Correspondence with Descartes

ELISABETH OF BOHEMIA

1618–1680

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Translated from the French with AI (Claude) and edited

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Correspondence with Descartes · Elisabeth of Bohemia (1618–1680)

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INTRODUCTION

In May 1643 Elisabeth, Princess Palatine (1618–1680), the twenty-four-year-old daughter of the exiled "Winter King" of Bohemia, wrote to René Descartes with a question he never fully answered: if the soul is a thinking thing with no extension at all, how can it move the body? Only bodies push bodies. Descartes replied, and for the next six years, until his death in Stockholm, the two wrote to each other about philosophy, health, grief and politics. This edition gives the whole exchange, her letters and his replies in order, so that each objection can be read beside the answer it provoked.

Elisabeth's objections matter because they go to the weak points of Descartes' system and push him to say things he says nowhere else. On the mind–body problem she will not accept that the union of soul and body is simply felt, and suggests it would be easier to grant the soul some extension than to understand how an unextended thing moves matter. When he prescribes reason as a cure for her illness and melancholy, and proposes that they read Seneca's *On the Happy Life*, she asks how virtue can make us happy when the body, illness and fortune can take reason itself away, and how God's providence can leave room for free will. Her questions about the passions led directly to his last book, *The Passions of the Soul*. And when she asks what he thinks of Machiavelli's *Prince*, a princess from a dispossessed ruling house presses the philosopher on the ethics of power.

The letters are courtly in form and personal in substance: Elisabeth writes of her brothers, her family's lost lands and her exile in Berlin; Descartes of his quarrels with the theologians of Utrecht and Leiden, his journeys to France and his invitation to the court of Queen Christina of Sweden. The two letters of November and December 1643 work through a problem in geometry, finding a circle that touches three given circles.

1643–1644

The union of soul and body
Elisabeth asks how an immaterial soul can move the body; Descartes answers with a third "primitive notion," and they trade solutions to a problem in geometry.

ELISABETH TO DESCARTES, 6/16 MAY 1643

FRENCH

AT III 660 **ELISABETH** I'ay appris, auec beaucoup de ioye & de regret, l'intention que vous auez eu de me voir, passé quelques iours, touchée également de vostre charité de vous vouloir communiquer a vne personne ignorante & indocile, & du malheur qui m'a detourbé vne conuersation si profitable. M. Pallotti a fort augmenté cette dernière passion, en me répétant les solutions que vous lui auez donné des obscurités contenues dans la physique de M. Rhegius, desquelles i'aurois esté mieux instruite de vostre bouche, comme aussi d'vne question que ie proposay audit professeur, III 661 lorsqu'il fut en cette ville, dont il me renuoya a vous pour en receuoir la satisfaction requise.

AT III 661 La honte de vous montrer vn style si dereglé m'a empesché iusqu'icy de vous demander cette faueur par lettre.

Mais auiourd'huy, M. Palotti m'a donné tant d'assurance de vostre bonté pour chacun, & particulierement pour moy, que i'ay chassé toute autre consideration de l'esprit, hors celle de m'en preualoir, en vous priant de me dire comment l'ame de l'homme peut determiner les esprits du corps, pour faire les actions volontaires, (n'estant qu'vne substance pensante). Car il semble que toute determination de mouuement se fait par la pulsion de la chose mue, a maniere dont elle est poussée par celle qui la meut, ou bien, de la qualification & figure de la superficie de cette derniere. L'attouchement est requis aux deux premieres conditions, & l'extension a la troisiesme.

Vous excludez entierement celle-cy de la notion que vous auez de l'ame, & celuy-la me paroist incompatible auec

ENGLISH

ELISABETH I have learned, with much joy and much regret, of your intention to come and see me a few days ago. I was touched equally by your charity in being willing to share yourself with an ignorant and unteachable person, and by the misfortune that deprived me of so profitable a conversation. Monsieur Pollot has greatly heightened this latter passion by repeating to me the solutions you gave him to the obscurities contained in Monsieur Regius's physics. I would have learned them better from your own lips, as I would also the answer to a question I put to that professor III 661 when he was in this town, and for which he referred me to you for the satisfaction required.[1]

Shame at showing you so disorderly a style has kept me until now from asking this favor of you by letter.

But today Monsieur Pollot has given me such assurance of your kindness toward everyone, and toward me in particular, that I have driven every other consideration from my mind except that of taking advantage of it. So I ask you to tell me how the human soul, being only a thinking substance, can determine the spirits of the body to perform voluntary actions. For it seems that every determination of motion comes about through the impulsion of the thing moved, by the manner in which it is pushed by the thing that moves it, or else through the particular quality and shape of the surface of the latter. Contact is required for the first two conditions, and extension for the third.[2]

You exclude extension entirely from the notion you have of the soul, and contact seems to me in-

1 Alphonse Pollot (Elisabeth spells him "Pallotti"), Descartes' friend at The Hague. Henricus Regius, a physician and professor at Utrecht, whose Cartesian physics had caused controversy there.
2 The "spirits" are the animal spirits, the fine fluid that Descartes held to flow through the nerves and move the muscles.

FRENCH

vne chose immaterielle. Pourquoy ie vous demande vne definition de l'ame plus particuliere qu'en vostre Metaphysique, c'est a dire de sa substance, separée de son action, de la pensée. Car encore que nous les supposions inseparables, (qui toutefois est difficile a prouuer dans le ventre de la mere & les grands euanouissemens), comme les attributs de Dieu, nous pouuons, en les considerant a part, en acquerir vne idée plus parfaite.

AT III 662 Vous cognoissant le meilleur medecin pour la mienne, ie vous descouure si librement les foiblesses de ses speculations, & espere qu'obseruant le serment d'Hipocrates vous y apporterez des remedes, sans les publier ; ce que vous prie de faire, comme de souffrir ces importunités de

Vostre affectionee amie a vous seruir, Élisabeth.
Monsieur Descartes. Ce 6 de May.

ENGLISH

compatible with an immaterial thing. That is why I ask you for a more specific definition of the soul than the one in your *Metaphysics*: that is, a definition of its substance, separated from its action, from thought. For although we suppose them inseparable, like the attributes of God (which is nevertheless hard to prove in the mother's womb and in deep fainting fits), we can acquire a more perfect idea of them by considering them separately.[3]

Knowing you to be the best physician for my own soul, I lay bare to you so freely the weaknesses of its speculations. I hope that, observing the oath of Hippocrates, you will supply remedies for them without making them public. I ask you to do so, as also to bear with these importunities from[4]

Your affectionate friend, always at your service,
Elisabeth. Monsieur Descartes. 6 May.

DESCARTES TO ELISABETH, 21 MAY 1643

Descartes answers with three primitive notions and says the soul's power to move the body was once misattributed to heaviness.

FRENCH

AT III 663 **DESCARTES** Madame,

La faueur dont vostre Altesse m'a honoré, en me faisant receuoir ses commandemens par escrit, est plus grande que ie n'eusse iamais osé esperer ; & elle soulage mieux mes defauts que celle que i'auois souhaitée auec passion, qui estoit de les receuoir de bouche, III 664 si i'eusse pû estre admis à l'honneur de vous faire la reuerence, & de vous offrir mes tres-humbles seruices, lors que i'estois dernierement à la Haye.

AT III 664 Car l'aurois eu trop de merueilles à admirer en mesme temps ; et voyant sortir des discours plus qu'humains d'vn corps si semblable à ceux que les peintres donnent aux anges, i'eusse esté rauy de mesme façon que me semblent le deuoir estre ceux qui, venans de la terre, entrent nouuellement dans le ciel.

Ce qui m'eust rendu moins capable de respondre à vostre Altesse, qui sans doute a desia remarqué en moy ce defaut, lors que l'ay eu cy-deuant l'honneur de luy parler ; & vostre clemence l'a voulu soulager, en me laissant les traces de vos pensées sur vn papier, où, les relisant plusieurs fois, & m'acoutumant à les considerer,

ENGLISH

DESCARTES Madame,

The favor with which Your Highness has honored me, in letting me receive her commands in writing, is greater than I would ever have dared to hope. It also makes up for my shortcomings better than the favor I had passionately wished for, which was to receive them by word of mouth, III 664 had I been admitted to the honor of paying you my respects and offering you my most humble services when I was last at The Hague.

For I would have had too many marvels to admire at once. Seeing more than human discourse come from a body so like those that painters give to angels, I would have been enraptured in the way that, it seems to me, those must be who come from earth and newly enter heaven.

This would have made me less able to answer Your Highness, who has no doubt already noticed this failing in me when I previously had the honor of speaking with her. Your clemency chose to relieve it by leaving me the traces of your thoughts on paper. I have reread them several times and grown

3 That is, the *Meditations* (1641).
4 The Hippocratic oath binds physicians to keep secret what they learn from their patients.

FRENCH

i'en suis veritablement moins esbloüy, mais ie n'en ay que d'autant plus d'admiration, remarquant qu'elles ne paroissent pas seulement ingenieuses à l'abord, mais d'autant plus iudicieuses & solides que plus on les examine.

Et ie puis dire, auec verité, que la question que vostre Altesse propose, me semble estre celle qu'on me peut demander auec le plus de raison, en suite des escrits que i'ay publiez. Car, y ayant deux choses en l'ame humaine, desquelles depend toute la connoissance que nous pouuons auoir de sa nature, l'vne desquelles est qu'elle pense, l'autre, qu'estant vnie au cors, elle peut agir & patir auec luy ; ie n'ay quasi rien dit de cette derniere, & me suis seulement estudié III 665 à faire bien entendre la premiere, à cause que mon principal dessein estoit de prouuer la distinction qui est entre l'ame & le corps ; à quoy celle-cy seulement a pû seruir, & l'autre y auroit esté nuisible.

AT III 665 Mais, pour ce que vostre Altesse voit si clair, qu'on ne luy peut dissimuler aucune chose, ie tascheray icy d'expliquer la façon dont ie conçoy l'vnion de l'ame auec le corps, & comment elle a la force de le mouuoir.

ENGLISH

used to considering them, and I am truly less dazzled by them now. But I admire them all the more, for I notice that they not only seem ingenious at first sight but appear more judicious and solid the more one examines them.

And I can say truthfully that the question Your Highness raises seems to me the one that can most reasonably be asked of me, in view of the writings I have published. For there are two things in the human soul on which all the knowledge we can have of its nature depends: one is that it thinks; the other is that, being united to the body, it can act and be acted upon along with it. I have said almost nothing of the latter, and have applied myself only III 665 to making the former well understood. This was because my principal aim was to prove the distinction between the soul and the body, and only the former could serve that aim, while the other would have been a hindrance.

But since Your Highness sees so clearly that nothing can be concealed from her, I shall try here to explain how I conceive the union of the soul with the body, and how the soul has the power to move it.

THREE PRIMITIVE NOTIONS

Descartes names the basic notions of body, soul and their union, each understood only through itself.

FRENCH

DESCARTES Premierement, ie considere qu'il y a en nous certaines notions primitiues, qui sont comme des originaux, sur le patron desquels nous formons toutes nos autres connoissances. Et il n'y a que fort peu de telles notions ; car, apres les plus generales, de l'estre, du nombre, de la durée &c., qui conuiennent à tout ce que nous pouuons conceuoir, nous n'auons, pour le corps en particulier, que la notion de l'extension, de laquelle suiuent celles de la figure & du mouuement ; & pour l'ame seule, nous n'auons que celle de la pensée, en laquelle sont comprises les perceptions de l'entendement & les inclinations de la volonté ; enfin, pour l'ame & le corps ensemble, nous n'auons que celle de leur vnion, de laquelle depend celle de la force qu'a l'ame de mouuoir le corps, & le corps d'agir sur l'ame, en causant ses sentimens & ses passions.

ENGLISH

DESCARTES First, I consider that there are in us certain primitive notions, which are like originals on whose pattern we form all our other knowledge. And there are very few such notions. After the most general ones, of being, number, duration, etc., which apply to everything we can conceive, we have, for the body in particular, only the notion of extension, from which follow those of shape and motion. For the soul alone, we have only that of thought, which includes the perceptions of the intellect and the inclinations of the will. Finally, for the soul and the body together, we have only that of their union, on which depends the notion of the soul's power to move the body, and of the body's power to act on the soul by causing its sensations and passions.[5]

5 Primitive notions: basic concepts that cannot be explained through any others and through which all our other concepts are formed.

FRENCH

Ie considere aussi que toute la science des hommes ne consiste qu'à bien distinguer ces notions, & à n'attribuer chacune d'elles qu'aux choses ausquelles elles appartiennent. Car, lors que nous voulons expliquer III 666 quelque difficulté par le moyen d'vne notion qui ne luy appartient pas, nous ne pouuons manquer de nous mesprendre ; comme aussi lors que nous voulons expliquer vne de ces notions par vne autre ; car, estant primitiues, chacune d'elles ne peut estre entenduë que par elle mesme.

AT III 666 Et d'autant que l'vsage des sens nous a rendu les notions de l'extension, des figures & des mouuemens, beaucoup plus familieres que les autres, la principale cause de nos erreurs est en ce que nous voulons ordinairement nous seruir de ces notions, pour expliquer les choses à qui elles n'appartiennent pas, comme lors qu'on se veut seruir de l'imagination pour conceuoir la nature de l'ame, ou bien lors qu'on veut conceuoir la façon dont l'ame meut le corps, par celle dont vn cors est mû par vn autre cors.

C'est pourquoy, puis que, dans les Meditations que vostre Altesse a daigné lire, i'ay tasché de faire conceuoir les notions qui appartiennent à l'ame seule, les distinguant de celles qui appartiennent au corps seul, la premiere chose que ie dois expliquer en suite, est la façon de conceuoir celles qui appartiennent à l'vnion de l'ame auec le corps, sans celles qui appartiennent au corps seul, ou à l'ame seule.

