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*Osiris*, 2nd Series, Vol. 17, Science and Civil Society. (2002), pp. 25-48.

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*Osiris* is currently published by The University of Chicago Press.

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# Body and Passions: Materialism and the Early Modern State

By *Harold J. Cook\**

## ABSTRACT

A group of works written in the mid-seventeenth-century Netherlands shows many defenders of commerce and republicanism embracing some of the most unsettling tenets of the new and experimental philosophy. Their political arguments were based on a view consonant with Cartesianism, in which the body and its passions for the most part dominate reason, instead of the prevailing idea that reason could and should dominate the passions and through them the body. These arguments were in turn related to some of the new claims about the body that flowed from recent anatomical investigations, in a time and place comfortable with materialism. If ever there were a group of political theorists who grounded their views on contemporary science, this is it: Johann de Witt, the brothers De la Court, and Spinoza. They believed that the new philosophy showed it was unnatural and impoverishing to have a powerful head of state, natural and materially progressive to allow the self-interested pursuit of life, liberty, and happiness.

## INTRODUCTION

**E**STABLISHING THE RELATIONSHIP between knowledge of nature and political systems is a classic problem for twentieth-century historians and philosophers of science. To mention only a few of the many notable arguments along these lines: science has been invoked as the keystone in the arch of truth supporting liberal democratic society against religious doctrine,<sup>1</sup> against the failures of capitalism,<sup>2</sup> Marxism,<sup>3</sup> and totalitarianism.<sup>4</sup> Herbert Butterfield's *The Origin of Modern Science* (1957) embraced the Whiggism of progressive truth, reversing his more relativistic prewar attack on it—or so A. Rupert Hall has argued.<sup>5</sup> During the Cold War the semi-religious importance of mental insight in scientific discovery seemed a key counter-argument to Stalinist materialism.<sup>6</sup> For the English seventeenth century, it has been argued that science grew from a politico-religious movement allied either with

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Dickson White, *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom*, 2 vols. (London and New York: Appleton, 1896).

<sup>2</sup> Boris M. Hessen, "The Social and Economic Roots of Newton's *Principia*," in *Science at the Cross Roads* (1931; reprinted, London: Frank Cass, 1971), pp. 151–212.

<sup>3</sup> G. N. Clark, *Science and Social Welfare in the Age of Newton* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1937).

<sup>4</sup> Karl R. Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, 5th ed., 2 vols. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1966)

<sup>5</sup> A. Rupert Hall, "On Whiggism," *Hist. Sci.* 21 (1983): 45–59.

<sup>6</sup> Alexandre Koyré, "Les Origines de la science moderne," *Diogene* 16 (1956); Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1958).

Puritanism or Anglicanism,<sup>7</sup> or emerged with the foundations of an “open and liberal” society.<sup>8</sup> For early modern Italy and France, it has been argued that science developed from the princely courts or the centralizing state.<sup>9</sup> From postmodernists have come powerful statements about how science is part of the system of modern domination or a means of shattering the public use of reason into nonpublic specialisms.<sup>10</sup> In short, many of the most notable arguments about science have been concerned with exploring the connections between it and politics.

If in light of such discussions one reexamines a group of works written in the mid-seventeenth-century Netherlands, it becomes clear that defenders of commerce and republicanism there embraced some of the most unsettling tenets of the new and experimental philosophy. As they did so, they offered no consolation for either classicists or clerics who believed that humankind should strive to be good. In the view of human nature advanced by the Dutch republicans, the state should not, because it could not, try to make people behave well. The best kind of civil society was the most natural rather than the most virtuous; it was one in which the material betterment of the whole progressed despite the trials and tribulations of individual members. The political arguments of the republicans were based on a view consonant with Cartesianism, in which the body and its passions for the most part dominate reason, rather than on the prevailing idea that reason could and should dominate the passions and through them the body. The views of these republicans were related to some of the new claims about the body that flowed from the recent anatomical discoveries and theories, in a time and place comfortable with materialism. I do not claim that the ideas of the new philosophers, including the anatomists, caused the political arguments advanced in the Dutch Republic, only that those ideas became crucial elements in the works defending republicanism. The republicans fundamentally divided the study of how things are from the pronouncements of moralists in ways that echo down the centuries.

### REASON VERSUS THE PASSIONS

The republicans held that the new philosophy had destroyed the main premises of the old. Since at least Plato’s time, two key concepts had been regularly employed for understanding the public good. One was the idea that an analysis of the public good depends on the individual good: what is good for the person is good for the public. The crucial metaphor here is that of the “body politic,” suggesting that the collectivity is corporeal. A second concept was that of “right reason,” which supposes that

<sup>7</sup> Charles Webster, *The Great Instauration: Science, Medicine, and Reform, 1626–1660* (New York: Holmes & Meyer, 1976); James R. Jacob and Margaret C. Jacob, “The Anglican Origins of Modern Science: The Metaphysical Foundations of the Whig Constitution,” *Isis* 71 (1980): 251–67.

<sup>8</sup> Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air Pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1986).

<sup>9</sup> David S. Lux, *Patronage and Royal Science in Seventeenth-Century France: The Academie de Physique in Caen* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1989); Mario Biagioli, *Galileo Courtier: The Practice of Science in the Culture of Absolutism* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1993).

<sup>10</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 1989); originally published in German as *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* (Darmstadt and Neuwied: Hermann Luchterhand Verlag, 1962). Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Random House, 1973); originally published in French as *Les mots et les choses: une archéologie des sciences humaines* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966).

truth contains more than a distinction between correct and incorrect: it also contains a distinction between good and bad. Coupled together, these notions suggested that the font of personal wisdom contained directions for both individual and collective well-being. A well-regulated state would be composed of people governed by virtue. The so-called scientific revolution, however, altered classical ideas of the body, sometimes challenging concepts of the body politic; it also radically narrowed the view of reason to judgments of true and false, undermining the notion that mortals could know the good by the faculty of reason. It therefore raised deep questions about the nature of private and public virtue, even at times threatening to do away with the metaphor of the body politic.

The classical union of the personal and the political is most clearly expressed in the works of Plato. For him, Aristotle, the Stoics, and numerous other philosophers and their heirs, true knowledge of the *logos*—the eternal meaningful order that lay beneath the appearances of things—revealed both the good and the true; the good and the true were elements of the same ultimate universal. Put another way, natural philosophy was separate from moral philosophy only heuristically: they were simply different ways to a knowledge of the good and the true. Consequently, an identity existed between the knowledgeable life and the moral life. Plato famously distinguished the philosopher from the mere sophist by declaring the former to have a true love of wisdom, or a true desire to gain a knowledge of the *logos* rather than of opinion. His teachings about the true were equally teachings about the good. At the same time, because of the identity between the true and the good, to exercise reason one had to become good. Knowledge transformed. The wise person and the good person were the same; the wiser the better, the better the wiser. For Aristotle, too, to actualize our potential we must gain knowledge and act accordingly. This would make us truly good, for “true pleasures are what seem to [the good man] to be pleasures, and the really pleasant things those which he finds pleasant.” The measure of what is “real and truly human” is “the good man’s pleasures.” Since the good man necessarily sought theoretical wisdom, the quest for wisdom was the highest and most perfect good, and contemplative happiness was therefore the most perfect of pleasures.<sup>11</sup> Stoic philosophers, too, argued for the identity of the moral and the rational. As one recent commentator on Stoicism has noted, the Stoics taught that “a moral person is one who has suppressed irrational movements and who lives in perfect conformity with the divine Logos,” so that “a wise person is a sign, a symbol that elucidates the deepest roots of the universe and its history.”<sup>12</sup> Christian theologians had to wrestle with the problem of the relationship between reason and grace (for they had to allow the good Christian fool to gain salvation when the philosopher might not); but they also took the Creator to be a rational being, which meant that one’s own rational soul participated, at least to a certain extent, in the nature of God. Vigorous and sometimes violent argument went into determining what that “to a

<sup>11</sup> Quotations from Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. J. A. K. Thomson (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1955), 10.5; the definition of perfect happiness is at 10.7–8. See also Nancy Sherman, *The Fabric of Character: Aristotle’s Theory of Virtue* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989); and Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1994), pp. 48–101.

<sup>12</sup> Gerard Verbeke, “Ethics and Logic in Stoicism,” in *Atoms, Pneuma, and Tranquillity: Epicurean and Stoic Themes in European Thought*, ed. Margaret J. Osler (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1991), p. 24.

certain extent” meant. But from at least Augustine forward, most theologians took the view that the cultivation of virtue through reason would at least help on the path toward salvation. Thus virtue came from right reason: from knowing the *logos* and acting in accord with it.

At the same time, Plato and his successors felt free to move from an analysis of the individual good to the public good by employing the concept of the body politic. As Plato’s Socrates put it in the *Gorgias*, “any regularity of the body is called healthiness, and this leads to health being produced in it, and general bodily excellence.” By extension, the regular and orderly states of the soul, “called lawfulness and the law,” are states of “justice and temperance.”<sup>13</sup> A person should strive both for bodily excellence and for justice and temperance in the soul, which meant restraining one’s desires (ἐπιθυμία) according to reason so that no correction from others is necessary for one’s own good. “[B]ut if he have need of it [i.e., correction], either himself or anyone belonging to him, either an individual or a city, then right must be applied and they must be corrected.” In other words, both the body and the *polis* needed governance: the body politic, as well as the personal body, needed to be restrained or, if necessary, corrected by reason. Following Plato, thinking about the *polis* as a person became common, with powerful consequences. Ideas of the body in turn reinforced the sense that the body politic needed a governor. As Shigehisa Kuriyama has recently put it in writing of Greek medicine: “The motions within a person had to spring from some ultimate source. There had to be a ruler.”<sup>14</sup> Following Galen, the governor of the body came to be the head, where reason’s organ, the brain, held sway; hence a just and temperate public order began with the “head of state.” For Christians, the metaphor was altered to indicate that the body of Christ was the gathering of the faithful into the true church, which was opposed to the world of deceit and corruption. But with the political establishment of the Christian church as an arm of Rome, and the former bishop of Rome assuming the headship of the Latin-speaking church, many theologians felt enabled to apply notions of the collective Christian body to the entire body politic, with the Pope as its head. After the revival of Roman law in medieval Europe, the idea of the body politic even took on the color of law, as “corporations” came to obtain charters from the twelfth century onward: these were legal fictions representing in law collective groups—from guilds to whole cities—as if they were a single body (*corpus*).<sup>15</sup> The corporatist nature of medieval and early modern society has been stressed particularly for France, where the notion of the body politic remained closely associated with the king’s own body,<sup>16</sup> but it can be found everywhere in Europe.

