexion that the Stoics presume to say that there are no ills, though at the same time they permit that the wise man to commit suicide if he cannot, or ought not, to endure his ills. <sup>434</sup>

<sup>433</sup> This is the account that Pascal (mis)quotes from Montaigne’s *Essays* as I discussed in my third chapter.

<sup>434</sup> Pascal says the same thing in *Pensées* S180/L147, but he does not attribute it to Augustine.

## Aquinas

### Major References

<i>ST I-II</i> , Q.24, Art. 2	Stoics do not distinguish between the sensitive and appetitive soul; thus, all the passions are evil. Still, not a big difference between the Stoics and the Peripatetics. Every passion lessens the good of an act.
<i>ST I-II</i> Q.52, Art. 1	Stoics say some things, like art, come in degrees while other things (like virtue) do not.

### Quotes, Glosses, Minor References

<i>ST I-II</i> Q. 59, Art. 2	Cites Augustine's <i>CD IX.4</i> : Stoics and Peripatetics hold same opinion as them.
<i>ST I-II</i> Q. 59, Art. 3	Cites Augustine's <i>CD XIV.8</i> : There are three good passions according to the Stoics, which they identify as disturbances; the wise man has no sorrow.
<i>ST I-II</i> Q. 66, Art. 1	The Stoics believe that virtue does not come in degrees; that no one can be virtuous unless s/he reaches highest degree (and that is wrong). Like Aristotle, it's enough that s/he approaches the mean.
<i>ST I-II</i> Q. 73, Art. 2	Stoics say all sins are equal, which is the source of heresies. Privation, the only aspect of sin considered.
<i>ST II-II</i> Q.123, Art. 10	Stoics say, against Aristotle, that a brave man never uses his anger.
<i>ST III</i> Q. 15, Art. 4, Reply to Obj 2	Notes Tully who references the Stoics, criticizing that they only named the passions that lead to disorderly conduct.
<i>ST III</i> , Q. 15, Art. 6, Obj. 2	Stoics assert there is no one saddened except at the loss of goods; the just man esteems justice and virtue as goods and he cannot lose those.
Reply to Obj 2	Cites Augustine's <i>CD XIV.8</i> , that there are three good passions and the wise man has no sorrow.