A quoy il me semble que peut seruir ce que i'ay escrit à la fin de ma Response aux six(iesmes) obiections ; car nous ne pouuons chercher ces notions simples ailleurs qu'en nostre ame, qui les a toutes en soy par sa nature, mais qui ne les distingue III 667 pas tousiours assez les vnes des autres, ou bien ne les attribuë pas aux obiets ausquels on les doit attribuer.

AT III 667 Ainsi ie croy que nous auons cy-deuant confondu la notion de la force dont l'ame agit dans le corps, auec celle dont vn corps agit dans vn autre ; & que nous auons attribué l'vne & l'autre, non pas à l'ame, car nous ne la connoissions pas encore, mais aux diuerses qualitez des corps, comme à la pesanteur, à la chaleur, & aux autres, que nous auons imaginé estre reelles, c'est à dire auoir vne existance distincte de celle du corps, & par consequent estre des substances, bien que nous les ayons nommées des qualitez.

ENGLISH

I consider also that all human knowledge consists only in distinguishing these notions well, and in attributing each of them only to the things to which it belongs. For when we try to explain III 666 some difficulty by means of a notion that does not belong to it, we cannot fail to go wrong. The same happens when we try to explain one of these notions by another, for, being primitive, each of them can be understood only through itself.

And because the use of the senses has made the notions of extension, shapes and motions far more familiar to us than the others, the principal cause of our errors is that we usually want to use these notions to explain things to which they do not belong. We do this when we try to use the imagination to conceive the nature of the soul, or when we try to conceive the way the soul moves the body on the model of the way one body is moved by another.

That is why, since in the *Meditations* that Your Highness has deigned to read I tried to convey the notions that belong to the soul alone, distinguishing them from those that belong to the body alone, the first thing I must explain next is how to conceive those that belong to the union of the soul with the body, without those that belong to the body alone or to the soul alone.

For this, it seems to me, what I wrote at the end of my Reply to the Sixth Objections may be of use. We can look for these simple notions nowhere but in our own soul, which has them all within it by its nature, but which does not III 667 always distinguish them sufficiently from one another, or else does not attribute them to the objects to which they should be attributed.[6]

Thus I believe that we have hitherto confused the notion of the power by which the soul acts in the body with the notion of the power by which one body acts in another. We have attributed both, not to the soul, for we did not yet know it, but to the various qualities of bodies, such as heaviness, heat and the others. We imagined these qualities to be real, that is, to have an existence distinct from that of the body, and consequently to be substances, even though we called them qualities.

6 The *Meditations* were published with sets of objections from other thinkers and Descartes' replies; the sixth set is the last.

FRENCH

Et nous nous sommes seruis, pour les conceuoir, tantost des notions qui sont en nous pour connoistre le corps, & tantost de celles qui y sont pour connoistre l'ame, selon que ce que nous leur auons attribué, a esté materiel ou immateriel.

Par exemple, en supposant que la pesanteur est vne qualité reelle, dont nous n'auons point d'autre connoissance, sinon qu'elle a la force de mouuoir le corps, dans lequel elle est, vers le centre de la terre, nous n'auons pas de peine à conceuoir comment elle meut ce corps, ny comment elle luy est iointe ; & nous ne pensons point que cela se fasse par vn attouchement reel d'vne superficie contre vne autre, car nous experimentons, en nous mesmes, que nous auons vne notion particuliere pour conceuoir cela ; & ie croy que nous vsons mal de cette notion, en l'appliquant III 668 à la pesanteur, qui n'est rien de reellement distingué du cors, comme l'espere monstrer en la Physique, mais qu'elle nous a esté donnée pour conceuoir la façon dont l'ame meut le cors.

AT III 668 Ie tesmoignerois ne pas assez connoistre l'incomparable esprit de vostre Altesse, si i'employois dauantage de paroles à m'expliquer, & ie serois trop presomptueux, si i'osois penser que ma response la doiue entierement satisfaire ; mais ie tascheray d'euiter l'vn & l'autre, en n'adioustant rien icy de plus, sinon que, si ie suis capable d'escrire ou de dire quelque chose qui luy puisse agreer, ie tiendray tousiours à tres grande faueur de prendre la plume, ou d'aller à la Haye, pour ce suiet, & qu'il n'y a rien au monde qui me soit si cher que de pouuoir obeïr à ses commandemens.

Mais ie ne puis icy trouuer place à l'obseruation du serment d'Hippocrate qu'elle m'enioint a, puis qu'elle ne m'a rien communiqué, qui ne merite d'estre vû & admiré de tous les hommes. Seulement puis-ie dire, sur ce suiet, qu'estimant infiniment la vostre que l'ay receuë, i'en vseray comme les auares font de leurs tresors, lesquels ils cachent d'autant plus qu'ils les estiment, & en enuiant la veuë au reste du monde, ils mettent leur souuerain contentement à les regarder. Ainsi ie seray bien aise de iouïr seul du bien de la voir ; & ma plus grande ambition est de me pouuoir dire, & d'estre veritablement, &c.

ENGLISH

And to conceive them, we have used sometimes the notions that are in us for knowing the body, and sometimes those that are in us for knowing the soul, according as what we attributed to them was material or immaterial.

For example, in supposing that heaviness is a real quality, of which we know nothing except that it has the power to move the body in which it is toward the center of the earth, we have no trouble conceiving how it moves this body, or how it is joined to it. And we do not think this happens through a real contact of one surface against another, for we find by experience in ourselves that we have a particular notion for conceiving this. I believe we misuse this notion when we apply it III 668 to heaviness, which, as I hope to show in the Physics, is nothing really distinct from the body. Rather, this notion was given to us for conceiving the way the soul moves the body.[7]

I would show that I do not sufficiently know Your Highness's incomparable mind if I used more words to explain myself, and I would be too presumptuous if I dared think my answer ought to satisfy her entirely. But I shall try to avoid both faults by adding nothing more here, except this: if I am capable of writing or saying anything that could please her, I shall always count it a very great favor to take up my pen, or to go to The Hague, for that purpose; and there is nothing in the world so dear to me as being able to obey her commands.

But I can find no occasion here for observing the oath of Hippocrates that she enjoins on me, since she has communicated nothing to me that does not deserve to be seen and admired by everyone. All I can say on this subject is that, since I value infinitely the letter of yours that I have received, I shall treat it as misers treat their treasures. The more they value them, the more they hide them; and, grudging the sight of them to the rest of the world, they place their supreme contentment in looking at them. So I shall be very glad to enjoy alone the good of seeing it; and my greatest ambition is to be able to call myself, and to be truly, etc.

7 Descartes' planned physics, which appeared as Parts II–IV of the *Principles of Philosophy* (1644).

ELISABETH TO DESCARTES, 10/20 JUNE 1643

Elisabeth finds the comparison with heaviness unhelpful and says she could more easily grant the soul extension.

FRENCH	ENGLISH
AT III 683 **ELISABETH** Monsieur Descartes,	**ELISABETH** Monsieur Descartes,
Votre bonté ne paroist pas seulement en me montrant & corrigeant les defauts de mon raisonnement, comme ie l'auois entendu, mais aussi que, pour me rendre leur cognoissance moins fascheuse, vous taschez de m'en consoler, au preiudice de vostre iugement, par de fausses louanges qui auroient esté necessaires, pour m'encourager de trauailler au remede, si ma nourriture, en vn lieu où la fasson ordinaire de conuerser m'a accoutumé d'en entendre des personnes incapables d'en donner de veritables, ne m'auoit fait presumer ne pouuoir faillir en croyant le contraire de leur discours, & par la rendre la consideration de mes imperfections si familiere, qu'elle ne me donne plus qu'autant d'emotion qu'il m'en faut pour le desir de m'en defaire.	Your kindness appears not only in showing me and correcting the defects in my reasoning, as I had hoped, but also in the fact that, to make the knowledge of them less painful to me, you try to console me for them with false praise, at the expense of your own judgment. Such praise would have been necessary to encourage me to work at the remedy, but for my upbringing. I was raised in a place where the ordinary manner of conversation has accustomed me to hearing praise from people incapable of giving it truly, and this has made me presume that I cannot go wrong in believing the opposite of what they say. It has also made the consideration of my imperfections so familiar to me that it now stirs in me only as much emotion as I need for the desire to be rid of them.
Cela me fait confesser, sans honte, d'auoir trouué en III 684 moy toutes les causes d'erreur que vous remarquez en vostre lettre, & de ne les pouuoir encore bannir entierement, puisque la vie que ie suis contrainte de mener, ne me laisse la disposition d'assez de tems pour acquerir vne habitude de meditation selon vos regles.	This makes me confess without shame that I have found in III 684 myself all the causes of error you point out in your letter, and that I cannot yet banish them entirely, since the life I am forced to lead does not leave me enough time at my disposal to acquire a habit of meditation according to your rules.
AT III 684 Tantôt les interêts de ma maison, que ie ne dois negliger, tantôt des entretiens & complaisances, que ie ne peux euiter, m'abatent si fort ce foible esprit de fascherie ou d'ennuy, qu'il se rend, pour longtemps apres, inutile a tout autre chose : qui seruira, comme i'espere, d'excuse a ma stupidité, de ne pouuoir comprendre l'idée par laquelle nous deuons iuger comment l'ame (non estendue & immaterielle) peut mouuoir le corps, par celle que vous auez eu autrefois de la pesanteur ;	Sometimes the interests of my house, which I must not neglect, and sometimes conversations and courtesies that I cannot avoid, so beat down this weak mind with vexation or boredom that it becomes useless for anything else for a long time afterward. This, I hope, will serve as an excuse for my stupidity in being unable to grasp, from the idea you once had of heaviness, the idea by which we are to judge how the soul (unextended and immaterial) can move the body;
ni pourquoy cette puissance, que vous luy auez alors, sous le nom d'vne qualité, fausement attribuée, de porter le corps vers le centre de la terre, nous doit plustôt persuader qu'vn corps peut estre poussé par quelque chose d'immateriel, que la demonstration d'vne verité contraire (que vous promettez en vostre physique) nous confirmer dans l'opinion de son impossibilité : principalement, puisque cette idée (ne pouuant pretendre a la mesme perfection & realité obiectiue que	nor why this power of carrying the body toward the center of the earth, which you then falsely attributed to heaviness under the name of a quality, should persuade us that a body can be pushed by something immaterial, rather than the demonstration of a contrary truth (which you promise in your physics) should confirm us in the opinion that this is impossible. This is all the more so since this idea, being unable to claim the same perfection and objective reality as the idea of God, may

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celle de Dieu) peut estre feinte par l'ignorance de ce qui veritablement meut ces corps vers le centre.	have been invented out of ignorance of what truly moves these bodies toward the center.
Et puisque nulle cause materielle ne se presentoit aux sens, on l'auroit attribué a son contraire, l'immateriel, ce que neanmoins ie n'ay iamais pu conceuoir que comme vne negation de la matiere, qui ne peut auoir aucune communication auec elle.	And since no material cause presented itself to the senses, people would have attributed the motion to its contrary, the immaterial. Yet I have never been able to conceive the immaterial except as a negation of matter, which can have no communication with it.
AT III 685 Et i'auoue qu'il me seroit plus facile de conceder la matiere & l'extension a l'ame, que la capacité de mouuoir vn corps & d'en estre emeu, a vn estre immateriel. Car, si le premier se faisoit par information, il faudroit que les esprits, qui font le mouuement, fussent intelligens, ce que vous n'accordez a rien de corporel. Et encore qu'en vos Meditations Metaphysiques, vous montrez la possibilité du second, il est pourtant tres difficile a comprendre qu'vne ame, comme vous l'auez descrite, apres auoir eu la faculté & l'habitude de bien raisonner, peut perdre tout cela par quelques vapeurs, & que, pouuant subsister sans le corps & n'ayant rien de commun auec luy, elle en soit tellement regie.	And I confess that it would be easier for me to concede matter and extension to the soul than to concede to an immaterial being the capacity to move a body and to be moved by it. For if the first were done by "information", the spirits that produce the motion would have to be intelligent, which you grant to nothing corporeal. And although in your *Metaphysical Meditations* you show the possibility of the second, it is nevertheless very hard to understand that a soul as you have described it, after having had the faculty and habit of reasoning well, can lose all of it through some vapors; and that, though it can subsist without the body and has nothing in common with it, it is so governed by it.[8]
Mais, depuis que vous auez entrepris de m'instruire, ie n'entretiens ces sentimens que comme des amis que ie ne crois point conseruer, m'asseurant que vous m'expliquerez aussi bien la nature d'vne substance immaterielle & la maniere de ses actions & passions dans le corps, que toutes les autres choses que vous auez voulu enseigner. Ie vous prie aussi de croire que vous ne pouuez faire cette charité a personne, qui soit plus sensible de l'obligation qu'elle vous en a, que	But since you have undertaken to instruct me, I entertain these views only as friends I do not expect to keep. I am confident that you will explain to me the nature of an immaterial substance, and the manner of its actions and passions in the body, as well as all the other things you have been willing to teach. I also ask you to believe that you cannot do this charity to anyone more sensible of the obligation she owes you for it than
Vostre tres affectionnée amie, Élisabeth. Ce 10me de Iuin. Monsieur Descartes.	Your most affectionate friend, Elisabeth. 10 June. Monsieur Descartes.

DESCARTES TO ELISABETH, 28 JUNE 1643

Descartes says the union is known through the senses and ordinary life, and lets her attribute extension to the soul.

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AT III 690 **DESCARTES** Madame,	**DESCARTES** Madame,
I'ay tres-grande obligation à vostre Altesse de ce que, apres auoir éprouué que ie me suis mal expliqué en mes precedentes, touchant la question qu'il luy a plû me proposer, elle daigne encore auoir la patience III 691 de	I am very much obliged to Your Highness because, having found that I explained myself badly in my previous letter about the question she was pleased to put to me, she still deigns to have the patience

8 "Information" is the Scholastic term for the way a form, such as the soul, gives shape and life to matter.