Yet everyone understood that both knowing via right reason and acting in accor-

<sup>13</sup> *Gorgias*, in *Plato*, 12 vols., vol. 3: *Lysis, Symposium, Gorgias*, trans. W. R. M. Lamb, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1925), 504 C-D.

<sup>14</sup> Shigehisa Kuriyama, *The Expressiveness of the Body and the Divergence of Greek and Chinese Medicine* (New York: Zone Books, 1999), p. 160.

<sup>15</sup> Antony Black, *Guilds and Civil Society in European Political Thought from the Twelfth Century to the Present* (New York: Methuen, 1984).

<sup>16</sup> Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1957); Jeffrey Merrick, “The Body Politics of French Absolutism,” in *From the Royal to the Republican Body: Incorporating the Political in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century France*, ed. Sarah E. Melzer and Kathryn Norberg (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1998), pp. 11–31; and Susan McClary, “Unruly Passions and Courtly Dances: Technologies of the Body in Baroque Music,” in *Republican Body*, pp. 85–112.

dance with it are very difficult for mortals. The major problem is that the “passions”—in most representations the middle part of the soul, intimately associated with the bodily spirits and desires<sup>17</sup>—keep one from knowing or acting according to the dictates of reason. For most philosophers and theologians, then, reason needed to dominate, check, or eliminate the passions.<sup>18</sup> In Plato’s virtuous person, “the ruling principle of reason, and the two subject ones of spirit and desire are equally agreed that reason ought to rule.”<sup>19</sup> Aristotle argued for tempering the passions so that they were not too low or too high; since they caused motions in the soul that could lead to good actions, the passions were not bad if properly checked by reason.<sup>20</sup> Stoics usually took a harder line, teaching that peace of mind and social harmony could come only through the extirpation of the passions by reason.<sup>21</sup>

In contradistinction to classical notions, however, the concept of “reason” was radically narrowed in the late Renaissance and early modern period: it came to depend on knowledge that entered the mind via the senses—experience (and later “experiment”)—rather than either innate or transcendent understanding. It was a knowledge of “thingness.” This had the advantage of making knowledge equally communicable among those with healthy senses. Proper reason in such people could apprehend the stuff of nature (after pinning down Proteus in order to discard mere appearance), and it could calculate what would happen provided a true account had been apprehended. Reason therefore understood truths about being, or existence (“objective” truths). The foundation for reasoning about truths concerning the good, however, had to be found in something outside nature (subjective experience), for which there could be no shared sensation, or in nature itself (which raised the danger of pantheism, paganism, and other heresies).

When this narrowed sense of reason was applied to the public, one obtained a view known as *raison d'état*. Despite the term’s being best known in its French form, French thinkers owed a great deal to Italian discourses on *ragione degli stati*; the Italians in turn owed much to the infamous Machiavelli.<sup>22</sup> Machiavelli believed that the state acts from the same causes as a person does, including the ways in which astral emanations affect the humors of the body politic.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, as the phrase makes clear, the main goal of *raison d'état* remained that of setting out the means by which reason could dominate the body politic. As Cardinal Richelieu, that well-known exponent of *raison d'état*, put it: because man’s nature<sup>24</sup> possesses reason,

<sup>17</sup> Katharine Park, “The Organic Soul,” in *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, ed. Charles B. Schmitt, Quentin Skinner, Eckhard Kessler et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1988), 464–84.

<sup>18</sup> Juda Sihvola and Troels Engberg-Pedersen, eds., *The Emotions in Hellenistic Philosophy* (Dordrecht, South Holland: Kluwer, 1998).

<sup>19</sup> *Republic*, 4.442, in *The Dialogues of Plato*, trans. Benjamin Jowett, 3d ed. (New York and London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1892).

<sup>20</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics* (cit. n. 11), bk. 2. Aristotle’s work on *Rhetoric*, for instance, stressed the importance of the deliberative and epideictic forms, by which one could achieve the good by putting the passions to the service of reason: *Rhetoric*, 1.3–9.

<sup>21</sup> For a lively discussion of Stoic views of the passions, see Nussbaum, *Therapy of Desire* (cit. n. 11), pp. 316–401; on the early modern interpretations of the same, see Jill Krave, “Moral Philosophy,” in *Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy* (cit. n. 17), pp. 364–7.

<sup>22</sup> Peter Burke, “Tacitism, Scepticism, and Reason of State,” in *The Cambridge History of Political Thought, 1450–1700*, ed. J. H. Burns and Mark Goldie (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1991), especially pp. 479–84.

<sup>23</sup> Anthony J. Parel, *The Machiavellian Cosmos* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 1992).

<sup>24</sup> He meant this to apply only exceptionally to women.

“he ought to make reason sovereign, which requires not only that he do nothing not in conformity with it, but also that he make all those who are under his authority reverence it and follow it religiously.”<sup>25</sup> By “making” the governed reverence the reason known to their governors, however, we are in a world quite different from that in which people can agree on the true and the good discovered by right reason. Moreover, the politico-jurisprudential ideas of Hugo Grotius and his successors were grounded in the fundamental principle of self-preservation, which became the first “natural right” and the basis of “natural jurisprudence.”<sup>26</sup> Many French authors in particular took the discussion of self-preservation further by considering the passions associated with it: most notably Jean-François Senault, François de La Rochefoucauld, and Blaise Pascal developed the notion of *amour-propre*,<sup>27</sup> in which self-preservation was intimately tied to the love of praise, or pride.<sup>28</sup>

According to this new sense of reason, then, it could calculate and follow arguments of logic or interest, but when it came to understanding the good it could only demonstrate material truths, such as the fundamental necessity for self-preservation and other passions in driving human conduct. The new science therefore posed a predicament for anyone who wished to grasp the human condition: the good had to be either limited to objective “flourishing” and other physical goods, or founded on some subjective principle open to doubt. If the latter, people had to be subject to a power they could not reason about (or at least not always agree with), leading to tyranny; if the former, then materialist self-indulgence rather than virtue seemed the consequence.

The best example of the former argument is Thomas Hobbes’s invocation of a powerful sovereign, echoing Richelieu’s view. Hobbes took a more explicitly materialist line, however, developing his ideas about how “whatever we experience, whether in sleep or waking, or at the hands of a malicious demon, has been caused by some material object or objects impinging upon us.” According to Richard Tuck’s recent analysis of the origins of Hobbes’s natural philosophy, Hobbes turned seriously to a study of the new philosophy during his visit to France in 1634–1637, where he became a member of the Mersenne circle and gained an acquaintance with the work of René Descartes and Pierre Gassendi, among others. His materialism owed much to Galileo’s discussion of heat in *Il Saggiatore* (1623) and possibly to Gassendi’s Epicureanism, in which sense-perceptions are signs of some material cause.<sup>29</sup> Hobbes therefore also accepted the narrowing of reason. Hobbesian reason depended on being sure of first principles and the evidence gathered from the senses from which one could calculate outcomes. This view of reason gave one access to

<sup>25</sup> *The Political Testament of Cardinal Richelieu*, ed. and trans. by Henry Bertram Hill (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1961), pp. 70–1. The treatise was probably extant by the late 1630s, although it was not published until 1688.

<sup>26</sup> Richard Tuck, *Philosophy and Government, 1572–1651* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1993).

<sup>27</sup> Anthony Levi, *French Moralists: The Theory of the Passions, 1585 to 1649* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), pp. 225–33; see also the fine recent work of Susan James, *Passion and Action: The Emotions in Seventeenth-Century Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1997).

<sup>28</sup> Arthur O. Lovejoy, *Reflections on Human Nature* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1961), pp. 129–215; Nannerl O. Keohane, *Philosophy and the State in France: The Renaissance to the Enlightenment* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1980).

<sup>29</sup> Richard Tuck, “Hobbes and Descartes,” in *Perspectives on Thomas Hobbes*, ed. G. A. J. Rogers and Alan Ryan (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), pp. 11–41, on p. 40; for an attack on Tuck’s views, see Perez Zagorin, “Hobbes’s Early Philosophical Development,” *J. Hist. Ideas* 54 (1993): 505–18.

physical truths, but did not give one access to innate moral truths, causing differences of opinion to arise. As a consequence, the state needed a powerful sovereign to make his subjects conform to his views.