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m'entendre sur le mesme suiet, & me donner occasion de remarquer les choses que l'auois obmises.

AT III 691 Dont les principales me semblent estre, qu'apres auoir distingué trois genres d'idées ou de notions primitiues qui se connoissent chacune d'vne façon particuliere & non par la comparaison de l'vne à l'autre, à sçauoir la notion que nous auons de l'ame, celle du corps, & celle de l'vnion qui est entre l'ame & le corps, ie deuois expliquer la difference qui est entre ces trois sortes de notions, & entre les operations de l'ame par lesquelles nous les auons, & dire les moyens de nous rendre chacune d'elles familiere & facile ; puis en suite, ayant dit pourquoy ie m'estois seruy de la comparaison de la pesanteur, faire voir que, bien qu'on veuille conceuoir l'ame comme materielle (ce qui est proprement conceuoir son vnion auec le corps), on ne laisse pas de connoistre, par apres, qu'elle en est separable.

Ce qui est, comme ie croy, toute la matiere que vostre Altesse m'a icy prescrite.

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III 691 to hear me on the same subject, and gives me the opportunity to note the things I had left out.

The chief of these seem to me to be the following. I had distinguished three kinds of ideas or primitive notions, each of which is known in its own particular way and not by comparing one with another: namely, the notion we have of the soul, that of the body, and that of the union between the soul and the body. After this, I should have explained the difference between these three kinds of notions, and between the operations of the soul by which we have them, and stated the means of making each of them familiar and easy to us. Then, having said why I had used the comparison with heaviness, I should have shown that, even if one wishes to conceive the soul as material (which is, properly speaking, to conceive its union with the body), one still recognizes afterward that it is separable from it.

This, I believe, is the whole of the subject Your Highness has set me here.

HOW THE UNION IS KNOWN

The soul is known by pure intellect, body best with imagination, and their union through the senses.

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DESCARTES Premierement, donc, ie remarque vne grande difference entre ces trois sortes de notions, en ce que l'ame ne se conçoit que par l'entendement pur ; le corps, c'est à dire l'extention, les figures & les mouuemens, se peuuent aussi connoistre par l'entendement seul, mais beaucoup mieux par l'entendement aidé de l'imagination ; et enfin, les choses qui appartiennent à l'vnion de l'ame & du corps, ne se connois III 692 sent qu'obscurement par l'entendement seul, ny mesme par l'entendement aidé de l'imagination ; mais elles se connoissent tres-clairement par les sens.

AT III 692 D'où vient que ceux qui ne philosophent iamais, & qui ne se seruent que de leurs sens, ne doutent point que l'ame ne meuue le corps, & que le corps n'agisse sur l'ame ; mais ils considerent l'vn & l'autre comme vne seule chose, c'est à dire, ils conçoiuent leur vnion ; car conceuoir l'vnion qui est entre deux choses, c'est les conceuoir comme vne seule.

Et les pensées Metaphysiques, qui exercent l'entendement pur, seruent à nous rendre la notion de l'ame familiere ; & l'étude des Mathematiques, qui exerce principalement l'imagination en la consideration des

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DESCARTES First, then, I note a great difference between these three kinds of notions. The soul is conceived only by the pure intellect. The body, that is, extension, shapes and motions, can also be known by the intellect alone, but much better by the intellect aided by the imagination. And finally, the things that belong to the union of the soul and the body are known III 692 only obscurely by the intellect alone, or even by the intellect aided by the imagination; but they are known very clearly by the senses.

That is why those who never philosophize, and who use only their senses, do not doubt that the soul moves the body and that the body acts on the soul. Rather, they consider the two as a single thing; that is, they conceive their union. For to conceive the union between two things is to conceive them as one.

Metaphysical thoughts, which exercise the pure intellect, serve to make the notion of the soul familiar to us. The study of mathematics, which chiefly exercises the imagination in considering

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figures & des mouuemens, nous acoutume à former des notions du corps bien distinctes ; et enfin, c'est en vsant seulement de la vie & des conuersations ordinaires, & en s'abstenant de mediter & d'étudier aux choses qui exercent l'imagination, qu'on apprend à conceuoir l'vnion de l'ame & du corps.

I'ay quasi peur que vostre Altesse ne pense que ie ne parle pas icy serieusement ; mais cela seroit contraire au respect que ie luy dois, & que ie ne manqueray iamais de lui rendre. Et ie puis dire, auec verité, que la principale regle que i'ay tousiours obseruée en mes études, & celle que ie croy m'auoir le plus seruy pour acquerir quelque connoissance, a esté que ie n'ay iamais employé que fort peu d'heures, par iour, aux pensées qui occupent l'imagination, & fort peu d'heures, par an, à celles qui occupent l'entendement III 693 seul, & que i'ay donné tout le reste de mon temps au relasche des sens & au repos de l'esprit ; mesme ie conte, entre les exercices de l'imagination, toutes les conuersations serieuses, & tout ce à quoy il faut auoir de l'attention.

AT III 693 C'est ce qui m'a fait retirer aux champs ; car encore que, dans la ville la plus ocupée du monde, ie pourrois auoir autant d'heures à moy, que i'en employe maintenant à l'étude, ie ne pourrois pas toutes-fois les y employer si vtilement, lors que mon esprit seroit lassé par l'attention que requert le tracas de la vie. Ce que ie prens la liberté d'écrire icy à vostre Altesse, pour luy témoigner que i'admire veritablement que, parmy les affaires & les soins qui ne manquent iamais aux personnes qui font ensemble de grand esprit & de grande naissance, elle ait pû vaquer aux meditations qui sont requises pour bien connoistre la distinction qui est entre l'ame & le corps.

Mais l'ay iugé que c'estoit ces meditations, plutost que les pensées qui requerent moins d'atention, qui luy ont fait trouuer de l'obscurité en la notion que nous auons de leur vnion ; ne me semblant pas que l'esprit humain soit capable de conceuoir bien distinctement, & en mesme temps, la distinction d'entre l'ame & le corps, & leur vnion ; à cause qu'il faut, pour cela, les conceuoir comme vne seule chose, & ensemble les conceuoir comme deux, ce qui se contrarie.

Et pour ce suiet, (supofant que vostre Altesse auoit encore les raisons qui prouuent la distinction de l'ame & du corps sont presentes à son esprit, & ne voulant point

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shapes and motions, accustoms us to forming very distinct notions of the body. And finally, it is only by living and engaging in ordinary conversation, and by refraining from meditating and from studying things that exercise the imagination, that one learns to conceive the union of the soul and the body.

I am almost afraid Your Highness will think I am not speaking seriously here; but that would be contrary to the respect I owe her, and which I shall never fail to show her. And I can say truthfully that the principal rule I have always observed in my studies, and the one I believe has served me best in acquiring some knowledge, has been this: I have never spent more than a very few hours a day on the thoughts that occupy the imagination, and a very few hours a year on those that occupy the intellect III 693 alone, and I have given all the rest of my time to the relaxation of the senses and the repose of the mind. I even count among the exercises of the imagination all serious conversations, and everything that requires attention.

That is what made me withdraw to the country. For although in the busiest city in the world I could have as many hours to myself as I now spend on study, I could not spend them so usefully there, since my mind would be wearied by the attention that the bustle of life demands. I take the liberty of writing this here to Your Highness to show her how truly I marvel that, amid the business and cares that never fail those who combine a great mind with high birth, she has been able to devote herself to the meditations required to understand properly the distinction between the soul and the body.

But I judged that it was these meditations, rather than thoughts requiring less attention, that made her find obscurity in the notion we have of their union. For it does not seem to me that the human mind is capable of conceiving very distinctly, and at the same time, both the distinction between the soul and the body and their union. To do so, one must conceive them as a single thing and at the same time conceive them as two, which is self-contradictory.

And for this reason (supposing that Your Highness still had the arguments that prove the distinction of the soul and the body present to her mind, and

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la suplier de s'en défaire, pour se representer la III 694 notion de l'vnion que chacun éprouue tousiours en soy-mesme sans philosopher ;

AT III 694 à sçauoir qu'il est vne seule personne, qui a ensemble vn corps & vne pensée, lesquels sont de telle nature que cette pensée peut mouuoir le corps, & sentir les accidens qui luy arriuent), ie me suis seruy cy-deuant de la comparaison de la pesanteur & des autres qualitez que nous imaginons communement estre vnies à quelques corps, ainsi que la pensée est vnie au nostre ; & ie ne me suis pas soucié que cette comparaison clochast en cela que ces qualitez ne sont pas reelles, ainsi qu'on les imagine, à cause que i'ay crû que vostre Altesse estoit desia entierement persuadée que l'ame est vne substance distincte du corps.

Mais, puis que vostre Altesse remarque qu'il est plus facile d'attribuer de la matiere & de l'extension à l'ame, que de luy attribuer la capacité de mouuoir vn corps & d'en estre muë, sans auoir de matiere, ie la supplie de vouloir librement attribuer cette matiere & cette extension à l'ame ; car cela n'est autre chose que la conceuoir vnie au corps.

Et aprés auoir bien conceu cela, & l'auoir éprouué en soy-mesme, il luy sera aisé de considerer que la matiere qu'elle aura attribuée à cette pensée, n'est pas la pensée mesme, & que l'extension de cette matiere est d'autre nature que l'extension de cette pensée, en ce que la premiere est determinée à certain lieu, duquel elle exclut toute autre extension de corps, ce que ne fait pas la deuxième. Et III 695 ainsi vostre Altesse ne laissera pas de reuenir aisement à la connoissance de la distinction de l'ame & du corps, nonobstant qu'elle ait conceu leur vnion.

AT III 695 Enfin, comme ie croy qu'il est tres-necessaire d'auoir bien compris, vne fois en sa vie, les principes de la Metaphysique, à cause que ce sont eux qui nous donnent la connoissance de Dieu & de nostre ame, ie croy aussi qu'il seroit tres-nuisible d'occuper souuent son entendement à les mediter, à cause qu'il ne pourroit si bien vacquer aux fonctions de l'imagination & des sens ; mais que le meilleur est de se contenter de retenir en sa memoire & en sa creance les conclusions qu'on en a vne fois tirées, puis employer le reste du temps qu'on a pour l'étude, aux pensées où l'entendement agit auec l'imagination & les sens.

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not wishing to beg her to set them aside in order to represent to herself the III 694 notion of the union that everyone always experiences in himself without philosophizing;

namely, that one is a single person who has both a body and a thought, which are of such a nature that this thought can move the body and feel the things that happen to it), I previously used the comparison with heaviness and with the other qualities that we commonly imagine to be united to certain bodies, just as thought is united to ours. And I was not concerned that this comparison limped in that these qualities are not real, as people imagine them, because I believed that Your Highness was already entirely persuaded that the soul is a substance distinct from the body.

But since Your Highness remarks that it is easier to attribute matter and extension to the soul than to attribute to it the capacity to move a body and to be moved by it without having matter, I beg her to feel free to attribute this matter and this extension to the soul; for that is nothing other than conceiving it as united to the body.

And after conceiving this properly, and experiencing it in herself, she will easily see that the matter she has attributed to this thought is not the thought itself, and that the extension of this matter is of a different nature from the extension of this thought. For the first is fixed to a certain place, from which it excludes every other bodily extension, which the second does not do. And III 695 so Your Highness will still easily return to knowledge of the distinction of the soul and the body, even though she has conceived their union.

Finally, I believe it is very necessary to have properly understood, once in one's life, the principles of metaphysics, since it is they that give us knowledge of God and of our soul. But I also believe it would be very harmful to occupy one's intellect often in meditating on them, since it could not then attend so well to the functions of the imagination and the senses. The best course is to be content with keeping in one's memory and belief the conclusions one has once drawn from them, and then to spend the rest of the time one has for study on thoughts in which the intellect acts together with the imagination and the senses.

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L'extreme deuotion que l'ay au seruice de vostre Altesse, me fait esperer que ma franchise ne luy sera pas desagreable, & elle n'auroit engage icy en vn plus long discours, où l'eusse tasché d'éclaircir à cette fois toutes les difficultez de la question proposée ; mais vne fascheuse nouuelle que ie viens d'aprendre d'Vtrech, où le Magistrat me cite, pour verifier ce que i'ay écrit d'vn de leurs Ministres, combien que ce soit vn homme qui m'a calomnié tres indignement, & que ce que i'ay écrit de luy, pour ma iuste défene, ne soit que trop notoire à tout le monde, me contraint de finir icy, pour aller consulter les moyens de me tirer, le plutost que ie pourray, de ces chicaneries. Ie suis, &c.

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The extreme devotion I have to serving Your Highness makes me hope that my frankness will not displease her. It would have drawn me here into a longer discussion, in which I would have tried to clear up on this occasion all the difficulties of the question she raised. But I have just received some troublesome news from Utrecht, where the magistrates summon me to substantiate what I wrote about one of their ministers. Yet he is a man who has slandered me most unworthily, and what I wrote about him in my just defense is only too well known to everyone. This news forces me to stop here, so as to go and consider how to extricate myself from this legal wrangling as soon as I can. I am, etc.[9]

ELISABETH TO DESCARTES, 1 JULY 1643

Elisabeth suspects the soul has unknown properties and still asks how an unextended soul moves the body.

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AT IV 1 **ELISABETH** Monsieur Descartes,

I'aprehende que vous ne receuiez autant d'incommodité, par mon estime de vos instructions & le desir de m'en preualoir, que par l'ingratitude de ceux qui s'en priuent eux-mesmes & en voudroient priuer le genre humain ; & ne vous aurois enuoyé vn nouuel effet de mon IV 2 ignorance, auant que ie vous seusse dechargé de ceux de leur opiniastreté, si le sieur Van Bergen ne m'y eust obligé plus tost, par sa ciuilité de vouloir demeurer en cette ville, iusqu'a ce que ie luy donnerais vne response a vostre lettre du 28e de iuin, qui me fait voir clairement les trois sortes de notions que nous auons, leurs obiets, & comment on s'en doit seruir.

AT IV 2 Ie trouue aussi que les sens me montrent que l'ame meut le corps, mais ne m'enseignent point (non plus que l'Entendement & l'Imagination) la fasson dont elle le fait. Et, pour cela, ie pense qu'il y a des proprietés de l'ame, qui nous sont inconnues, qui pourront peut estre renuerser ce que vos Meditations Metaphysiques m'ont persuadée, par de si bonnes raisons, de l'inextention de l'ame. Et ce doute semble estre fondé sur la regle que vous y donnez en parlant du vray & du faux, & que toute l'erreur nous vient de former des iugements de ce que nous ne perceuons assez.

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ELISABETH Monsieur Descartes,

I fear that my esteem for your instructions and my desire to profit by them cause you as much inconvenience as the ingratitude of those who deprive themselves of them and would like to deprive the human race of them too. I would not have sent you a new effect of my IV 2 ignorance before I knew you to be free of the effects of their obstinacy, had Monsieur Van Bergen not obliged me to do so sooner. He was courteous enough to wish to remain in this town until I could give him a reply to your letter of 28 June, which shows me clearly the three kinds of notions we have, their objects, and how one should use them.

I also find that the senses show me that the soul moves the body, but they do not teach me (any more than the intellect and the imagination do) the way it does so. For that reason, I think there are properties of the soul unknown to us that could perhaps overturn what your *Metaphysical Meditations* persuaded me of, by such good arguments, concerning the non-extension of the soul. And this doubt seems to be founded on the rule you give there in speaking of the true and the false, namely that all error comes from our form-

9 The minister is Gisbertus Voetius, theologian and rector of the University of Utrecht, whom Descartes had attacked in print in his *Letter to Voetius* (1643).

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	ing judgments about what we do not perceive well enough.
Quoy que l'extension n'est necessaire a la pensée, n'y repugnant point, elle pourra duire a quelque autre fonction de l'ame, qui ne luy est moins essentielle. Du moins elle fait choir la contradiction de Scholastiques, qu'elle est toute en tout le corps, & toute en chacune de ses parties. Ie ne m'excuse point de confondre la notion de l'ame auec celle du corps par la mesme raison que le vulgaire ; mais cela ne m'oste point le premier doute, & ie desespereray de trouuer de la certitude en chose du monde, si vous ne m'en donnez, qui m'auez seul empeschée d'estre [IV 3] sceptique, a quoy mon premier raisonnement me portoit.	Although extension is not necessary to thought, it is not incompatible with it either, and so it could suit some other function of the soul that is no less essential to it. At the very least, it disposes of the contradiction of the Scholastics, that the soul is whole in the whole body and whole in each of its parts. I do not excuse myself for confusing the notion of the soul with that of the body on the same grounds as ordinary people do; but this does not remove my first doubt. I shall despair of finding certainty in anything in the world unless you give it to me, since you alone have kept me from being [IV 3] a skeptic, which is where my first reasoning was leading me.
AT IV 3 Encore que ie vous doiue cette confession, pour vous en rendre grace, ie la croirois fort imprudente, si ie ne connoissois vostre bonté & generosité, esgale au resre de vos merites, autant par l'experience que i'en ay desia eue, que par reputation. Vous ne la pouuez tesmoigner d'vne fasson plus obligeante que par les esclaircissements & conseils dont vous me faites part, que ie prise au-dessus des plus grands tresors que pourroit posseder	Although I owe you this confession in order to thank you, I would think it very imprudent if I did not know your kindness and generosity, which equal the rest of your merits, as much from the experience I have already had of them as by reputation. You cannot show them in a more obliging way than through the clarifications and advice you share with me, which I prize above the greatest treasures that could be possessed by
Vostre tres-affectionnée amie a vous seruir, Élisabeth. Ce Ier de Iuillet. Monsieur Descartes.	Your most affectionate friend, always at your service, Elisabeth. 1 July. Monsieur Descartes.

DESCARTES TO ELISABETH, NOVEMBER 1643

Descartes sets out his method for the problem of the three circles, using several unknowns and right triangles.

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AT IV 38 **DESCARTES** Madame,	**DESCARTES** Madame,
Ayant sceu de Monsieur de Pollot que Vostre Altesse a pris la peine de chercher la question des trois cercles, & qu'elle a trouué le moyen de la soudre, en ne supposant qu'une quantité inconnuë, i'ai pensé que mon deuoir m'obligeoit de mettre ici la raison pourquoi i'en avois proposé plusieurs, et de quelle façon ie les démesle.	I have learned from Monsieur Pollot that Your Highness has taken the trouble to work on the problem of the three circles, and that she has found a way to solve it by supposing only one unknown quantity. I therefore thought it my duty to set down here the reason why I had proposed several, and how I untangle them.[10]
I'obserue tousiours, en cherchant vne question de Geometrie, que les lignes, dont ie me sers pour la trouuer, soient paralleles, ou s'entrecouppent à angles droits, le plus qu'il est possible ; & ie ne considere point d'autres Theoremes, sinon que les costez des triangles semblables	In working on a geometrical problem, I always see to it that the lines I use to find the solution are, as far as possible, parallel or intersect at right angles. I use no theorems except these two: that the sides of similar triangles are in proportion to one anoth-

10 The problem, posed by Apollonius of Perga (3rd century BC), is to find a circle that touches three given circles.

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ont semblable proportion entr'eux, & que, dans les triangles rectangles, le quarré de la base est égal aux deux quarrez des costez. Et ie ne crains point de supposer plusieurs quantitez inconnuës, pour reduire la question à tels termes, qu'elle ne depende que de ces deux Theoremes ; au contraire, i'aime mieux en supposer plus que moins.	er, and that in right triangles the square of the base is equal to the squares of the two sides. And I am not afraid to suppose several unknown quantities, so as to reduce the problem to terms that depend only on these two theorems; on the contrary, I prefer to suppose more rather than fewer.[11]
Car, par ce moyen, ie voy plus clairement tout ce que ie fais, & en les demeslant ie trouue mieux les plus courts chemins, & m'exempte de multiplications superfluës ; au lieu que, si l'on tire d'autres lignes, & qu'on se serue d'autres Theoremes, bien qu'il puisse arriuer, par hazard, que le chemin qu'on trouuera soit plus court que le mien, toutesfois il arriue quasi tousiours le contraire.	For in this way I see more clearly everything I am doing, and in untangling them I find the shortest routes more easily and avoid superfluous multiplications. If instead one draws other lines and uses other theorems, it may happen by chance that the route one finds is shorter than mine; but almost always the opposite happens.
Et on ne voit point si bien ce qu'on fait, si [IV 39] ce n'est qu'on ait la demonstration du Theoreme dont on se sert soit presente en l'esprit ; & en ce cas on trouue, quasi tousiours, qu'il depend de la consideration de quelques triangles, qui sont ou rectangles, ou semblables entr'eux, & ainsi on retombe dans le chemin que ie tiens.	And one does not see so well what one is doing unless [IV 39] one has the proof of the theorem one is using present in one's mind. In that case one almost always finds that it depends on considering certain triangles that are either right-angled or similar to one another, and so one falls back onto the route I take.
AT IV 39 Par exemple, si on veut chercher cette question des trois cercles, par l'aide d'vn Theoreme qui enseigne à trouuer l'aire d'vn triangle par ses trois costez, on n'a besoin de supposer qu'vne quantité inconnuë.	For example, if one tries to solve this problem of the three circles with the help of a theorem that teaches how to find the area of a triangle from its three sides, one need suppose only one unknown quantity.[12]
Car si A, B, C sont les centres des trois cercles donnez, & D le centre du cherché, les trois costez du triangle ABC sont donnez, & les trois lignes AD, BD, CD sont composées des trois rayons des cercles donnez, iоints au rayon du cercle cherché, si bien que, supposant *x* pour ce rayon, on a tous les costez des triangles ABD, ACD, BCD ; & par consequent on peut auoir leurs aires, qui, iointes ensemble, sont égales à l'aire du triangle donné ABC ; & on peut, par cette équation, venir à la connoisance du rayon *x*, qui seul est requis pour la solution de la question.	For if A, B, C are the centers of the three given circles, and D the center of the one sought, the three sides of the triangle ABC are given. The three lines AD, BD, CD are made up of the three radii of the given circles, each added to the radius of the circle sought. So, supposing *x* for this radius, one has all the sides of the triangles ABD, ACD, BCD, and consequently one can have their areas, which, added together, are equal to the area of the given triangle ABC. By this equation one can arrive at knowledge of the radius *x*, which alone is required for solving the problem.
Mais ce chemin me semble conduire à tant de multiplications superfluës, que ie ne voudrois pas entreprendre de les demesler en trois mois. C'est pourquoy, au lieu des deux lignes obliques AB & BC, ie mene les trois perpendiculaires BE, [IV 40] DG, DF, & posant trois quantitez inconnuës, I'vne pour DF, l'autre pour DG, & l'autre pour le rayon du cercle cherché, i'ay tous les	But this route seems to me to lead to so many superfluous multiplications that I would not undertake to untangle them in three months. That is why, instead of the two oblique lines AB and BC, I draw the three perpendiculars BE, [IV 40] DG, DF. Positing three unknown quantities, one for DF, another for DG, and another for the radius of the circle

11 "Base" here means the hypotenuse.
12 The theorem known as Heron's formula.

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costez des trois triangles rectangles ADF, BDG, CDF, qui me donnent trois équations, pour ce qu'en chacun d'eux le quarré de la base est égal aux deux quarrez des costez.

AT IV 40 Apres auoir ainsi fait autant d'équations que i'ay supposé de quantitez inconnuës, ie considere si, par chaque équation, i'en puis trouuer vne en termes assez simples ; & si ie ne le puis, ie tasche d'en venir à bout, en ioignant deux ou plusieurs équations par l'addition ou soustraction ; & enfin, lors que cela ne suffit pas, i'examine seulement s'il ne sera point mieux de changer les termes en quelque façon. Car, en faisant cét examen auec addresse, on rencontre aisément les plus courts chemins, & on en peut essayer vne infinité en fort peu de temps.

Ainsi, en cét exemple, ie suppose que les trois bases des triangles rectangles sont

AD = $a + x$, BD = $b + x$, CD = $c + x$; et, faisant AE = d, BE = e, CF = f, DF ou GE = y, DG = FE = z, AF = $d - z$ et FD = y, BG = $e - y$ et DG = z, CF = $f + z$ et FD = y.

AT IV 41 Puis, faisant le quarré de chacune de ces bases égal au quarré des deux costez, i'ay les trois équations suiuantes :

$aa + 2ax + xx = dd - 2dz + zz + yy$,

$bb + 2bx + xx = ee - 2ey + yy + zz$,

$cc + 2cx + xx = ff + 2fz + zz + yy$,

& ie voy que, par l'vne d'elles toute seule, ie ne puis trouuer aucune des quantitez inconnuës, sans en tirer la racine quarrée, ce qui embarrasseroit trop la question. C'est pourquoy ie viens au second moyen, qui est de ioindre deux équations ensemble, & i'apperçois incontinent que, les termes xx, yy & zz estant semblables en toutes trois, si i'en oste vne d'vne autre, laquelle ie voudray, ils s'effaceront, & ainsi ie n'auray plus de termes inconnus que x, y & z tous simples. Ie voy aussi que, si i'oste la seconde de la premiere ou de la troisiéme, i'auray tous ces trois termes x, y & z ; mais que, si i'oste la premiere de la troisiéme, ie n'auray que x & z.

Ie choisis donc ce dernier chemin, & ie trouue

$cc + 2cx - aa - 2ax = ff + 2fz - dd + 2dz$,

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sought, I have all the sides of the three right triangles ADF, BDG, CDF. These give me three equations, since in each of them the square of the base is equal to the squares of the two sides.

Having thus formed as many equations as I have supposed unknown quantities, I consider whether from each equation I can find one of them in fairly simple terms. If I cannot, I try to achieve it by combining two or more equations through addition or subtraction. And finally, when that is not enough, I merely examine whether it would not be better to change the terms in some way. For by making this examination skillfully one easily comes upon the shortest routes, and one can try an infinite number of them in a very short time.

Thus, in this example, I suppose that the three bases of the right triangles are

AD = $a + x$, BD = $b + x$, CD = $c + x$; and, setting AE = d, BE = e, CF = f, DF or GE = y, DG = FE = z, AF = $d-z$ and FD = y, BG = $e-y$ and DG = z, CF = $f + z$ and FD = y.

Then, setting the square of each of these bases equal to the square of the two sides, I have the following three equations:

$aa + 2ax + xx = dd-2dz + zz + yy$,

$bb + 2bx + xx = ee-2ey + yy + zz$,

$cc + 2cx + xx = ff + 2fz + zz + yy$,

and I see that from any one of them alone I cannot find any of the unknown quantities without extracting the square root, which would complicate the problem too much. That is why I turn to the second means, which is to combine two equations. I immediately notice that, since the terms xx, yy and zz are alike in all three, if I subtract any one of them from another, whichever I like, these terms will cancel out, and so I shall have no unknown terms left except x, y and z, all simple. I also see that if I subtract the second from the first or from the third, I shall have all three terms x, y and z; but that if I subtract the first from the third, I shall have only x and z.