In his *Leviathan* (1651), Hobbes developed the implications of these premises. In brief, he rooted his view of human nature in the idea that everything could be reduced to matter and motion.<sup>30</sup> “Life is but a motion of Limbs, the beginning of which is in some principall part within,” he declared in the second sentence of *Leviathan*.<sup>31</sup> The signs of life within, in turn took their origin from the passions, which responded to stimuli. As he put it in his work on human nature, “the Passions of Man . . . are the Beginning of voluntary Motions.” Later, he says, “Sense proceedeth from the Action of external Objects upon the Brain, or some internal Substance of the Head; and . . . the Passions proceed from the Alteration there made, and continued to the Heart.”<sup>32</sup> He began his science of politics traditionally enough, with the Delphic (and Socratic) *nosce teipsum* (read thyself). This teaches “that for the similitude of the thoughts, and Passions of one man, to the thoughts, and Passions of another, whosoever looketh into himself, and considereth what he doth, when he does think, opine, reason, hope, fear, &c., and upon what grounds; he shall thereby read and know, what are the thoughts, and Passions of all other men, upon the like occasions.”<sup>33</sup> Hobbes continued by explaining the way sense, imagination, speech, and reason worked in the personal body. Having laid out these fundamental preliminaries, Hobbes moved in chapter six of *Leviathan* to deal with “the Interiour Beginnings of Voluntary Motions; commonly called the PASSIONS. And the Speeches by which they are expressed.”<sup>34</sup> He divided the passions into those stemming from appetite or desire and those stemming from aversion, from attraction and repulsion, love and hate (with the addition of “contempt” for “those things, which we neither Desire, nor Hate”). Hobbes therefore defined “good” as simply another word for “whatsoever is the object of any man’s Appetite or Desire,” and “evil” as “the object of his Hate, and Aversion”<sup>35</sup> (just as had the opponents of Socrates in the *Gorgias*). Hobbes acknowledged that the passions tended to make people disinclined toward civil duties, censorious, and subject to whims of fancy and rash deliberation; human life tended to “consisteth almost in nothing else but a perpetuall contention for [personal] Honor, Riches, and Authority.” As he famously concluded from this, the natural condition of man was that of war.<sup>36</sup>

Nevertheless, Hobbes’s message was that while conflicting passions pose “indeed

<sup>30</sup> For some of Hobbes’s further views on matter and motion, see his *Dialogus physicus* (1661), translated in Shapin and Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air Pump* (cit. n. 8), pp. 345–91; and Thomas Hobbes, *Thomas White’s ‘De mundo’ Examined*, trans. Harold Whitmore Jones (London: Bradford Univ. Press, 1976).

<sup>31</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1991), p. 9.

<sup>32</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Humane Nature: Or The Fundamental Elements of Policy. Being A Discovery of the Faculties Acts and Passions of the Soul of Man, From their Original causes; According to such Philosophical Principles As are not commonly known or asserted. The Third Edition, Augmented and much corrected by the Authors own hand* (London: Printed for Matthew Gilliflower, Henry Rogers, and Tho. Fox, 1684), pp. 30, 63.

<sup>33</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan* (cit. n. 31), p. 10.

<sup>34</sup> He had announced in Aug. 1635 “his intention of being the first writer to speak sense in plain English on the ‘faculties and passions of the soul,’” and he dealt with the passions in his first political treatise, in 1640: Johann P. Sommerville, *Thomas Hobbes: Political Ideas in Historical Context* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1992), pp. 13, 14.

<sup>35</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan* (cit. n. 31), p. 120.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 86–90 (chap. 13).



great difficulties,” by “Education, and Discipline, they may bee, and are sometimes reconciled.”<sup>37</sup> Both reason and a few of the passions (fear of death, desire to live commodiously, and hope) inclined people to peace, for reason taught that the ends desired by our passions can best be achieved not through war but through cooperation. All the virtues could therefore be shown to be rooted in actions that help people to achieve peaceful, sociable, and comfortable living. But because reason had power to judge only the true rather than the good, it could not be trusted always to anticipate the future correctly: it could not know whether some action actually furthered peace. Consequently, people would differ and so remain in a state of conflict unless judgment rooted in an agreed-upon authority (an arbitrator or a sovereign) could be applied.<sup>38</sup> This new view of reason made a powerful monarch necessary to peace and order. Indeed, one of the most famous depictions of the body politic is an engraving, published on the title page of the first edition of Hobbes’s *Leviathan*, with a body of people and the head of a king.

The most philosophical English alternative to the Hobbesian vision of a powerful sovereign revived the argument for right reason.<sup>39</sup> James Harrington’s *Oceana* (1656) countered Hobbes’s vision by backing off from Hobbes’s materialism. Harrington believed that a republican senate could exercise right reason and thereby control the passions in the body politic. To support his views, he borrowed heavily from vitalist views of the body, particularly those of Jan Baptista van Helmont and William Harvey.<sup>40</sup> Like Hobbes, Harrington believed that the passions needed to be dominated by reason: when first defining government, Harrington took note of the classical view that when government of reason degenerated into government of passion, the three good kinds of government degenerated into the three bad kinds.<sup>41</sup> Distinguishing between the internal and the external principles of government (virtue and wealth), Harrington famously went on to treat the goods of wealth and fortune first. But when he shortly returned to a discussion of the internal principles of authority—virtue—he took up the common distinction between right reason and the passions. When the passions take over the mind, one falls into “vice and the bondage of sin”; when reason takes over, one finds “virtue and freedom of soul.” Since “government is no other than the soul of a nation or city,” the question Harrington posed is how to obtain government by the use of right reason. His answer was that the reason of humankind as a whole comes “the nearest unto right reason.” Hence, he began by treating popular government, in which those who are considered the wisest—who are also the most virtuous,<sup>42</sup> as we know from the classical definition of right reason—will become the senators. A debating senate therefore became the embodi-

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 483.

<sup>38</sup> Quentin Skinner, “Thomas Hobbes: Rhetoric and the Construction of Morality,” *Proc. Brit. Acad.* 76 (1990): 1–61.

<sup>39</sup> For other views, see Sarah Barber, *Regicide and Republicanism: Politics and Ethics in the English Revolution, 1646–1659* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 1998).

<sup>40</sup> Wm. Craig Diamond, “Natural Philosophy in Harrington’s Political Thought,” *J. Hist. Phil.* 16 (1978): 387–98; I. Bernard Cohen, “Harrington and Harvey: A Theory of State Based on the New Physiology,” *J. Hist. Ideas* 55 (1994): 187–210. Sir Matthew Hale also borrowed heavily from Van Helmont: see Alan Cromartie, *Sir Matthew Hale, 1609–1676: Law, Religion and Natural Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1995), pp. 206–8, 218–9, 223, 227.

<sup>41</sup> That is, monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy degenerated into tyranny, oligarchy, and anarchy.

<sup>42</sup> James Harrington, *The Commonwealth of Oceana and a System of Politics*, ed. J. G. A. Pocock (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1992), pp. 10, 19, 22, 35.

ment of right reason in a popular government.<sup>43</sup> Right reason, dominating the passions, provided the necessary foundation for good government: true liberty is rooted in “the empire of [right] reason.”<sup>44</sup> Or so English opponents of Hobbes and other materialists contended.

#### DESCARTES AND THE GOODNESS OF THE PASSIONS

Almost all seventeenth-century commentators, then, continued to believe that reason must control the passions in the body politic, whether that be virtuous right reason or calculating *raison d'état*. But one great exception lay behind the views of the Dutch republicans: the analysis of René Descartes as expressed in his last work, *On the Passions of the Mind* (*Les Passions de l'ame*) (1649). His was a most powerful alternative, much more accepting of the passions as expressions of nature in us and therefore as good. In any case, in only a few people could reason control the passions. Therefore, understanding them and embracing them was far better than attempting to control them and suffering the anxieties that the failure to do so brought on. Descartes was led to this position through his conversations with the princess Elizabeth.

Like Hobbes and so many other contemporaries, Descartes employed the limited view of reason that ascribes to it the ability to take in information from the senses and calculate the consequences, but not the ability to grasp innate ideas about the good. Consequently, “when Descartes speaks of the judgments of the reason which the will should follow he does not identify reason with ‘right reason’ . . . but insists only on the attempt to judge correctly while acknowledging the fallibility of the human speculative faculty.” Moreover, “when he is on the point of undertaking the method, he is clearly prepared to dissociate in practice the principles governing the conduct of life from those which govern the quest for intellectual certainty,” unlike someone guided by classical right reason.<sup>45</sup> Hence the radical doubt about all former opinions with which he begins his *Meditations of First Philosophy* (1641). While Descartes’s famous discussion of *cogito* might satisfy some that God existed, it was not clear from that proof that ethical consequences followed. Indeed, Descartes himself wrote no work on ethics or politics (perhaps because he died too soon to reply to Hobbes). To questioners he simply made it clear that he had already done the metaphysical work necessary for people to get on with the “most desirable” business of studying “physical and observable things,” which would yield “abundant benefits for life.”<sup>46</sup>

<sup>43</sup> In his *System of Politics* (probably composed c. 1661, published in 1700), Harrington further declared: “Formation of government is the creation of a political creature after the image of the philosophical creature, or it is an infusion of the soul or faculties of man into the body of the multitude”; so that “The more the soul or faculties of man . . . are refined or made incapable of passion, the more perfect is the form of government.” Quoted from *ibid.*, p. 273 (chap. IV, 10 and 11).

<sup>44</sup> Quoted in Mark Goldie, “The Civil Religion of James Harrington,” in *The Languages of Political Theory in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Anthony Pagden (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1987), p. 211; see also J. A. I. Champion, *The Pillars of Priestcraft Shaken: The Church of England and Its Enemies, 1660–1730* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1992), pp. 198–208.

<sup>45</sup> Levi, *French Moralists* (cit. n. 27), pp. 295, 246. See also Steven Shapin, “Descartes the Doctor: Rationalism and Its Therapies,” *Brit. J. Hist. Sci.* 33 (2000): 131–54.

<sup>46</sup> *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, ed. and trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch et al., 3 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1985–1991), vol. 3, pp. 346–7 (hereafter cited as CSMK).