So I choose this last route, and I find

$cc + 2cx-aa-2ax = ff + 2fz-dd + 2dz$,

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ou bien z = (cc – aa + dd – ff + 2cx – 2ax)/(2d + 2f),	or else z = (cc − aa + dd − ff + 2cx − 2ax)/(2d + 2f),
ou bien 1/2d – 1/2f + (cc – aa + 2cx – 2ax)/(2d + 2f).	or else 1/2d − 1/2f + (cc − aa + 2cx − 2ax)/(2d + 2f).
AT IV 42 Puis, ostant la seconde équation de la premiere ou de la troisiéme (car l'vn reuient à l'autre), & au lieu de *z* mettant les termes que ie viens de trouuer, i'ay par la premiere & la seconde :	Then, subtracting the second equation from the first or from the third (for it comes to the same thing), and putting in place of *z* the terms I have just found, I have from the first and the second:
aa + 2*ax* — *bb* — 2*bx* = *dd* — 2*dz* — *ee* + 2*ey*,	*aa* + 2*ax*—*bb*—2*bx* = *dd*—2*dz*—*ee* + 2*ey*,
ou bien 2ey = ee + aa + 2ax – bb – 2bx – dd +	or else 2ey = ee + aa + 2ax − bb − 2bx − dd +
dd – df + (ccd – aad + 2cdx – 2adx)/(d + f)	dd − df + (ccd − aad + 2cdx − 2adx)/(d + f)
ou bien y = 1/2e – bb/2e – bx/e – df/2e + (ccd + aaf + 2cdx + 2afx)/(2ed + 2ef).	or else y = 1/2e − bb/2e − bx/e − df/2e + (ccd + aaf + 2cdx + 2afx)/(2ed + 2ef).
Enfin, retournant à l'vne des trois premieres équations, & au lieu d'*y* ou de *z* mettant les quantitez qui leur sont égales, & les quarrez de ces quantitez pour *yy* & *zz*, on trouue vne équation où il n'y a que *x* & *xx* inconnus ; de façon que le Probleme est plan, & il n'est plus besoin de passer outre. Car le reste ne sert point pour cultiuer ou recréer l'esprit, mais seulement pour exercer la patience de quelque calculateur laborieux. Mesme i'ay peur de m'estre rendu icy ennuyeux à Vostre Altesse, pour ce que ie me suis arresté à écrire des choses qu'elle sçauoit sans doute mieux que moy, & qui sont faciles, mais qui sont neantmoins les clefs de mon Algebre.	Finally, returning to one of the first three equations, and putting in place of *y* or *z* the quantities equal to them, and the squares of these quantities for *yy* and *zz*, one finds an equation in which only *x* and *xx* are unknown. So the problem is plane, and there is no need to go further. For the rest serves neither to cultivate nor to refresh the mind, but only to exercise the patience of some laborious calculator. Indeed, I am afraid I have made myself tedious to Your Highness here, because I have dwelt on writing out things she no doubt knew better than I, and which are easy, but which are nevertheless the keys to my algebra.[13]
Ie la supplie tres humblement de croire que c'est la deuotion que i'ay à l'honorer, qui m'y a porté, & que ie suis,	I most humbly beg her to believe that it is my devotion to honoring her that led me to do so, and that I am,
Madame, De V. A. Le tres-humble & tres-obeïssant seruiteur, Descartes.	Madame, Your Highness's most humble and obedient servant, Descartes.

ELISABETH TO DESCARTES, 21 NOVEMBER 1643

Elisabeth sends her own solution to the three-circles problem and thanks him for his lesson.

FRENCH	ENGLISH
AT IV 44 **ELISABETH** Monsieur Descartes,	**ELISABETH** Monsieur Descartes,
Si i'auois autant d'habileté a suiure vos auis, que d'enuie, vous trouueriez désià les effets de votre charité aux progrès que i'aurois fait dans le raisonnement & dans l'Algèbre, desquels, a cette heure, ie ne vous puis montrer que les fautes. Mais ie suis si accoustumée de vous en faire voir, qu'il m'arriue, comme aux vieux pescheurs,	If I had as much skill in following your advice as I have desire to do so, you would already see the effects of your charity in the progress I would have made in reasoning and in algebra. As it is, I can show you only my mistakes in them. But I am so used to showing you my mistakes that, like old

13 A "plane" problem is one that can be solved with ruler and compass alone.

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d'en perdre tout a fait la honte. Pourquoy i'auois fait dessein de vous enuoyer la solution de la question que vous m'auez donnée, par la méthode qu'on m'a enseignée autrefois tant pour vous obliger de m'en dire les manquements, que parce que ie ne suis pas si bien versée en la vostre.

Car ie remarquois bien qu'il y en auoit a ma solution, n'y voyant assez clair pour en conclure vn théorème ; mais ie n'en aurois iamais trouué la raison sans votre dernière lettre, qui m'y donne toute la [IV 45] satisfac-tion que ie demandois, & m'apprend plus que ie n'aurois fait en six mois de mon maistre. Ie vous en suis tres-redeuable & n'aurois iamais pardonné a M. de Palloti, s'il en eust vsé selon vostre ordre. Toutefois il ne me l'a voulu bailler, qu'a condition que ie vous enuoyerois ce que i'ay fait.

AT IV 45 Ne trouuez donc point mauuais que ie vous donne vne incommodité superflue, puisqu'il y a peu de choses que ie ne ferois, pour obtenir ces effets de vostre bonne volonté, qui est infiniment estimée de

Vostre tres-affectionnée amie a vous seruir, Élisabeth. Ce 21 de 9bre. Monsieur Descartes.

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sinners, I have lost all shame about it. That is why I had planned to send you my solution of the problem you gave me, using the method I was taught long ago. I meant to do so as much to oblige you to tell me its shortcomings as because I am not so well versed in your method.

For I could tell that my solution had shortcomings, since I did not see it clearly enough to draw a theorem from it. But I would never have found the reason without your last letter, which gives me all the [IV 45] satisfaction I asked for, and teaches me more than I would have learned from my tutor in six months. I am very much indebted to you for it, and I would never have forgiven Monsieur Pollot if he had acted according to your instructions. Even so, he would hand the letter over to me only on condition that I send you what I have done.

So do not take it amiss that I give you a superfluous trouble, since there are few things I would not do to obtain these effects of your goodwill, which is infinitely esteemed by

Your most affectionate friend, always at your service, Elisabeth. 21 November. Monsieur Descartes.

DESCARTES TO ELISABETH, NOVEMBER 1643

Descartes praises her solution and shows how to turn it into a general theorem.

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DESCARTES Madame,

La solution qu'il a plû à Vostre Altesse me faire l'honneur de m'enuoyer, est si iuste, qu'il ne s'y peut [IV 46] rien desirer dauantage ; et ie n'ay pas seulement esté surpris d'estonnement, en la voyant, mais ie ne puis m'abstenir d'adiouster que i'ay esté aussi rauy de ioye, & ay pris de la vanité de voir que le calcul, dont se sert Vostre Altesse, est entierement semblable à celuy que i'ay proposé dans ma Geometrie.

AT IV 46 L'experience m'auoit fait connoistre que la plupart des esprits qui ont de la facilité à entendre les raisonnemens de la Metaphysique, ne peuuent pas conceuoir ceux de l'Algebre, & reciproquement, que ceux qui comprennent aisément ceux-cy, sont d'ordinaire incapables des autres ; et ie ne voy que celuy de Votre Altesse, auquel toutes choses sont également faciles. Il est vray que i'en auois desia tant de preuues, que ie n'en pouuois aucunement douter ; mais ie craignois seulement que la patience, qui

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DESCARTES Madame,

The solution Your Highness was pleased to do me the honor of sending me is so exact that nothing [IV 46] more could be desired in it. I was not only struck with astonishment on seeing it, but I cannot refrain from adding that I was also delighted, and felt some vanity in seeing that the calculation Your Highness uses is entirely like the one I proposed in my *Geometry*.[14]

Experience had taught me that most minds that find it easy to follow the reasonings of metaphysics cannot grasp those of algebra, and conversely, that those who easily understand the latter are usually incapable of the former. I know of no mind but Your Highness's to which all things are equally easy. It is true that I already had so many proofs of this that I could not doubt it in the least. I only feared that she might lack the patience needed to

14 *La Géométrie* (1637), published with the *Discourse on Method*, which set out Descartes' algebraic method in geometry.

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est necessaire pour surmonter, au commencement, les difficultez du calcul, ne luy manquast. Car c'est vne qualité qui est extremement rare aux excellens esprits, & aux personnes de grande condition.

Maintenant que cette difficulté est surmontée, elle aura beaucoup plus de plaisir au reste ; & en substituant vne seule lettre au lieu de plusieurs, ainsi qu'elle a fait icy fort souuent, le calcul ne luy sera pas ennuyeux. C'est vne chose qu'on peut quasi tousiours faire, lors qu'on veut seulement voir de quelle nature est vne question, c'est à dire si elle se peut soudre auec la regle & le compas, ou s'il y faut employer quelques autres lignes courbes du premier ou du 2(d) genre &c., & quel est le chemin pour la trouuer ; qui est ce de quoy ie me contente ordinairement, touchant les [IV 47] questions particulieres.

AT IV 47 Car il me semble que le surplus, qui consiste à chercher la construction & la demonstration par les propositions d'Euclide, en cachant le proceder de l'Algebre, n'est qu'vn amusement pour les petits Geometres, qui ne requiert pas beaucoup d'esprit ny de science.

Mais lors qu'on a quelque question qu'on veut acheuer, pour en faire vn Theoreme qui serue de regle generale pour en soudre plusieurs autres semblables, il est besoin de retenir iusques à la fin toutes les mesmes lettres qu'on a posées au commencement ; ou bien, si on en change quelques-vnes pour faciliter le calcul, il les faut remettre par apres, estant à la fin, à cause qu'ordinairement plusieurs s'effacent l'vne contre l'autre, ce qui ne se peut voir, lors qu'on les a changées.

Il est bon aussi alors d'obseruer que les quantitez, qu'on denomme par les lettres, ayent semblable rapport les vnes aux autres, le plus qu'il est possible ; cela rend le Theoreme plus beau & plus court, pour ce que ce qui s'enonce de l'vne de ces quantitez, s'enonce en mesme façon des autres, & empesche qu'on ne puisse faillir au calcul, pour ce que les lettres qui signifient des quantitez qui ont mesme rapport, s'y doiuent trouuer distribuées en mesme façon ; & quand cela manque, on reconnoist son erreur.

Ainsi, pour trouuer vn Theoreme qui enseigne quel est le rayon du cercle, qui touche les trois donnez par position, il ne faudroit pas, en cét exemple, poser les trois lettres *a, b, c*, pour les lignes AD, DC, DB, mais pour les lignes AB, AC & BC, pour ce que ces dernieres ont mesme rapport

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overcome the difficulties of calculation at the start. For that is a quality extremely rare in excellent minds and in persons of high rank.

Now that this difficulty is overcome, she will take much more pleasure in the rest; and if she substitutes a single letter for several, as she has very often done here, she will not find the calculation tedious. This can almost always be done when one merely wants to see what kind of problem one has: that is, whether it can be solved with ruler and compass, or whether one must use some other curved lines of the first or second kind, etc., and what route leads to the solution. That is usually all I trouble myself about [IV 47] with particular problems.

For it seems to me that the remainder, which consists in looking for the construction and the proof by means of Euclid's propositions while concealing the algebraic procedure, is only an amusement for minor geometers, and calls for little in the way of mind or learning.

But when one wants to carry a problem through to the end, in order to make of it a theorem that serves as a general rule for solving many others like it, one must keep to the end all the same letters one posited at the beginning. Or, if one changes some of them to make the calculation easier, one must put them back afterward, at the end. For usually several of them cancel each other out, which cannot be seen once they have been changed.

It is also good in that case to see to it that the quantities denoted by the letters bear, as far as possible, similar relations to one another. This makes the theorem more elegant and shorter, because whatever is stated of one of these quantities is stated in the same way of the others. It also prevents one from going wrong in the calculation, because letters signifying quantities that have the same relation must be distributed in the same way; and when this is not the case, one recognizes one's error.

Thus, to find a theorem that teaches what the radius is of the circle that touches three circles given in position, one should not, in this example, assign the three letters *a, b, c* to the lines AD, DC, DB, but to the lines AB, AC and BC. For each of these

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l'vne que l'autre aux [IV 48] trois AH, BH & CH, ce que n'ont pas les premieres. Et en suiuant le calcul auec ces six lettres, sans les changer ny en adjoûter d'autres, par le chemin qu'a	[IV 48] three lines AH, BH and CH, which is not true of the former. And by following the calculation with these six letters, without changing them or adding others, along the route that
[AT IV 48] pris Vostre Altesse (car il est meilleur, pour cela, que celuy que i'auois proposé), on doit venir à vne équation fort reguliere, & qui fournira vn Theoreme assez court. Car les trois lettres *a, b, c*, y sont disposées en mesme façon, & aussi les trois *d, e, f*.	Your Highness took (for it is better, for this purpose, than the one I had proposed), one should arrive at a very regular equation, which will yield a fairly short theorem. For the three letters *a, b, c* are arranged in it in the same way, and so are the three *d, e, f*.
Mais, pour ce que le calcul en est ennuyeux, si Vostre Altesse a desir d'en faire l'essay, il luy sera plus aisé, en supposant que les trois cercles donnez s'entre-touchent, & n'employant, en tout le calcul, que les quatre lettres *d, e, f, x*, qui estant les rayons des quatre cercles, ont semblable rapport l'vne à l'autre. Et, en premier lieu, elle trouuera	But since the calculation is tedious, if Your Highness wishes to try it, it will be easier for her to suppose that the three given circles touch one another, and to use throughout the calculation only the four letters *d, e, f, x*, which, being the radii of the four circles, bear a similar relation to one another. First of all, she will find
AK = (dd + df + dx − fx)/(d + f), & AD = (dd + df + de − fe)/(d + f),	AK = (dd + df + dx − fx)/(d + f), and AD = (dd + df + de − fe)/(d + f),
où elle peut desia remarquer que *x* est dans la ligne AK, comme *e* dans la ligne AD, pour ce qu'elle se [IV 49] trouue par le triangle AHC, comme l'autre par le triangle ABC. Puis enfin, elle aura cette équation,	where she can already notice that *x* is in the line AK as *e* is in the line AD, because the one is [IV 49] found by means of the triangle AHC, as the other is by the triangle ABC. Then, finally, she will have this equation,
[AT IV 49] de laquelle on tire, pour Theoreme, que les quatre sommes, qui se produisent en multipliant ensemble les quarrez de trois de ces rayons, font le double de six, qui se produisent en multipliant deux de ces rayons l'vn par l'autre, & par les quarrez des deux autres ; ce qui suffit pour seruir de regle à trouuer le rayon du plus grand cercle qui puisse estre décrit entre les trois donnez qui s'entretouchent. Car, si les rayons de ces trois donnez sont, par exemple, d/2 e/3 f/4. i'auray 576 pour *ddeeff*, & 36*xx* pour *ddeexx*, & ainsi des autres. D'où ie trouueray	from which one derives, as a theorem, that the four sums produced by multiplying together the squares of three of these radii make twice the six produced by multiplying two of these radii by each other and by the squares of the other two. This is enough to serve as a rule for finding the radius of the largest circle that can be described between the three given circles that touch one another. For if the radii of these three given circles are, for example, d/2 e/3 f/4. I shall have 576 for *ddeeff*, and 36*xx* for *ddeexx*, and so on for the others. From this I shall find
$x = -156/47 + \sqrt{(31104/2209)}$	$x = -156/47 + \sqrt{(31104/2209)}$
si ie ne me suis trompé au calcul que ie viens de faire. Et Votre Altesse peut voir icy deux procedures fort differentes dans vne mesme question, selon les differens desseins qu'on se propose. Car, voulant sçauoir de quelle nature est la question, & par quel biais on la peut soudre, ie prens pour données les lignes perpendiculaires ou paralleles, & suppose plusieurs autres quantitez	unless I have made a mistake in the calculation I have just done. Your Highness can see here two very different procedures in one and the same question, depending on the different aims one sets oneself. For when I want to know what kind of question it is, and by what approach it can be solved, I take the perpendicular or parallel lines as

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	inconnuës, afin de ne faire aucune multiplication superfluë, & voir mieux les plus courts chemins ; au lieu que, la voulant acheuer, ie prens [IV 50] pour donnez les costez du triangle, & ne suppose qu'vne lettre inconnuë.	given, and assume several other unknown quantities, so as to make no superfluous multiplication and to see the shortest routes more clearly. When, on the other hand, I want to complete it, I take [IV 50] the sides of the triangle as given, and assume only one unknown letter.
AT IV 50	Mais il y a quantité de questions, où le mesme chemin conduit à l'vn & à l'autre, & ie ne doute point que Vostre Altesse ne voye bien tost iusques où peut atteindre l'esprit humain dans cette science. Ie m'estimerois extremement heureux, si i'y pouuois contribuer quelque chose, comme estant porté d'vn zele très-particulier à estre,	But there are many questions in which the same route leads to both, and I have no doubt that Your Highness will soon see how far the human mind can reach in this science. I would consider myself extremely fortunate if I could contribute anything to this, being moved by a very particular zeal to be,
	Madame, De V. A. Le tres-humble & tres-obeïssant seruiteur, Descartes.	Madame, Your Highness's most humble and obedient servant, Descartes.

DESCARTES TO ELISABETH, JULY 1644

Writing from France, Descartes advises her on health: trust in the body's soundness and avoid sad thoughts.

	FRENCH	ENGLISH
AT V 64	**DESCARTES** Madame,	**DESCARTES** Madame,
	Mon voyage ne pouuoit estre accompagné d'aucun malheur, puis que i'ay esté si heureux, en le faisant, que d'estre en la souuenance de vostre Altesse ; la tres-fauorable lettre, qui m'en donne des marques, est la [V 65] chose la plus precieuse que ie pûsse receuoir en ce païs. Elle m'auroit entierement rendu heureux, si elle ne m'auoit appris que la maladie qu'auoit vostre Altesse, auparauant que ie partisse de la Haye, luy a encore laissé quelques restes d'indisposition en l'estomac.	My journey could not be attended by any misfortune, since I was fortunate enough, while making it, to be remembered by Your Highness. The most gracious letter that gives me proof of this is the [V 65] most precious thing I could receive in this country. It would have made me entirely happy, had it not told me that the illness Your Highness had before I left The Hague has still left her with some lingering trouble in the stomach.
AT V 65	Les remedes qu'elle a choisis, à sçauoir la diete & l'exercice, sont, à mon auis, les meilleurs de tous, apres toutesfois ceux de l'ame, qui a sans doute beaucoup de force sur le corps, ainsi que monstrent les grands changemens que la colere, la crainte & les autres passions excitent en luy. Mais ce n'est pas directement par sa volonté qu'elle conduit les esprits dans les lieux où ils peuuent estre vtiles ou nuisibles ; c'est seulement en voulant ou pensant à quelqu'autre chose. Car la construction de nostre corps est telle, que certains mouuemens suiuent en luy naturellement de certaines pensées comme on voit que la rougeur du visage suit de la honte, les larmes de la compassion, & le ris de la ioye.	The remedies she has chosen, namely diet and exercise, are in my view the best of all—after, however, those of the soul, which undoubtedly has great power over the body, as the great changes that anger, fear and the other passions excite in it show. But the soul does not guide the spirits directly by its will to the places where they can be useful or harmful; it does so only by willing or thinking of something else. For our body is so constructed that certain movements follow naturally in it from certain thoughts: we see that blushing follows from shame, tears from compassion, and laughter from joy.
	Et ie ne sçache point de pensée plus propre pour la conseruation de la santé, que celle qui consiste en vne forte persuasion & ferme creance, que l'architecture de nos corps est si bonne que, lors qu'on est vne fois sain, on ne peut pas aisement tomber malade, si ce n'est qu'on	And I know of no thought better suited to preserving health than a strong conviction and firm belief that the architecture of our bodies is so sound that, once we are healthy, we cannot easily fall ill unless we commit some notable excess, or

FRENCH

fasse quelque excez notable, ou bien que l'air ou les autres causes exterieures nous nuisent ; & qu'ayant vne maladie, on peut aisement se remettre par la seule force de la nature, principalement lors qu'on est encore ieune.

Cette persuasion est sans doute beaucoup plus vraye & plus raisonnable, que celle de certaines gens, qui, sur le raport d'vn V 66 Astrologue ou d'vn Medecin, se font acroire qu'ils doiuent mourir en certain temps, & par cela seul deuiennent malades, & mesme en meurent assez souuent, ainsi que i'ay vû arriuer à diuerses personnes. Mais ie ne pourrois manquer d'estre extremement triste, si ie pensois que l'indisposition de vostre Altesse durast encore ; i'ayme mieux esperer qu'elle est toute passée ; & toutefois le desir d'en estre certain me fait auoir des passions extrémes de retourner en Holande.

AT V 66 Ie me propose de partir d'icy, dans quatre ou cinq iours, pour passer en Poitou & en Bretagne, où sont les affaires qui m'ont amené ; mais si-tost que ie les auray pû mettre vn peu en ordre, ie ne souhaite rien tant que de retourner vers les lieux où i'ay esté si heureux que d'auoir l'honneur de parler quelquefois à vostre Altesse. Car, bien qu'il y ait icy beaucoup de personnes que i'honore & estime, ie n'y ay toutesfois encore rien vû qui me puisse arrester. Et ie suis, au delà de tout ce que ie puis dire, &c.

ENGLISH

the air or other external causes harm us; and that, when we have an illness, we can easily recover by the force of nature alone, especially while we are still young.

This conviction is undoubtedly much truer and more reasonable than that of certain people who, on the word of an V 66 astrologer or a physician, persuade themselves that they must die at a certain time, and by that alone become ill, and quite often even die of it, as I have seen happen to various people. But I could not help being extremely sad if I thought Your Highness's indisposition were still continuing. I prefer to hope that it is quite gone; and yet the desire to be certain of this gives me an extreme longing to return to Holland.

I intend to leave here in four or five days to go on to Poitou and Brittany, where the business that brought me here lies. But as soon as I have been able to put it somewhat in order, I wish for nothing so much as to return to the places where I was fortunate enough to have the honor of sometimes speaking with Your Highness. For although there are many people here whom I honor and esteem, I have not yet seen anything here that could keep me. And I am, beyond anything I can say, etc.

ELISABETH TO DESCARTES, 1 AUGUST 1644

Elisabeth thanks him for dedicating the Principles to her and raises questions about quicksilver and magnetism.

FRENCH

AT IV 131 **ELISABETH** Monsieur Descartes,

Le present que M. Van Bergen m'a fait, de vostre part, m'oblige de vous en rendre grace, & ma conscience m'accuse de ne le pouuoir faire selon ses merites. Quand ie n'y aurois reçeu que le bien qui en reuient a nostre siecle, celuy cy vous deuant tout ce que les precedents ont payé aux inuenteurs des sciences, puisque vous auez seul demonstré qu'il y en a, iusqu'a quelle proportion montera ma dette, a qui vous donnez, auec l'instruction, vne partie de vostre gloire, dans le tesmoignage public que vous me faites de vostre amitié & de vostre approbation ? Les pedants diront que vous estes contraint de bastir vne nouuelle morale, pour m'en rendre digne.

ENGLISH

ELISABETH Monsieur Descartes,

The gift that Monsieur Van Bergen has given me on your behalf obliges me to thank you for it, and my conscience accuses me of being unable to do so as it deserves. Even if I had received from it only the benefit that comes to our age—which owes you everything that earlier ages paid to the inventors of the sciences, since you alone have demonstrated that there are any—how high will my debt rise, I to whom you give, along with instruction, a share of your glory, in the public testimony you give of your friendship and your approval of me? The pedants will say that you have been forced to build a new ethics to make me worthy of it.[15]

15 The gift is the *Principles of Philosophy* (1644), which Descartes dedicated to Elisabeth with high praise of her virtue; Van Bergen was the acquaintance who delivered it.

FRENCH	ENGLISH
Mais ie la prens pour vne regle de ma vie, ne me sentant qu'au premier degré, que vous y approuuez, le desir d'informer [IV 132] mon entendement & de suiure le bien qu'il connoit. C'est a cette volonté que ie dois l'intelligence de vos œuures, qui ne sont obscures qu'a ceux qui les examinent par les principes d'Aristote, ou auec fort peu de soin, comme les plus raisonnables de nos docteurs en ce païs m'ont auoué qu'ils ne les estudioient point, parce qu'ils sont trop vieux pour commencer vne nouuelle methode, ayant vsé la force du corps & de l'esprit dans la vieille.	But I take it as a rule for my life, since I feel I have reached only the first degree of what you approve there: the desire to inform [IV 132] my intellect and to follow the good it knows. It is to this will that I owe my understanding of your works, which are obscure only to those who examine them by the principles of Aristotle, or with very little care. Indeed, the most reasonable of our learned doctors in this country have admitted to me that they did not study them, because they are too old to begin a new method, having used up the strength of their body and mind in the old one.
[AT IV 132] Mais ie crains que vous retracterez, auec iustice, l'opinion que vous eustes de ma comprehension, quand vous saurez que ie n'entens pas comment l'argent vif se forme, si plein d'agitation & si pesant tout ensemble, contraire a la definition que vous auez fait de la pesenteur ; &, encore que le corps E, dans la figure de la 225e page, le presse, quand il est dessous, pourquoy se ressentiroit-il de cette contrainte, lorsqu'il est au dessus, plus que ne fait l'air en sortant d'vn vaisseau ou il a esté pressé ?	But I fear you will rightly retract the opinion you had of my understanding when you learn that I do not understand how quicksilver is formed, so full of agitation and so heavy at the same time, contrary to the definition you gave of heaviness. And even though the body E, in the figure on page 225, presses on it when it is beneath, why should it still feel this constraint when it is above, any more than air does on coming out of a vessel in which it was compressed?
La seconde difficulté que i'aye trouuée est celle de faire passer ces particules, tournées en coquilles, par le centre de la terre, sans estre pliées ou defigurées par le feu qui s'y trouue, comme ils le furent du commencement pour former le corps M. Il n'y a que leur vitesse qui les en peut sauuer, & vous dites, dans la page 133 & 134, qu'elle ne leur est point necessaire pour aller en ligne droite, &, par consequent, que ce sont les parties les moins agitées du premier element qui s'ecoulent ainsi par les globules du second.	The second difficulty I found is how these particles, twisted into shells, can pass through the center of the earth without being bent or deformed by the fire there, as they were at the beginning when the body M was formed. Only their speed could save them from this, and you say, on pages 133 and 134, that they do not need it to travel in a straight line, and consequently that it is the least agitated parts of the first element that flow in this way through the globules of the second.[16]
Ie m'estonne pareillement qu'ils prennent vn si grand tour, en sortant des poles du corps M, & passent par la superficie de la terre, pour retourner a [IV 133] l'autre, puisqu'ils peuuent trouuer vn chemin plus proche par le corps C.	I am likewise surprised that, on leaving the poles of the body M, they take so long a detour and pass along the surface of the earth to return to [IV 133] the other pole, since they could find a shorter path through the body C.
[AT IV 133] Ie ne vous represente icy que les raisons de mes doutes dans votre liure ; celles de mon admiration estant innumerables, comme aussi celles de mon obligation, entre lesquelles ie conte encore la bonté que vous auez eu de m'informer de vos nouuelles & me donner des preceptes pour la conseruation de ma santé. Celles-la m'apportoient beaucoup de ioye par le bon succes de vostre voyage & la continuation du dessein que vous	I set out here only the reasons for my doubts about your book. Those for my admiration are countless, as are those for my obligation, among which I also count the kindness you showed in sending me your news and giving me precepts for preserving my health. The former brought me much joy, telling me of the success of your journey and your continued intention to return; the latter brought

16 Descartes' screw-shaped "channeled" particles, which in the *Principles* account for magnetism.

FRENCH

auiez de reuenir, & celles-cy beaucoup de profit, puisque i'en experimente desia la bonté en moy-mesme. Vous n'auez pas montré a M.