Even more, Descartes famously took the study of the human body seriously and developed the consequences of his study in many of his works. One of his first major studies, written about 1629–1633 (but published posthumously), was the *Treatise on Man*. He began by analyzing the body as “a statue or machine made of earth, which God forms with the explicit intention of making it as much as possible like us.” It contained all the bones, nerves, muscles, veins, and other parts necessary. “I assume that if you do not already have sufficient first-hand knowledge of them, you can get a learned anatomist to show them to you—at any rate, those which are large enough to be seen with the naked eye.”<sup>47</sup> Among the learned anatomists with whom he himself was acquainted, and with whom he had observed anatomical investigations, were the Dutch professors François dela Boë Sylvius of Leiden and Henricus Regius of Utrecht. It is likely to have been Sylvius (one of whose students first defended William Harvey’s views on the circulation of the blood)<sup>48</sup> who introduced Descartes to the new anatomy. Descartes may have gotten the cause of the circulation of the blood wrong, but he was an early defender of the concept.<sup>49</sup> It is also likely that it was contemporary Dutch anatomists who exposed the pineal gland, an organ famously made much of by Descartes, as the central part of the brain.<sup>50</sup> He clearly believed that his new philosophy and physiology would lead to improvements in health: “the maintenance of health,” he wrote in *Discourse on Method* (1637), “is undoubtedly the chief good and the foundation of all other goods in this life,” and better health can be achieved through improvements to medicine made by his useful philosophical system.<sup>51</sup> In 1645 he repeated to the Marquess of Newcastle that “the preservation of health has always been the principal end of my studies,” and in 1646 he wrote to Hector-Pierre Chanut (the French resident in Stockholm) that because of this, “I have spent much more time” on medical topics than on moral philosophy and physics.<sup>52</sup> For Descartes, “the good” therefore appears to be bodily well-being: “in his *Discours*, Descartes seems . . . to envisage the spiritual perfection of man as a function of medicine, a practical application of the exact deductive physics.”<sup>53</sup> At the same time Descartes was occupied with medical concerns, local physicians became some of his most important allies: Regius’s physiological interpretations of Descartes’s views led to the first major controversy over Cartesianism; the notes of a medical student, Frans Burman, on his conversation with Descartes in 1648 are some of the most revealing explanations for his views; it was another Leiden physician, Florentius Schuyl, who discovered, translated, and brought out Descartes’s *Treatise on Man* (in Latin) in 1662; and physicians remained among

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 99.

<sup>48</sup> Roger French, “Harvey in Holland: Circulation and the Calvinists,” in *The Medical Revolution of the Seventeenth Century*, ed. Roger French and Andrew Wear (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1989), pp. 46–86; M. J. van Lieburg, “Isaac Beeckman and His Diary—Notes on William Harvey’s Theory on Bloodcirculation,” *Janus* 69 (1982): 161–83.

<sup>49</sup> Geoffrey Gorham, “Mind-Body Dualism and the Harvey-Descartes Controversy,” *J. Hist. Ideas* 55 (1994): 211–34.

<sup>50</sup> This suggestion was shared with me by Harm Beukers and is based on the large remaining part of Rembrandt’s *Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Joan Deyman* (1656), which represents a method of dissecting the brain that would have highlighted the pineal gland.

<sup>51</sup> CSMK (cit. n. 46), vol. 1, pp. 142–3.

<sup>52</sup> Descartes to the marquess of Newcastle, Oct. 1645, and Descartes to Chanut, 15 June 1646, CSMK (cit. n. 46), vol. 3, pp. 275, 289.

<sup>53</sup> Levi, *French Moralists* (cit. n. 27), p. 248.

the most numerous and important Cartesians in the middle decades of the century.<sup>54</sup>

Descartes, then, became famous—or infamous—for incorporating fresh discoveries in anatomy and physiology into a view of the human body as a machine-like system. (The clear and distinct difference between body and soul has ever since been known as Cartesian dualism, and ideas of the mechanical body have been associated with Cartesianism, even when their authors have clearly argued against Descartes's views.) The rational soul, as an incorporeal entity, could direct some aspects of the corporeal body through the means of the pineal gland if it chose, but it was not necessary. In this way, the human body functioned just like other animal bodies, even though the latter had no souls. Descartes himself held complex views on the relationship between body and soul, however, which came out clearly in his work on the passions. As he noted at the beginning of his *Treatise on Man*, to fully explain our beings he had to “describe the body on its own; then the soul, again on its own; and finally I must show how these two natures would have to be joined and united in order to constitute men who resemble us.”<sup>55</sup> When it came to analyzing the union of body and soul he, like his contemporaries, turned to the passions.

Although Descartes had already given some thought to the passions earlier, his close consideration of them was pressed on him by Princess Elizabeth, daughter of the ill-fated “Winter King,” Prince Frederick of the Palatinate, and his wife, Elizabeth, sister of Charles I of England. Descartes had heard through mutual acquaintances in late 1642 that the princess, then residing in The Hague, was reading his *Meditations*, and he managed an introduction, which led to a life-long relationship.<sup>56</sup> In a letter of 6 May 1643, Elizabeth pointed out that while Descartes had discussed how matters of soul and body had to be distinguished from one another and considered according to different clear and distinct notions, he had left an important question unanswered: How do the two interact? More precisely, how could the soul—in his view a thinking substance only—get the bodily spirits to exhibit voluntary actions? Descartes replied by letter two weeks later, arguing that the soul had two aspects we could know: it thinks, and it acts on and is acted on by the body. “About the second I have said hardly anything,” he confessed, since his first philosophical aim had been “to prove the distinction between the soul and the body, and to this end only the first was useful, and the second might have been harmful.” Pressed further by Elizabeth, he felt compelled to take up a discussion of cognition, but he left the problem vague for the moment. Understandably confused, Elizabeth nevertheless persisted, causing him to put her off: it was when one refrained from philosophy that one understood the union of soul and body most clearly, he wrote. “It does not seem to me that the human mind is capable of forming a very distinct conception

<sup>54</sup> Theo Verbeek, *La querelle d'Utrecht: René Descartes et Martin Schoock* (Paris: Les impressions nouvelles, 1988); idem, *Descartes and the Dutch: Early Reactions to Cartesian Philosophy, 1637–1650* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1992); idem, ed., *Descartes et Regius* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994); G. A. Lindeboom, *Florentius Schuyl (1619–1669) en zijn betekenis voor het Cartesianisme in de geneeskunde* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974); C. L. Thijssen-Schoute, *Nederlands Cartesianisme* (1954; reprinted, Utrecht: Hes Uitgevers, 1989); for Burman, see CSMK (cit. n. 46), vol. 3, pp. 332–54.

<sup>55</sup> CSMK (cit. n. 46), vol. 1, pp. 99.

<sup>56</sup> Descartes to Princess Elizabeth, 6 Oct. 1642, CSMK (cit. n. 46), vol. 3, pp. 214–5; Léon Petit, *Descartes et la Princesse Elisabeth: Roman d'Amour Vécu* (Paris: Éditions A.-G. Nizet, 1969).

of both the distinction between the soul and the body and their union” at the same time. The notion of a union of body and soul was something “everyone invariably experiences.” He then more or less told her to forget about the problem, instructing her to “feel free” to think what she wanted, that she should understand “the principles of metaphysics” once during her lifetime, but thinking about them too long and hard would be “very harmful.”<sup>57</sup> Rather than explain further, then, he begged off. Understandably, Descartes’s answers did not satisfy Elizabeth.

But a year later he came back to a discussion of the relation between the soul and the body due to medical considerations.<sup>58</sup> Elizabeth was not well and had decided on a course of diet and exercise, which Descartes approved. But he clearly agreed with her that the cause of her ill health was the result of a troubled mind. “There is no doubt that the soul has great power over the body, as is shown by the great bodily changes produced by anger, fear and other passions.”<sup>59</sup> In giving advice on how thinking could restore one to health, Descartes was making arguments about reason, the passions, and the bodily spirits that almost every learned physician of the day would second, for affections of the mind constituted one of the six non-naturals. He seemed to hold generally that the passions greatly affected the actions of the heart and other organs, thereby causing the putrefactions in the blood that gave rise to fevers.<sup>60</sup> In advising Elizabeth as he did, then, Descartes was returning to one of the main points of his work: its utility for medicine. But in doing so he was again forced to confront the relationship between soul and body. When he did, he minimized the power of reason to affect the passions directly:

The soul guides the spirits into the places where they can be useful or harmful; however, it does not do this directly through its volition, but only by willing or thinking about something else. For our body is so constructed that certain movements in it follow naturally upon certain thoughts: as we see that blushes accompany shame, tears compassion, and laughter joy. I know no thought more proper for preserving health than a strong conviction and firm belief that the architecture of our bodies is so thoroughly sound that when we are well we cannot easily fall ill except through extraordinary excess or infectious air or some other external cause.<sup>61</sup>

Elizabeth’s health nevertheless grew increasingly delicate, which Descartes attributed mainly to the continued bad news regarding her family’s fortunes: it was increasingly clear in these last years of what became known as the Thirty Years’ War that her family would not be restored to the princely throne of the Palatinate; more immediately, despite the brilliant efforts of her brother Rupert, the war in England against her uncle Charles I had been going badly. Elizabeth felt distresses of such a sort that “right reason does not command us to oppose them directly or to try to remove them,” wrote Descartes. He took up the traditional point of view, writing that “I know only one remedy for this: so far as possible to distract our imagination and senses from them [i.e., misfortunes], and when obliged by prudence to consider

<sup>57</sup> CSMK (cit. n. 46), vol. 3, pp. 217 n. 1, 217–20, 218, 217–20, 226–9, especially pp. 227 and 228.

<sup>58</sup> Descartes to Princess Elizabeth, July 1647, *Oeuvres de Descartes*, ed. Charles Adam and Paul Tannery (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1971–1975), vol. 5, pp. 64–6 (hereafter cited as AT).

<sup>59</sup> CSMK (cit. n. 46), vol. 3, p. 237.

<sup>60</sup> Theo Verbeek, “Les passions et la fièvre: L’idée de la maladie chez Descartes et quelques cartésiens néerlandais,” *Tractrix* 1 (1989): 45–61.