Voetius le danger qu'il y a d'estre vostre ennemi, comme a moy l'auantage de vostre bienueillance ; autrement, il en fuieroit autant le titre, comme ie cherche de meriter celuy de

Vostre tres-affectionnée amie a vous rendre seruice, Élisabeth. Ce 1er d'Aoust. Monsieur Descartes.

ENGLISH

me much benefit, since I already feel their good effect in myself. You have not shown Monsieur

Voetius the danger of being your enemy as clearly as you have shown me the advantage of your goodwill; otherwise he would flee that title as eagerly as I seek to deserve that of

Your most affectionate friend, always at your service, Elisabeth. 1 August. Monsieur Descartes.

DESCARTES TO ELISABETH, AUGUST 1644

Descartes answers her questions on the weight of quicksilver and the path of the magnetic particles.

FRENCH

AT IV 136 **DESCARTES** Madame,

La faueur que me fait vostre Altesse de n'auoir pas desagreable que l'aye osé témoigner en public combien ie l'estime & ie l'honore, est plus grande, & m'oblige plus qu'aucune que ie pourois receuoir d'ailleurs. Et ie ne crains pas qu'on m'acuse d'auoir rien changé en la Morale, pour faire entendre mon sentiment sur ce suiet ; car ce que l'en ay écrit est si veritable & si clair, que ie m'assure qu'il n'y aura point d'homme raisonnable qui ne l'auouë. Mais ie crains que ce que i'ay mis, au reste du liure, ne soit plus douteux & plus obscur, puisque V. A. y trouue des difficultez.

Celle qui regarde la pesanteur de l'argent vif, est fort considerable, & i'eusse tasché de l'éclaircir, sinon que, n'ayant pas encore assez examiné la nature de ce metal, i'ay eu peur de faire quelque chose contraire à ce que ie pouray aprendre cy-apres. Tout ce que i'en puis maintenant dire, est que ie me persuade que les petites parties de l'air, de l'eau, & de tous les autres cors terrestres, ont plusieurs pores, par où la matiere tres-subtile peut passer ; & cela suit assez de la façon dont i'ay dit qu'elles sont formées. Or il sufit de dire IV 137 que les parties du vif argent & des autres metaux ont moins de tels pores, pour faire entendre pourquoy ces metaux sont plus pesans.

AT IV 137 Car, par exemple, encore que nous auoüassions que les parties de l'eau & celles du vif argent fussent de mesme grosseur & figure, & que leurs mouuemens fussent semblables, si seulement nous suposons que chacune des parties de l'eau est comme vne petite corde fort molle & fort lasche, mais que celles du vif argent, ayant moins de

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DESCARTES Madame,

The favor Your Highness does me in not taking it amiss that I dared to show in public how much I esteem and honor her is greater, and puts me more in her debt, than any I could receive from anyone else. And I do not fear being accused of having changed anything in ethics in order to express my view on this subject; for what I wrote about it is so true and so clear that I am sure no reasonable person will fail to acknowledge it. But I fear that what I put in the rest of the book may be more doubtful and more obscure, since Your Highness finds difficulties in it.

The one concerning the heaviness of quicksilver is very considerable, and I would have tried to clear it up, except that, not having yet examined the nature of this metal enough, I was afraid of saying something contrary to what I may learn later. All I can say about it now is that I am convinced that the small parts of air, of water, and of all other terrestrial bodies have many pores through which the very subtle matter can pass; and this follows well enough from the way I said they are formed. Now it is enough to say IV 137 that the parts of quicksilver and of the other metals have fewer such pores, to make it understood why these metals are heavier.

For example, even if we granted that the parts of water and those of quicksilver were of the same size and shape, and that their movements were similar, it is enough to suppose that each part of water is like a small, very soft and very slack cord, while those of quicksilver, having fewer pores, are

FRENCH

pores, sont comme d'autres petites cordes beaucoup plus dures & plus serrées, cela sufit pour faire entendre que le vif argent doit beaucoup plus peser que l'eau.

Pour les petites parties tournées en coquille, ce n'est pas merueille qu'elles ne soient point détruites par le feu qui est au centre de la terre. Car ce feu-là n'estant composé que de la matiere tres-subtile toute seule, il peut bien les emporter fort viste, mais non pas les faire choquer contre quelques autres cors durs ; ce qui seroit requis pour les rompre ou diuiser.

Au reste, ces parties en coquille ne prennent point vn trop grand tour pour retourner d'vn pole à l'autre. Car ie suppose que la pluspart passe par le dedans de la terre ; en sorte qu'il n'y a que celles qui ne trouuent point de passage plus bas, qui retournent par nostre air. Et c'est la raison que ie donne, pourquoy la vertu de l'aimant ne nous paroist pas si forte en toute la masse de la terre, qu'en de petites pierres d'aimant.

AT IV 138 Mais ie supplie tres-humblement vostre Altesse de me pardonner, si ie n'écris rien icy que fort confusement. Ie n'ay point encore le liure dont elle a daigné marquer les pages, & ie suis en vn voyage continu ; mais i'espere, dans deux ou trois mois, auoir l'honneur de luy faire la reuerence à la Haye. Ie suis, &c.

ENGLISH

like other small cords that are much harder and more tightly wound. This suffices to make it understood that quicksilver must weigh much more than water.

As for the small particles twisted into shells, it is no wonder that they are not destroyed by the fire at the center of the earth. For since that fire is composed of the very subtle matter alone, it can indeed carry them along very fast, but it cannot make them collide with other hard bodies, which is what would be needed to break or divide them.

Moreover, these shell-shaped parts do not take too long a detour in returning from one pole to the other. For I suppose that most of them pass through the interior of the earth, so that only those that find no passage lower down return through our air. And this is the reason I give why the power of the magnet does not appear to us as strong in the whole mass of the earth as in small lodestones.

But I most humbly beg Your Highness to forgive me if what I write here is very muddled. I do not yet have the book whose pages she has kindly indicated, and I am continually traveling; but I hope in two or three months to have the honor of paying my respects to her at The Hague. I am, etc.

1645

Illness, Seneca and the happy life
Descartes prescribes for Elisabeth's fever, and they read Seneca's On the Happy Life together; she presses him on the passions, providence and free will.

DESCARTES TO ELISABETH, 18 MAY 1645

FRENCH

AT IV 200 **DESCARTES** Madame,

I'ay esté extremement surpris d'aprendre, par les lettres de Monsieur de P(ollot), que V. A. a esté longtemps malade, & ie veux mal à ma solitude, pour ce qu'elle est cause que ie ne l'ay point sceu plutost.

Il est vray que, bien que ie fois tellement retiré du monde, que ie n'aprenne rien du tout de ce qui s'y passe, toutesfois le zele que i'ay pour le seruice de vostre Altese ne m'eust pas permis d'estre si longtemps sans sçauoir l'estat de sa santé, quand l'aurois dû aller à la Haye tout exprés pour m'en enquerir, sinon que Monsieur de P(ollot), m'ayant écrit fort à la haste, il y a enuiron deux mois, m'auoit promis de m'écrire derechef par le prochain ordinaire ; & pour ce qu'il ne manque iamais de me mander comment se porte vostre Altesse, pendant que ie n'ay point receu de ses lettres, i'ay supofé que vous estiez tousiours [IV 201] en mesme estat.

AT IV 201 Mais i'ay apris, par ses dernieres, que vostre Altese a eu, trois ou quatre semaines durant, vne fiévre lente, acompagnée d'vne toux seiche, & qu'apres en auoir esté déliurée pour cinq ou six iours, le mal est retourné, & que toutesfois, au temps qu'il m'a enuoyé sa lettre (laquelle a esté prés de quinze iours par les chemins), vostre Altesse commençoit derechef à se porter mieux. En quoy ie remarque les signes d'vn mal si considerable, & neantmoins auquel il me semble que vostre Altesse peut si certainement remedier, que ie ne puis m'abstenir de luy en écrire mon sentiment.

Car, bien que ie ne sois pas Medecin, l'honneur que vostre Altesse me fit, l'esté passé, de vouloir sçauoir mon opinion, touchant vne autre indisposition qu'elle auoit pour lors, me fait esperer que ma liberté ne luy sera pas desagreable.

La cause la plus ordinaire de la fiévre lente est la tristesse ; & l'opiniastreté de la Fortune à persecuter

ENGLISH

DESCARTES Madame,

I was extremely surprised to learn from Monsieur Pollot's letters that Your Highness has been ill for a long time, and I am vexed with my solitude, since it is the reason I did not learn of it sooner.

It is true that I am so withdrawn from the world that I learn nothing at all of what goes on in it. Even so, the zeal I have for Your Highness's service would not have allowed me to go so long without knowing the state of her health, even if I had had to go to The Hague expressly to inquire, were it not that Monsieur Pollot, who wrote to me in great haste about two months ago, had promised to write again by the next post. And since he never fails to tell me how Your Highness is, as long as I received no letters from him I supposed that you were still [IV 201] in the same state.

But I have learned from his latest letter that for three or four weeks Your Highness had a low fever accompanied by a dry cough; that after she had been free of it for five or six days the illness returned; and that nevertheless, at the time he sent me his letter (which was nearly two weeks on the way), Your Highness was once again beginning to feel better. In this I recognize the signs of an illness that is very serious, and yet one that, it seems to me, Your Highness can remedy so surely that I cannot refrain from writing to her with my opinion of it.

For although I am not a physician, the honor Your Highness did me last summer in wishing to know my opinion about another indisposition she had at that time makes me hope that she will not take my freedom amiss.

The most common cause of a low fever is sadness; and Fortune's stubbornness in persecuting your

FRENCH

vostre maison, vous donne continuellement des suiets de fascherie, qui sont si publics & si éclatans, qu'il n'est pas besoin d'vser beaucoup de coniectures, ny estre fort dans les affaires, pour iuger que c'est en cela que consiste la principale cause de vostre indisposition. Et il est à craindre que vous n'en puissiez estre du tout déliurée, si ce n'est que, par la force de vostre vertu, vous rendiez vostre ame contente, malgré les disgraces de la Fortune.

Ie sçay bien que ce seroit estre imprudent de vouloir persuader la ioye à vne personne, à qui la Fortune enuoye tous les iours de nouueaux suiets de déplaisir, & ie ne suis point de ces [IV 202] Philosophes cruels, qui veulent que leur sage soit insensible. Ie sçay aussi que vostre Altesse n'est point tant touchée de ce qui la regarde en son particulier, que de ce qui regarde les interests de sa maison & des personnes qu'elle affectionne ; ce que l'estime comme vne vertu la plus aimable de toutes.

AT IV 202 Mais il me semble que la difference qui est entre les plus grandes ames & celles qui sont basses & vulgaires, consiste, principalement, en ce que les ames vulgaires se laissent aller à leurs passions, & ne sont heureuses ou malheureuses, que selon que les choses qui leur suruiennent sont agreables ou deplaisantes ; au lieu que les autres ont des raisonnemens si forts & si puissans que, bien qu'elles ayent aussi des passions, & mesme souuent de plus violentes que celles du commun, leur raison demeure neantmoins tousiours la maistresse, & fait que les afflictions mesme leur seruent, & contribuent à la parfaite felicité dont elles iouissent dés cette vie.

Car, d'vne part, se considerant comme immortelles & capables de receuoir de tres-grands contentemens, puis, d'autre-part, considerant qu'elles sont iointes à des cors mortels & fragiles, qui sont suiets à beaucoup d'infirmitez, & qui ne peuuent manquer de perir dans peu d'années, elles sont bien tout ce qui est en leur pouuoir pour se rendre la Fortune fauorable en cette vie, mais neantmoins elles l'estiment si peu, au regard de l'Eternité, qu'elles n'en considerent quasi les euenemens que comme nous faisons ceux des Comedies.

Et comme les Histoires tristes & lamentables, que nous voyons representer sur vn theatre, nous donnent souuent autant de recreation que les gayes, bien [IV 203] qu'elles tirent des larmes de nos yeux ; ainsi ces plus grandes

ENGLISH

house continually gives you causes for vexation so public and so conspicuous that one need not conjecture much, nor be deeply versed in affairs, to judge that this is where the chief cause of your indisposition lies. And it is to be feared that you cannot be entirely rid of it unless, by the strength of your virtue, you make your soul content in spite of the blows of Fortune.[1]

I know well that it would be imprudent to try to persuade someone to be joyful when Fortune sends her new causes of displeasure every day, and I am not one of those [IV 202] cruel philosophers who want their wise man to feel nothing. I also know that Your Highness is not so much affected by what concerns her personally as by what concerns the interests of her house and of the people she loves—which I regard as the most lovable of all the virtues.[2]

But it seems to me that the difference between the greatest souls and those that are base and common consists chiefly in this. Common souls give themselves up to their passions, and are happy or unhappy only according as the things that befall them are pleasant or unpleasant. The others, by contrast, have reasonings so strong and so powerful that, although they too have passions, and often even more violent ones than ordinary people, their reason nevertheless always remains the master, and makes even their afflictions serve them and contribute to the perfect happiness they enjoy already in this life.

For, on the one hand, they consider themselves immortal and capable of receiving very great contentment; on the other, they consider that they are joined to mortal and fragile bodies, which are subject to many infirmities and cannot fail to perish within a few years. So they do indeed do everything in their power to make Fortune favorable to them in this life, but they nevertheless think so little of it in comparison with eternity that they regard its events almost as we regard those of plays.