<sup>61</sup> CSMK (cit. n. 46), vol. 3, p. 237.

them, to do so with our intellect alone.”<sup>62</sup> Descartes went on to distinguish between the intellect on the one hand and the imagination and senses on the other. The imagination and senses governed the passions and affected the spirits and body; the intellect was separate and had the power to direct the imagination (and so the passions). Descartes had even cured himself of ill health by looking at things “from the most favorable angle,” he declared. In a following letter a few days later, Descartes tried to soothe his distressed patient by sympathizing with her and by declaring that “the best minds are those in which the passions are most violent and act most strongly on their bodies.” But following a night’s sleep, one can “begin to restore one’s mind to tranquillity” by concentrating on the good news, “for no events are so disastrous . . . that they cannot be considered in some favorable light by a person of intelligence.” Perhaps study would help to distract her, he suggested.<sup>63</sup>

Elizabeth agreed, and they began an epistolary conversation about the Stoic philosopher Seneca’s *De vita beata*. For the next several months, their discussion focused on reason and the passions and continued until the end of Descartes’ life.<sup>64</sup> Descartes began by defending a neo-Stoic position (which he thought consistent with what he had put forward in the *Discourse on Method*). One should employ reason to discover what should and should not be done in all circumstances; one should resolve to do as reason directs “without being diverted by . . . passions or appetites. Virtue, I believe, consists precisely in sticking firmly to this resolution,” and one should acknowledge that all goods that one does not possess are beyond one’s power and so not worth thinking about. “So we must conclude that the greatest felicity of man depends on the right use of reason” and the controlling of the passions by this. Put another way, “happiness consists solely in contentment of mind . . . but in order to achieve contentment which is solid we need to pursue virtue—that is to say, to maintain a firm and constant will to bring about everything we judge to be the best, and to use all the power of our intellect in judging well.” Elizabeth objected that many, including those who are ill, do not have the free use of their reason that Descartes’s views assumed. He agreed that “what I said in general about every person should be taken to apply only to those who have the free use of their reason and in addition know the way that must be followed to reach such happiness.” That is, some people do not know how to think properly about happiness, and others have a bodily indisposition that prevents them from acting freely. But he came back to the neo-Stoic view that the passions are vain imaginings, or distortions of reason—that is, errors of mind—so that “the true function of reason . . . is to examine and consider without passion” one’s true good and to “subject one’s passions to reason.”<sup>65</sup>

Still not satisfied, Elizabeth asked Descartes, in her letter of 13 September 1645, to give “a definition of the passions, in order to make them well known.”<sup>66</sup> In order

<sup>62</sup> Descartes to Princess Elizabeth, [May or June] 1645 [I believe it a good guess to date it at about the time of the battle of Naseby, which took place on 14 June], CSMK (cit. n. 46), vol. 3, p. 249, except that they translate *la vraye raison* (AT [cit. n. 58], vol. 4, p. 218) as “true reason” rather than “right reason.”

<sup>63</sup> Descartes to Princess Elizabeth, June 1645, CSMK (cit. n. 46), vol. 3, pp. 251, 253–4.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 12 July, 4 Aug., 18 Aug., 1 Sept., 15 Sept., 6 Oct., 3 Nov. 1645; Jan., May, Sept., Oct./Nov., Dec. 1646; March, 10 May 1647; 31 Jan. 1648; 22 Feb., June, 9 Oct. 1649, CSMK (cit. n. 46), vol. 3, pp. 255–73, 276–8, 281–3, 285–8, 292–5, 296–8, 304–5, 314–5, 317–9, 323–4, 328–30, 367–8, 378–9, 382–3.

<sup>65</sup> CSMK (cit. n. 46), vol. 3, pp. 257–8, 262, 264–5.

<sup>66</sup> Robert Stoothoof, preface to *The Passions of the Soul*, in CSMK (cit. n. 46), vol. 1, p. 325.

to comply with her request, Descartes returned to a consideration of animal physiology. At the same time, his physiological views, as expressed by Regius in Utrecht, were leading to condemnations of Descartes's philosophy. Occupied with concerns on at least these two fronts about how to express his views on the body, Descartes began to dig deeper and arrived at some new conclusions. He began by discarding a number of common associations of the word "passion" and limiting his investigations to "the thoughts that come from some special agitation of the spirits, whose effects are felt as in the soul itself,"<sup>67</sup> writing that he had begun to consider these in detail. In his letters, he began to make excuses for not continuing along these lines, while engaging in a long discussion with Elizabeth about free will. But by early 1646, he had drafted a work on the passions, which he sent to Elizabeth for comment.

In this draft treatise, Descartes explained that the movements of the blood accompanying each passion were grounded in physical and physiological principles, and that "our soul and our body" are very closely linked. But he also acknowledged that "the remedies against excessive passions are difficult to practise" and "insufficient to prevent bodily disorders." He still believed that such remedies might free the soul of domination by the passions so as to enable "free judgement." But now "it is only desires for evil or superfluous things that need controlling"; certainly "it is better to be guided by experience in these matters than by reason." A few months later, in writing to Hector-Pierre Chanut about how to present his philosophical views to Queen Christina (in an attempt to secure her patronage), Descartes declared that despite Chanut's expectations, "in examining the passions I have found almost all of them to be good, and to be so useful in this life that our soul would have no reason to wish to remain joined to its body even for one minute if it could not feel them."<sup>68</sup> In late 1647, Descartes sent copies of his 1645 letters to Elizabeth and the draft treatise on the passions to the queen;<sup>69</sup> he returned to working on his treatise on animals in 1648. *Les Passions de l'ame* appeared in November 1649, just three months before Descartes's death in Stockholm.

The published version of the treatise began by noting that "The defects of the sciences we have from the ancients are nowhere more apparent than in their writings on the passions." While he continued to treat topics of soul and body separately, and to see the passions as acting on the soul in the same way that objects made themselves known through sight, he also wished to show that one of the two kinds of thought proceeding from the soul is the passions (the other being volition). Moreover, "[T]he various perceptions or modes of knowledge present in us may be called [the soul's] passions." These perceptions may be caused by the soul or by the body. Because the passions were products of body as much as of mind, they could not be directly controlled by volition (this reiterated his epistolary exposition of 1644). Reason could control volition, and hence people possess free will, but volition cannot control the passions directly. "Our passions . . . cannot be directly aroused or

<sup>67</sup> CSMK (cit. n. 46), vol. 3, p. 271.

<sup>68</sup> Descartes to Princess Elizabeth, May 1646, CSMK (cit. n. 46), vol. 3, pp. 285–8; Descartes to Chanut, 1 Nov. 1646, CSMK (cit. n. 46), vol. 3, p. 290. That he was then beginning to lobby a convinced neo-Epicurean may also have had its effects in convincing him of the goodness of the passions: see Susanna Åkerman, *Queen Christina of Sweden and Her Circle: The Transformation of a Seventeenth-Century Philosophical Libertine* (Leiden: Brill, 1991).

<sup>69</sup> CSMK (cit. n. 46), vol. 1, p. 327.

suppressed by the action of our will, but only indirectly through the representation of things which are usually joined with the passions we wish to have and opposed to the passions we wish to reject." The body affected the passions greatly: "the soul cannot readily change or suspend its passions" because the passions "are nearly all accompanied by some disturbance which takes place in the heart and consequently also throughout the blood and the animal spirits."<sup>70</sup>

Descartes held out the possibility that some people might be able to master these powerful forces: "undoubtedly the strongest souls belong to those in whom the will by nature can most easily conquer the passions and stop the bodily movements which accompany them." And "Even those who have the weakest souls could acquire absolute mastery over all their passions if we employed sufficient ingenuity in training and guiding them." Yet the only hope for mastering the passions came from habits and mental exercises that anticipated events beforehand, what one's own reactions would be, and what one hoped to do in the circumstances. "I must admit that there are few people who have sufficiently prepared themselves" by the constant use of forethought and diligence "for all the contingencies of life," and "no amount of human wisdom is capable of counteracting these movements [in the body] when we are not adequately prepared to do so." Therefore, it was actually by strengthening one of the passions themselves that one achieved inner freedom: the "key to all the other virtues and a general remedy for every disorder of the passions" is that of generosity. "True generosity . . . causes a person's self-esteem to be as great as it may legitimately be" and has two parts: "The first consists in his knowing that nothing truly belongs to him but this freedom to dispose his volitions," while the second "consists in his feeling within himself a firm and constant resolution to use it well." Generosity can be generated as a thought in the soul, "but it often happens that some movement of the [bodily] spirits strengthens them, and in this case they are actions of virtue and at the same time passions of the soul." He concluded by arguing that "the chief use of wisdom lies in its teaching us to be masters of our passions and to control them with such skill that the evils which they cause are quite bearable, and even become a source of joy."<sup>71</sup> Trying to maintain control of the passions through reason was still a laudable goal, then, but it could not be done directly, only through anticipation and indirection; and this was impossible for almost everyone, although those with generous souls had the best chance of acting in a manner that blended the goals of reason and body.

Most importantly, Descartes suggested that one should not worry too much about controlling the passions—a complete departure for him. First, the passions show us how to remain alive and how to live well. "The function of all the passions consists solely in this, that they dispose our soul to want the things which nature deems useful to us, and to persist in this volition." Therefore the passions were good—and not just some of the passions, but all of them: "we see that they are all by nature good, and that we have nothing to avoid but their misuse or their excess." Second, they bring us pleasures. While the soul (or rational faculty) "can have pleasures of its own," the pleasures "common to it and the body depend entirely on the passions." People who can be moved deeply by the passions "are capable of enjoying

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 328, 333, 335, 345. For a fine discussion of Descartes's treatise on the passions, see Levi, *French Moralists* (cit. n. 27), pp. 257–98; James, *Passion and Action* (cit. n. 27), *passim*.

<sup>71</sup> CSMK (cit. n. 46), vol. 1, pp. 347, 348, 403, 388, 384, 387–8, 404.



the sweetest pleasures of this life.”<sup>72</sup> This new view placed Descartes in a line of argument that included Lorenzo Valla, who argued in *De voluptate* (1431) that the true virtues came not from “faith in one’s own reason and in a form of wisdom which derives from it,” but rather from a faith “in the miracle of life as we are allowed to live it in harmony with the universe, with the plants and animals, with our fellow human beings.” This faith—uniting the senses to the external world—was, Valla declared, the same as *caritas*, “Jesus Christ’s love for humanity, expressed through the Redemption.”<sup>73</sup> Perhaps Descartes had been convinced of Epicureanism by his close reading of Seneca, who although usually taken as a Stoic also introduced Epicurean concepts to a great many people in the seventeenth century: it was after all in Seneca’s treatise *De vita beata*, which Elizabeth and Descartes had examined together, that the Epicurean notion of *voluptas* was introduced as sober and austere.<sup>74</sup> Or perhaps like others Descartes, too, was persuaded of the coherence of Epicurean ideas by his correspondent Pierre Gassendi, despite their firm disagreements.<sup>75</sup>

Descartes’s general conclusion from his studies, then, was that “we have much less reason for anxiety about [the passions] than we had before.” More powerfully, all the pleasures that are common to both soul and body, such as love, “depend entirely on the passions.” This is a large step beyond Aristotle’s view that some of the passions can be good; this new view would have been almost unthinkable for Descartes’s neo-Stoic predecessors; and it went considerably further than all but the Epicureans in making the passions into forces for good instead of irrationality and vice. One need not fear the passions, only avoid “their misuse or their excess.” Virtue lies not in the conquest of the passions by reason, but in a person’s living “in such a way that his conscience cannot reproach him for ever failing to do something he judges to be the best.” That way, he will have a tranquil soul (one of the chief goals of Epicureanism), which “the most violent assaults of the passions will never have sufficient power to disturb.” If one pursues this course toward a virtuous life, then the rational faculty or soul will remain free of being a slave to the passions. One can therefore enjoy the pleasures the passions bring while turning the ills they cause into “a source of joy.”<sup>76</sup> As one recent commentator has declared, it was Elizabeth’s persistence in grounding the thinking subject in the body that forced Descartes to come to terms with the passions;<sup>77</sup> this seems to have forced him to reconsider Epicurean options; and he came to take a view that emphasized the passions, rather than reason, for maintaining life and bringing happiness.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 349, 403, 404.

<sup>73</sup> Maristella de P. Lorch, “The Epicurean in Lorenzo Valla’s *On Pleasure*,” in *Atoms, Pneuma, and Tranquillity* (cit. n. 12), pp. 93, 99.

<sup>74</sup> Louise Fothergill-Payne, “Seneca’s Role in Popularizing Epicurus in the Sixteenth Century,” in *Atoms, Pneuma, and Tranquillity* (cit. n. 12), pp. 115–33; see also Lynn Joy, “Epicureanism in Renaissance Moral and Natural Philosophy,” *J. Hist. Ideas* 53 (1992): 573–83.

<sup>75</sup> On Gassendi, see especially Lisa T. Sarasohn, “Motion and Morality: Pierre Gassendi, Thomas Hobbes and the Mechanical World-View,” *J. Hist. Ideas* 46 (1985): 363–79; idem, “Gassendi and the Creation of a Privatist Ethic in Early Seventeenth-Century France,” in *Atoms, Pneuma, and Tranquillity* (cit. n. 12), pp. 174–95; Lynn Sumida Joy, *Gassendi the Atomist: Advocate of History in an Age of Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1987).

<sup>76</sup> CSMK (cit. n. 46), vol. 1, pp. 403, 382, 404.

<sup>77</sup> Erica Harth, *Cartesian Women: Versions and Subversions of Rational Discourse in the Old Regime* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1992), pp. 75–8.

<sup>78</sup> See also J. Dankmeijer, “De biologische studies van René Descartes,” in *Leidse Voordrachten*, no. 9 (Leiden: Universitaire Pers, 1951); Richard B. Carter, *Descartes’ Medical Philosophy: The Organic Solution to the Mind-Body Problem* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1983); G. A.

## FREEING THE PASSIONS: DUTCH REPUBLICANISM

Shortly after Descartes's death in 1650, a republic came into being in the Dutch world in which he had moved, and this new world's defenders argued for a view of the passions very similar to his. The republicans retained the narrowing of reason rather than trying to reassert right reason. They also highlighted the positive value of the passions. To allow for good government, then, this viewpoint argued, the passions need not be controlled by reason but could be allowed free reign in a system of laws, which would establish agreed-upon rules for letting private passions check one another. When opposite passions meet, they would cancel each other out, thus allowing peace and stability to emerge in the public realm. Instead of being the embodiment of reason, the state would be a kind of referee enforcing methods of negotiation.

As elsewhere in Europe, early modern political theory in the Netherlands had generally remained rooted in ideas in which the goal of public virtue remained uppermost; humanity obtained that goal by controlling the passions, primarily with monarchical government. Humanist education in the Netherlands had been directed "towards developing civic virtues and preparing its pupils for a life of responsible leadership"<sup>79</sup> just as much as elsewhere. Orthodox Calvinists hated anything that smacked of Cartesianism, while even the more liberal Arminians and Coccejians battled outright materialism, borrowing support from their English latitudinarian colleagues.<sup>80</sup> But in the middle of the century, at the same time Descartes was studying the passions closely, theories that spoke openly of republicanism became more widely available. Just as the horrors of civil war in England had confirmed Hobbes in his monarchism, the period known as "True Freedom" in the Netherlands, from 1650 to 1672, confirmed many in republicanism. In the republican body politic, the passions were as important as reason for directing humanity toward the good, while authority was diffused among the members and organs of the constitution, not needing the head to have the final say in all things.

The death of William II, Prince of Orange and Stadhouder (captain-general), from smallpox, on 6 November 1650, allowed the restoration of political control by the States Party, or the party of True Freedom as they sometimes styled themselves. Just before his death, Prince William had forced Amsterdam into obedience by surrounding it with his army and threatening a siege, allowing him and his conservative Calvinist allies to seize control of almost all institutions of government. For the next twenty-two years following his death, however, the oligarchy of the rich and powerful members of the city and provincial governing councils (the *regenten*, or regents) reasserted its control. The skilled author and pensionary (chief minister) of the province of Holland Jacob Cats opened the Great Assembly that ratified the return to republican rule with a discourse on the superiority of republics to monarchies. Although Orangists and anti-Remonstrant Calvinists continued to advocate a return to

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Lindeboom, *Descartes and Medicine* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1979); Geneviève Rodis-Lewis, *Descartes: His Life and Thought*, trans. Jane Marie Todd (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1998), pp. 186–7.

<sup>79</sup> E. H. Kossmann, "The Development of Dutch Political Theory," in *The Development of Dutch Political Theory in the Seventeenth Century* (London: Chato & Windus, 1960), p. 101.

<sup>80</sup> See especially Verbeek, *Descartes and the Dutch* (cit. n. 54); Rosalie L. Colie, *Light and Enlightenment: A Study of the Cambridge Platonists and the Dutch Arminians* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1957).

a system with a princely head that would control republican and heterodox passions in the Dutch body politic, a period of true republicanism flourished at the height of the Dutch Golden Age.

For most of that period, from 1652 until his brutal murder in 1672, the chief representative of the republic was Johann de Witt. Described by one historian as a *raison d'état* politician,<sup>81</sup> De Witt saw himself as a skeptical realist who tried to live without illusions and without faith in the ability of humanity to save itself in this turbulent world of sin: as another historian declared, De Witt was “a Calvinist of an unmistakable neo-stoic type.” De Witt noted that “nothing so much inspires men to love and affection as the feeling in the purse,”<sup>82</sup> and he managed the country accordingly. While a marvelously skilled politician (and mathematician) more than a theoretician of politics, De Witt did have some clear principles, which are most evident in his “Deduction” of 1654 (defending the exclusion of the House of Orange from public office). In it he supported the multiple republican constitutions of the United Provinces, which he believed best acted on the principle that “the welfare of the inhabitants of the country must be the supreme law.” The basis for union in a republic was the shared interest of its people:

But do not the present seven United Provinces have the same single interest in their own preservation? A same single fear of all Foreign Powers? Are they not so bound to each other by mutual alliances and marriages among both regents and inhabitants, by common bodies, companies and partnerships in trade and other interests, by intercourse, possession of property in each other's lands, common customs and otherwise, are they not indeed so bound and interwoven together that it is almost impossible to split them from each other without extraordinary violence, which will not occur unless there are eminent Heads [i.e., princes]?<sup>83</sup>

His solution to the inherent corruption of humanity, then, was to insist on the sharing of power as the best means to prevent abuse and misgovernment. In the case of the United Provinces, he defended the rights of cities and the provincial states even above those of the States General (the assembly of states), leading him to ask that his nation be referred to not as a *respublica* but as a plural: *Respublicae Foederatae*.<sup>84</sup> Such an outlook inherently rejected a view of a body politic ruled by a head.

De Witt clearly believed that monarchies in church and state were unnatural, the enemies of knowledge and virtue, of liberty and property. As he put it in the preface to the book of fables he published:

But not to speak of past Ages, we may observe, that Monarchical Government has, in the Age in which we live, made such Progress both in Church and State, to the Oppression of many free Republicks, that if the Tyrants continue to tread in the same Paths but for one Age longer, all the liberal Arts and Sciences, all Virtue, and the Liberties and Properties of Men, will throughout all *Europe* dwindle away to nothing; nay the Men

<sup>81</sup> J. G. Boogman, “The ‘Raison d’État’ Politician Johan de Witt,” *Low Countries History Yearbook* 11 (1978): 55–78.

<sup>82</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>83</sup> Herbert H. Rowen, *John de Witt, Grand Pensionary of Holland, 1625–1672* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1978), pp. 388–9.

<sup>84</sup> Jonathan I. Israel, *The Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness, and Fall, 1477–1806* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), p. 706.

themselves will be lessen'd in Number, as we already see it had happen'd in *Muscovy, Greece, Turkey, Persia, India, &c.* unless God in his Infinite Mercy prevent it.<sup>85</sup>

The most telling evidence for his outlook is, however, his probable editing of (and ghostwriting of chapters 29 and 30 in) one of the most powerfully developed theories of republicanism, Pieter de la Court's *The Interest of Holland* (1662).<sup>86</sup> As that work put it: "people here are right to constantly pray to God, 'oh Lord, protect us from a monarch.'"<sup>87</sup>

There is a story that de Witt first encountered Pieter de la Court's *The Prosperity of Leiden* soon after its publication in 1659 and was so taken with it that he encouraged the author to expand it into *The Interest of Holland*.<sup>88</sup> It certainly uses many of the same arguments as the *Prosperity*, although it is far clearer in attacking the institution of monarchy. De la Court asserted that the province of Holland was not one single country (*Land*) but a region of multiple aspects and interests. It was not a place favored by nature, however, so the inhabitants had to rely on fishing and trading, and after those manufacturing, far more than agriculture. He estimated that perhaps 450,000 people made their living from sea fishing, 200,000 from farming and produce from the land, 450,000 from manufacture, 450,000 from trade, and 650,000 from supplying needs of residents, and that there were 200,000 professionals and civil servants—a total of 2,400,000. From this estimate it was clear that "not the eighth part of the population of Holland can find their means of living [*nooddrust*] from their own land."<sup>89</sup> But a brief economic history revealed why Amsterdam was a richer and greater trading city and Holland a richer country than the world had seen before: freedom. Here people had the freedom to follow whatever religion they chose; the freedom to live and work where they wanted, without the constraints of guilds or monopoly companies, giving rise to a very flexible and adaptable workforce. Freedom for people to follow their own passions and interests created a wealth of material goods. In contrast, the strict Calvinists sought to limit religious choice; the growing power of institutions narrowed the freedom of the fisheries, trade, and crafts, and the growing weight of import and export taxes plus convoy-money threatened to reduce trade. History showed that the country had flourished when it had a thoroughly free government in contrast to the times when the Prince of Orange had been powerful. "People must understand that a good government is not where the subjects fare well or badly depending on the virtue or vice of the governors, but . . . where the fate of the governors necessarily depends on whether the governed fare well or badly."<sup>90</sup> In *Considerations of State* (1661) Johan de la Court (Pieter's recently deceased brother) argued that popular government is the most natural, the most rational, and the fairest. Only in a popular government, moreover, did the saying *Vox populi, Vox Dei* (the voice of God is the voice of the people) hold true. In

<sup>85</sup> *Sinryke Fabulen* (1685), translated as *Fables Moral and Political, with Large Explications*, 2 vols. (London, 1703), unpaginated preface. The work is attributed to De Witt but may be by Pieter de la Court, on whom see below.

<sup>86</sup> On de Witt's involvement with the publication, see Rowen, *John de Witt* (cit. n. 83), pp. 391–4.

<sup>87</sup> v. d. H. [Pieter de la Court or "van der Hoeven"], *Interest Van Holland, Ofte Gronden Van Hollands-Welvaren* (Amsterdam: Joan. Cyprianus vander Gracht, 1662), p. 23: "Zulks men hier te recht altijd God behoorde te bidden, *à furore Monarcharum libera nos Domine, ô God bewaar doch Holland voor een Hoofd.*"

<sup>88</sup> Rowen, *John de Witt* (cit. n. 83), p. 391.

<sup>89</sup> v. d. H. [van der Hoeven], *Interest Van Holland* (cit. n. 85), p. 21.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, preface.

such a government, all the knowledge, passions, and abilities (*bequaamheid*) of the inhabitants were turned to use.<sup>91</sup> Finally, such a country will have no wish to make war for the benefit of its rulers, nor, if it is well ordered, can any monarchy or aristocracy overthrow it.

The De la Courts' are some of the century's most remarkable statements on capitalism and republicanism, and they depended on a view of the power of the human passions that could be best developed in a republic. As one historian remarked almost thirty years ago, the brothers De la Court "regarded self-interest and passion as the basis of human conduct, but at the same time they developed the concept of the harmony of self-interests, possible only in a democratic community."<sup>92</sup> The small democracies of the Dutch cities could be combined (along the lines de Witt argued) into a republic such as Holland, or even the United Provinces, and still maintain general harmony in the counterbalancing of personal interests. In arguing directly that the good state did not depend upon a virtuous monarch, the brothers De la Court set themselves directly against those who wanted to restore or enhance the power of the House of Orange.<sup>93</sup> The brothers outlined an original republican theory probably held by many advocates of True Liberty. They self-consciously sought to persuade the magistrates (*politici*) that they could establish their views not on the theories of the schools, but on experience and an analysis of the passions. The noted Dutch historian of political thought E. H. Kossmann has noticed that with its many digressions on physiology and the passions and citations to Descartes, the theory of the brothers De la Court was based on the latest psychology of *Passions de l'ame*.<sup>94</sup>

The De la Courts thought even less than Descartes that the power of reason could control the passions. In his discussion of their views, Kossmann describes the brothers as being more "pessimistic" and "cynical" in their description than Descartes, while also depicting the passions in an even more utilitarian manner.<sup>95</sup> In their view, the passions of individuals should be allowed to express themselves; provided that the political-economic system in which people operated was well ordered—rooted in the law of contracts—opposite passions would balance one another, yielding public harmony and tranquillity.<sup>96</sup> The De la Courts therefore held that "the public inter-

<sup>91</sup> V. H., [Johan de la Court or "van der Hoeven"], *Consideratien Van Staat* (Amsterdam: Jacob Volckerts, 1661), p. 443.

<sup>92</sup> J. W. Smit, "The Netherlands and Europe in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," in *Britain and the Netherlands in Europe and Asia*, ed. J. S. Bromley and E. H. Kossmann (London: Macmillan; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1968), pp. 23–4.

<sup>93</sup> G. O. van de Klashorst, "'Metten schijn van monarchie getempert': De verdediging van het stadhouderschap in de partijliteratuur, 1650–1686," in *Pieter de la Court in zijn tijd: Aspecten van een veelzijdig publicist, 1618–1685*, ed. H. W. Blom and I. W. Wildenberg (Amsterdam: APA-Holland Univ. Press, 1986), especially pp. 119–20, 136; I. W. Wildenberg, "Appreciaties van de gebroeders De la Court ten tijde van de Republiek," *Tijdschr. Gesch.* 98 (1985): 540–56.

<sup>94</sup> E. H. Kossmann, "Politieke theorie in het zeventiende-eeuwse Nederland," *Verhandeling der Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen*, Afd. Letterkunde (Nieuwe Reeks), Deel 67, No. 2 (Amsterdam: N. V. Noord-Hollandsche Uitgevers Maatschappij, 1960), pp. 38–48.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37. See also E. H. Kossmann, "Volkssouvereiniteit aan het begin van het Nederlandse Ancienne Régime," *Bijdragen en mededelingen betreffende de geschiedenis der Nederlanden* 95 (1980): 1–34 (reprinted in his *Politieke theorie en geschiedenis: Verspreide opstellen en voordrachten* [Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 1987], pp. 59–92; trans. as "Popular Sovereignty at the Beginning of the Dutch Ancien Régime," *Low Countries History Yearbook* 14 [1981]: 1–28). See also Eco O. G. Haitisma Mulier, *The Myth of Venice and Dutch Republican Thought in the Seventeenth Century*, trans. Gerard T. Moran (Assen, Drenthe: Van Gorcum, 1980), pp. 120–69, who argues for the influence of Machiavelli as well as Descartes and Hobbes, since Machiavelli also grounded politics on the pas-

est [is] the sum of individual interests” and that the true expression of the public interest was possible only in a democratically rooted and commercial republic.<sup>97</sup> Needless to say, those who believed that the country needed a head (the Orangists and strict Calvinists) were outraged.<sup>98</sup> After publishing the *Interest*, Pieter de la Court was suspended from communion by the church council of Leiden, while the magistrates “agreed to forbid the book and seize all copies already published.” In 1666 he moved to Amsterdam to join the business of his second wife’s family, supplying naval stores to the admiralty in the Second Anglo-Dutch War and trying to break into the trading monopoly of the Dutch East India Company.<sup>99</sup>

Even more striking than the De la Courts’ theory was the democratic one developed a few years later by Baruch Spinoza, too radical even for de Witt.<sup>100</sup> Spinoza took further the argument that only in a democratic republic could people live together harmoniously and in keeping with the most authentic expression of “nature or God” (*natura sive deus*). Deeply immersed in the works of Descartes and responding to Machiavelli and Hobbes (whose *Leviathan* he studied carefully), Spinoza may also have been indebted to the De la Courts, although there is only tentative evidence that they were acquainted.<sup>101</sup>

Spinoza, like those discussed above, established his system on naturalistic grounds, but since he did not accept a dualistic division between an incorporeal reasoning soul and a corporeal body (or between God and nature), his naturalism (and determinism) was even more radical. To Spinoza, reasoning and acting, thought and extension, were two expressions (modes) of the same being. He therefore began his *Ethics* with a section on God, identifying him with all that exists (versus superstition in the guise of religion, which separates God from nature and anthropomorphizes him). After dealing with mind, Spinoza went to greater lengths to portray the “affects” (which can be grouped into three: desire, joy, and sadness) and their powers. The opening remarks in this third section castigate almost all previous treatments of the passions, which treat them as vices escaping the control of free will and reason. Other theorists, he wrote,

seem to conceive man in Nature as a dominion within a dominion. For they believe that man disturbs, rather than follows, the order of Nature, that he has absolute power over his actions, and that he is determined only by himself. And they attribute the cause of human impotence and inconstancy, not to the common power of Nature, but to I know not what vice of human nature, which they therefore bewail, or laugh at, or disdain, or

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sions. Also idem, “A Controversial Republican: Dutch Views on Machiavelli in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries,” in *Machiavelli and Republicanism*, ed. Gisela Bock, Quentin Skinner, and Maurizio Viroli (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1990), pp. 247–63; and Martin van Gelderen, “The Machiavellian Moment and the Dutch Revolt: The Rise of Neostoicism and Dutch Republicanism,” in *Machiavelli and Republicanism*, pp. 205–23. For a recent argument about Machiavelli’s view of the working of the body and the body politic, see Anthony J. Parel, *The Machiavellian Cosmos* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 1992), especially pp. 86–112, 122–39.

<sup>97</sup> Smit, “The Netherlands and Europe” (cit. n. 92), p. 24.

<sup>98</sup> See Rowen, *John de Witt* (cit. n. 83), pp. 391–8; Israel, *Dutch Republic* (cit. n. 84), pp. 759–60.

<sup>99</sup> Rowen, *John de Witt* (cit. n. 83), pp. 395–6.

<sup>100</sup> For a general study of Spinoza and his circle, see Steven Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1999).

<sup>101</sup> Kossmann, “Politieke theorie in het zeventiende-eeuwse Nederland” (cit. n. 94), pp. 50–8; Hait-sma Mulier, “Language of Seventeenth-Century Republicanism in the United Provinces: Dutch or European?” in *The Language of Political Theory in Early-Modern Europe* (cit. n. 44), pp. 191–3; idem, “Controversial Republican” (cit. n. 96), p. 256.

(as usually happens) curse. And he who knows how to censure more eloquently and cunningly the weakness of the human mind is held to be godly.<sup>102</sup>

Even Descartes, who “sought to explain human affects through their first causes, and at the same time to show the way by which the mind can have absolute dominion over its affects,” revealed in this “nothing but the cleverness of his understanding.” But the affects are expressions of nature just as much as is the mind, and “nothing happens in Nature which can be attributed to any defect in it.”<sup>103</sup> Hence, Spinoza believed—even more than Descartes and the De la Courts—that the passions are good and natural, and that human society ought to accord with them rather than to try to fight or dominate them.

Like Hobbes and many others, Spinoza began with self-preservation: “Each thing, as far as it can by its own power, strives to persevere in its being.” And, “The striving by which each thing strives to persevere in its being is nothing but the actual essence of the thing.” He also echoed Descartes on generosity in declaring: “Since reason demands nothing contrary to Nature, it demands that everyone love himself, seek his own advantage, what is really useful to him, want what will really lead man to a greater perfection, and absolutely, that everyone should strive to preserve his own being as far as he can. This, indeed, is as necessarily true as that the whole is greater than its part.”<sup>104</sup> But while Hobbes had found human happiness in the reason of a strong sovereign restraining the passions of the body politic, Spinoza found true happiness in following our most authentic nature, which leads to a mode of life “that largely transcends merely transitory desires and which has as its natural consequences autonomous control over the passions and participation in an eternal blessedness.”<sup>105</sup> This is because adequate ideas have as much motivational power as inadequate ideas (the passions). Ethical knowledge is both produced from nature and motivates us to act in accord with our true nature.<sup>106</sup> In Spinoza’s state of nature, then, each person is the one most capable of achieving his or her authentic self. Consequently, Spinoza argued for democracy because “in it everyone remains equal, as they were in the state of nature, and because democracy approaches most nearly to the freedom of the state of nature.”<sup>107</sup> He did not think, as did Hobbes, that people transferred their natural rights to another (a sovereign) without reserving the right to be consulted about their use.<sup>108</sup> In a democracy, one also had the freedom to think and say what nature spoke through oneself.<sup>109</sup> Finally, when it came to state power, although the power to do something made it right, the further consequence is “that

<sup>102</sup> *Ethics*, preface to pt. 3, quoted from Edwin Curley, ed. and trans., *A Spinoza Reader: The Ethics and Other Works* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1994), pp. 152–3.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 153; for a modern criticism of Spinoza’s analysis, see Michael della Rocca, “Spinoza’s Metaphysical Psychology,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza*, ed. Don Garrett (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996), pp. 192–266.

<sup>104</sup> *Ethics*, pt. 3, P6, P7, pt. 4, P18s, quoted from Curley, *Spinoza Reader* (cit. n. 102), pp. 159, 209.

<sup>105</sup> Don Garrett, “Spinoza’s Ethical Theory,” *Cambridge Companion to Spinoza* (cit. n. 103), pp. 267–8.

<sup>106</sup> See especially *ibid.*, pp. 296–7.

<sup>107</sup> Edwin Curley, “Kissinger, Spinoza, and Genghis Khan,” in *Cambridge Companion to Spinoza* (cit. n. 103), p. 317.

<sup>108</sup> Spinoza, *A Theologico-Political Treatise*, trans. R. H. M. Elwes (1883; reprinted, New York: Dover, 1951), title of chap. 17: “It is shown, that no one can or need transfer all his Rights to the Sovereign Power.”

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, chap. 20.

rulers govern with right just to the extent that their subjects consent to their rule by obeying their commands.”<sup>110</sup>

By 1670, when Spinoza's *Theologico-Political Treatise* saw print for the first time, De Witt and the States Party were finding it more and more difficult to retain their authority.<sup>111</sup> The young William III of Orange (born shortly after his father's death) reached the age of majority, and his allies became increasingly vociferous in arguing for his being made stadhouder. Now led by the anti-Cartesian leader from Utrecht Voetius, the anti-Remonstrant Calvinists, as they had done earlier in the century, gave their full support to such moves. Against this theologico-political coalition the party of True Freedom held a shaky grip on power. Then in 1672 Louis XIV invaded the country overland in alliance with the bishop of Münster and the English (who waged war against the Dutch at sea). Many Calvinists and Orangists rose up against the republican *regenten* and installed William III as head of the army and virtual head of state. In The Hague, an Orangist mob brutally butchered De Witt and his brother Cornelis, strung their corpses upside down on hooks like hogs, and handed out or sold pieces of their bodies to members of the crowd. According to a later report from his acquaintance Leibniz, Spinoza had to be locked in his room by his landlord to prevent him from posting a sign at the nearby scene of the incident (on which he had written *ultimi barbarorum* [the ultimate barbarity]), fearing that he, too, would be torn apart.<sup>112</sup> Never again would the Netherlands have a completely republican form of government, and there is little evidence of any Dutch political treatises explicitly adopting the positive views of Spinoza or the De la Courts about allowing the passions freedom in a republic.<sup>113</sup>

#### CONCLUSION

Explicitly republican theories may have gone underground, Descartes may have been tamed, and Hobbes (like Machiavelli and Spinoza) may have become a name synonymous with damnation. But the attempt to draw conclusions about the body politic from new notions of the body natural has remained with us, much to the consternation of those who wish to find virtue in the power of reason coupled with the transcendent or immanent.<sup>114</sup> David Hume famously argued in his *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739) that reason is only “the slave of the passions”; Immanuel Kant countered by saying that practical reason has motivational force equal to or greater than the passions, although he admitted that it is “beyond our capacity to explain *how* it is that reason can have this motivating force.”<sup>115</sup> Dutch republican theories about the positive value of the passions resurfaced in England in the work of Bernard Mandeville, an emigré physician from an anti-Orangist family of

<sup>110</sup> Curley, “Kissinger” (cit. n. 107), p. 326.

<sup>111</sup> Israel, *Dutch Republic* (cit. n. 84), pp. 785–95.

<sup>112</sup> On the butchery, see Rowen, *John de Witt* (cit. n. 83), pp. 861–84, on Spinoza's reaction, pp. 885–6.

<sup>113</sup> On the continuing influence of Hobbes and Descartes in the Netherlands, see Kossmann, *Politieke theorie en geschiedenis* (cit. n. 96), pp. 59–103. But even he admitted in his “Development of Dutch Political Theory”: “As far as I know, there are no traces of any direct influence exercised by De la Court and Spinoza on Dutch political theory” (cit. n. 79), p. 105.

<sup>114</sup> See especially Albert O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism before Its Triumph* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1977).

<sup>115</sup> Garrett, “Spinoza's Ethical Theory” (cit. n. 105), p. 295.



Rotterdam. The famous slogan to his *Fable of the Bees* (1714), “private vices, public benefits,” said it all, as long as one recognizes the tongue-in-cheek substitution of “vices” for passions.<sup>116</sup> It may be that one can trace a path from the Dutch republican underground to the theories of Hume and Adam Smith via Mandeville.<sup>117</sup>

In the mid-seventeenth century, then, a group of political theorists in northern Europe took up new views of the human body and their implications for ideas about the body politic. Whether Hobbes or Spinoza, these mid-seventeenth-century political theorists referred the origins of everything, even the attributes of reason, back to nature—unless like Descartes they tried to escape the box by reserving some small, separate, and (politically) unimportant spark to a more divine sphere. Their reason was no longer the “right reason” that had allowed Plato to counter the rhetoricians. For those such as Hobbes, who still believed that reason had to control the passions, this meant that a powerful sovereign had to arbitrate competing claims to the good, threatening tyranny. For republicans, however, the passions expressed the strivings of nature, and so to be true to our nature we need to be true to our passions.<sup>118</sup> The head need not rule the body. Just as the passions led to material goods, so they lead to public benefits. As Mandeville later explained, if everyone acted according to the dictates of virtue as promulgated by the priests, powerful nations would rapidly decline and we would all be back to a state of nature, spending our time gathering acorns. If ever there were a group of political theorists who grounded their views on contemporary science, this is it: the famous Descartes, the first-rate mathematician de Witt, the merchant-lawyers De la Court, and the lens-grinder Spinoza.<sup>119</sup> Only the less mathematically astute Hobbes, opposed to the experimental science of semi-republicans such as Robert Boyle, still thought that the passions needed to be controlled by a dominating reason. The rest placed their faith in the natural law urging us toward life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

<sup>116</sup> See M. M. Goldsmith, *Private Vices, Public Benefits: Bernard Mandeville's Social and Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1985); Harold J. Cook, “Bernard Mandeville and the Therapy of the ‘Clever Politician,’” *J. Hist. Ideas* 60 (1999): 101–24.

<sup>117</sup> M. M. Goldsmith, “Liberty, Luxury and the Pursuit of Happiness,” in *The Languages of Political Theory in Early-Modern Europe* (cit. n. 44), pp. 225–51; idem, “Regulating Anew the Moral and Political Sentiments of Mankind: Bernard Mandeville and the Scottish Enlightenment,” *J. Hist. Ideas* 49 (1988): 587–606.

<sup>118</sup> The important work of Otto Mayr, *Authority, Liberty and Automatic Machinery in Early Modern Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986) draws attention to the variety of political views that sought support in mechanical theories. Views about the passions, however, seem to have limited the conclusions of rigorous authors.

<sup>119</sup> Alan Gabbey, “Spinoza's Natural Science and Methodology,” in *Cambridge Companion to Spinoza* (cit. n. 103), pp. 142–91.