And just as the sad and lamentable stories we see performed in a theater often give us as much enjoyment as the cheerful ones, even [IV 203] though they draw tears from our eyes, so these greatest

1 Elisabeth's family, the Palatine house, had lost its lands and its crown early in the Thirty Years' War and lived in exile.
2 An allusion to the Stoics, whose sage was to be free of all passion.

FRENCH

ames, dont ie parle, ont de la satisfaction, en elles-mesmes, de toutes les choses qui leur arriuent, mesme des plus fascheuses & insuportables. Ainsi, ressentant de la douleur en leur cors, elles s'exercent à la supporter patiemment, & cette épreuue qu'elles font de leur force, leur est agreable ; ainsi, voyant leurs amis en quelque grande affliction, elles compatissent à leur mal, & font tout leur possible pour les en déliurer, & ne craignent pas mesme de s'exposer à la mort pour ce suiet, s'il en est besoin.

AT IV 203 Mais, cependant, le témoignage que leur donne leur conscience, de ce qu'elles s'acquittent en cela de leur deuoir, & font vne action loüable & vertueuse, les rend plus heureuses, que toute la tristesse, que leur donne la compassion, ne les afflige. Et enfin, comme les plus grandes prosperitez de la Fortune ne les enyurent iamais, & ne les rend(ent) point plus insolentes, aussi les plus grandes aduersitez ne les peuuent abatre ny rendre si tristes, que le corps, auquel elles sont iointes, en deuienne malade.

Ie craindrois que ce stile ne fust ridicule, si ie m'en seruois en écriuant à quelqu'autre ; mais, pour ce que ie considere vostre Altesse comme ayant l'ame la plus noble & la plus releuée que ie connoisse, ie croy qu'elle doit aussi estre la plus heureuse, & qu'elle le sera veritablement, pourueu qu'il luy plaise ietter les yeux sur ce qui est au dessous d'elle, & comparer la valeur des biens qu'elle possede, & qui ne luy sçauroient iamais estre ostez, auec ceux dont la Fortune l'a dépouillée, & les disgraces dont elle la persecute en la personne [IV 204] de ses proches ; car alors elle verra le grand suiet qu'elle a d'estre contente de ses propres biens.

AT IV 204 Le zele extreme que i'ay pour elle est cause que ie me suis laissé emporter à ce discours, que ie la supplie tres-humblement d'excuser, comme venant d'vne personne qui est, &c.

ENGLISH

souls I am speaking of find satisfaction within themselves in everything that happens to them, even the most distressing and unbearable things. Thus, when they feel pain in their body, they practice bearing it patiently, and this test they make of their strength is pleasing to them. Thus, when they see their friends in some great affliction, they feel compassion for their suffering and do all they can to deliver them from it, and do not even fear exposing themselves to death for this purpose, if need be.

But meanwhile the testimony of their conscience—that in this they are doing their duty and performing a praiseworthy and virtuous action—makes them happier than all the sadness that compassion brings them makes them afflicted. And finally, just as the greatest prosperity Fortune can bring never intoxicates them or makes them more arrogant, so the greatest adversities cannot cast them down, or make them so sad that the body to which they are joined falls ill from it.

I would fear that this style might seem ridiculous if I used it in writing to anyone else. But since I regard Your Highness as having the noblest and most elevated soul I know, I believe she must also be the happiest, and that she truly will be, provided she is pleased to cast her eyes on what is beneath her. Let her compare the value of the goods she possesses, which can never be taken from her, with those of which Fortune has stripped her, and with the misfortunes by which it persecutes her in the person [IV 204] of her relatives: she will then see what great reason she has to be content with her own goods.

The extreme zeal I have for her is why I have let myself be carried away into this discourse, which I most humbly beg her to excuse, as coming from someone who is, etc.

ELISABETH TO DESCARTES, 24 MAY 1645

Elisabeth admits that her illness comes from grief over her family's troubles and asks about the Spa waters.

FRENCH

AT IV 207 **ELISABETH** Monsieur Descartes,

Ie vois que les charmes de la vie solitaire ne vous ostent point les vertus requises a la societé. Ces bontés genereuses que vous auez pour vos amis & me tesmoignez aux soins que vous auez de ma santé, ie serois

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ELISABETH Monsieur Descartes,

I see that the charms of the solitary life do not take from you the virtues required for society. As for the generous kindness you have for your friends, and show me in the care you take of my health, I

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faschée qu'ils vous eussent engagé a faire vn voyage iusqu'icy, depuis que M. de Palotti m'a dit que vous iugiez le repos necessaire a vostre conseruation. Et ie vous asseure que les medecins, qui me virent tous les iours & examinerent tous les symptomes de mon mal, n'en ont pas trouué la IV 208 cause, ni ordonné de remedes si salutaires que vous auez fait de loin.

AT IV 208 Quand ils auroient esté assez sauants pour se douter de la part que mon esprit auoit au desordre du corps, ie n'aurois point eu la franchise de le leur auouer. Mais a vous, Monsieur, ie le fais sans scrupule, m'asseurant qu'vn recit si naïf de mes defauts ne m'ostera point la part que i'ay en vostre amitié, mais me la confirmera d'autant plus, puisque vous y verrez qu'elle m'est necessaire.

Sachez donc que i'ay le corps imbu d'vne grande partie des foiblesses de mon sexe, qu'il se ressent tres facilement des afflictions de l'ame, & n'a point la force de se remettre auec elle, estant d'vn temperament suiet aux obstructions & demeurant en vn air qui y contribue fort ; aux personnes qui ne peuuent point faire beaucoup d'exercice, il ne faut point vne longue oppression de cœur par la tristesse, pour opiler la rate & infecter le reste du corps par ses vapeurs. Ie m'imagine que la fieure lente & la toux seiche, qui ne me quitte pas encore, quoy que la chaleur de la saison & les promenades que ie fais rappellent vn peu mes forces, vient de la.

C'est ce qui me fait consentir a l'auis des medecins, de boire d'icy en vn mois les eaux de Spa (qu'on fait venir iusqu'icy, sans qu'elles se gastent), ayant trouué, par experience, qu'elles chassent les obstructions. Mais ie ne les prendray point, auant que i'en sache vostre opinion, puisque vous auez la bonté de me vouloir guerir le corps auec l'ame.

AT IV 209 Ie continueray aussi de vous confesser qu'encore que ie ne pose point ma felicité en chose qui depende de la fortune ou de la volonté des hommes, & que ie ne m'estimeray absolument malheureuse, quand ie ne verrois iamais ma maison restituée, ou mes proches hors de misere, ie ne saurois considerer les accidents nuisibles qui leur arriuent, sous autre notion que celle du mal, ni les efforts inutiles que ie fais pour leur seruice, sans quelque sorte d'inquietude, qui n'est pas sitost calmée

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would be sorry if it had led you to make the journey here, now that Monsieur Pollot has told me you judged rest necessary for your health. And I assure you that the physicians, who saw me every day and examined all the symptoms of my illness, did not find its IV 208 cause, nor prescribe remedies as beneficial as those you have prescribed from afar.

Even if they had been learned enough to suspect the part my mind played in the disorder of my body, I would not have been frank enough to admit it to them. But to you, Sir, I admit it without scruple, confident that so candid an account of my failings will not cost me my share in your friendship, but will confirm it all the more, since you will see from it that I need it.

Know, then, that my body is imbued with a good many of the weaknesses of my sex. It feels the afflictions of the soul very easily, and has not the strength to recover along with it, being of a temperament prone to obstructions and living in an air that contributes greatly to them. For people who cannot take much exercise, it does not take a long oppression of the heart by sadness to obstruct the spleen and infect the rest of the body with its vapors. I imagine that this is the source of the low fever and dry cough, which have not yet left me, although the warmth of the season and the walks I take are restoring my strength a little.

That is why I am agreeing to the physicians' advice to drink the waters of Spa a month from now (they are brought all the way here without spoiling), having found by experience that they clear obstructions. But I will not take them before I know your opinion, since you are kind enough to want to cure my body along with my soul.[3]

I will also go on to confess to you that, although I do not place my happiness in anything that depends on fortune or on the will of men, and would not consider myself absolutely unhappy even if I never saw my house restored or my relatives out of misery, I cannot view the harmful events that befall them under any notion other than that of evil. Nor can I view the useless efforts I make on their behalf without a kind of disquiet, which is no

3 Spa, a town in the Ardennes (in present-day Belgium), famous for its mineral springs.

FRENCH

par le raisonnement, qu'vn nouueau desastre n'en produit d'autre.

Et ie pense que, si ma vie vous estoit entierement cognue, vous trouueriez plus estrange qu'vn esprit sensible, comme le mien, s'est conserué si longtemps, parmi tant de trauerses, dans vn corps si foible, sans conseil que celuy de son propre raisonnement, & sans consolation que celle de sa conscience, que vous ne faites les causes de cette presente maladie.

I'ay employé tout l'hyuer passé en des affaires si fascheuses, qu'elles m'empescherent de me seruir de la liberté que vous m'auez octroyée, de vous proposer les difficultés que ie trouueray en mes estudes, & m'en donnerent d'autres, dont il me faloit encore plus de stupidité que ie n'ay, pour m'en desembarrasser. Ie ne trouuay qu'vn peu deuant mon indisposition le loisir de lire la philosophie de M.

le cheualier Digby, qu'il a fait en anglois, d'ou i'esperois prendre des argumens pour refuter la vostre, puisque le sommaire des chapitres me montroit deux endroits, ou il pretendoit l'auoir fait ; mais ie fus toute estonnée, quand i'y arriuay, de voir qu'il n'auoit rien moins entendu que ce qu'il approuue de vostre sentiment de la reflexion, & de ce qu'il nie de celuy de la [IV 210] refraction, ne faisant nulle distinction entre le mouuement d'vne balle & sa determination, & ne considerant pourquoy vn corps mol qui cede retarde l'vn, & qu'vn corps dur ne fait que resister a l'autre.

AT IV 210 Pour vne partie de ce qu'il dit du mouuement du cœur, il en est plus excusable, s'il n'a point leu ce que vous en escriuites au medecin de Louuain. Le docteur Ionson m'a dit qu'il vous traduira ces deux chapitres ; & ie pense que vous n'aurez pas grande curiosité pour le reste du liure, parce qu'il est du calibre & suit la methode de ce prestre Anglois qui se donne le nom d'Albanus, quoyqu'il y ait de tres-belles meditations, & que difficilement on en peut attendre dauantage d'vn homme qui a passé le plus grand tems de sa vie a poursuiure des desseins d'amour ou d'ambition. Ie n'en auray iamais de plus forts & de plus constants que celuy d'estre, toute ma vie,

ENGLISH

sooner calmed by reasoning than a new disaster produces more.

And I think that if my life were entirely known to you, you would find it stranger that a sensitive mind like mine has survived so long, amid so many adversities, in so weak a body, with no counsel but that of its own reasoning and no consolation but that of its conscience, than you find the causes of this present illness.

I spent the whole of last winter on business so vexing that it kept me from using the freedom you granted me to put to you the difficulties I would find in my studies, and gave me other difficulties, from which I would have needed even more stupidity than I have to extricate myself. Only a little before my indisposition did I find the leisure to read the philosophy of Sir

Kenelm Digby, which he wrote in English, and from which I hoped to draw arguments to refute yours, since the summary of the chapters showed me two places where he claimed to have done so. But when I reached them I was quite astonished to see that he had understood nothing at all of what he approves in your view of reflection, nor of what he denies in your view of [IV 210] refraction. He makes no distinction between the motion of a ball and its determination, and does not consider why a soft body that yields slows the one, while a hard body merely resists the other.[4]

For part of what he says about the motion of the heart he is more excusable, if he has not read what you wrote about it to the physician of Louvain. Dr. Jonson has told me that he will translate these two chapters for you; and I think you will not be very curious about the rest of the book, because it is of the same caliber as that English priest who calls himself Albanus, and follows his method—although it contains some very fine meditations, and one can hardly expect more from a man who has spent most of his life pursuing designs of love or ambition. I shall never have any design stronger or more constant than that of being, all my life,[5]

4 Sir Kenelm Digby (1603–1665), English courtier and natural philosopher; his *Two Treatises* (1644) discuss Descartes' views.
5 The physician of Louvain is Vopiscus Fortunatus Plempius, with whom Descartes debated the heart's motion in 1638; "Albanus" was the pen name of Thomas White, an English Catholic priest and friend of Digby.

FRENCH

Vostre tres-affectionnée amie a vous seruir, Élisabeth. Ce 24eme de May. Monsieur Descartes.

En relisant ce que ie vous mande de moy mesme, IV 211 que i'oublie vne de vos maximes, qui est de ne mettre iamais rien par escrit, qui puisse estre mal interpreté de lecteurs peu charitables. Mais ie me fie tant au soin de M. de Palotti, que ie say que ma lettre vous sera bien rendue, & a votre discretion, que vous l'osterez, par le feu, du hazard de tomber en mauuaises mains.

ENGLISH

Your most affectionate friend, always at your service, Elisabeth. 24 May. Monsieur Descartes.

On rereading what I tell you about myself, IV 211 I see that I am forgetting one of your maxims, which is never to put anything in writing that could be misinterpreted by uncharitable readers. But I trust Monsieur Pollot's care so completely that I know my letter will be safely delivered to you, and I trust your discretion enough to know that you will put it beyond the risk of falling into the wrong hands by burning it.

DESCARTES TO ELISABETH, MAY OR JUNE 1645

Descartes advises turning the imagination away from troubles and tells how he outgrew his own inherited illness.

FRENCH

AT IV 218 **DESCARTES** Madame,

Ie n'ay pû lire la lettre que vostre Altesse m'a fait l'honneur de m'écrire, sans auoir des ressentimens extrémes, de voir qu'vne vertu si rare & si accomplie ne soit pas accompagnée de la santé, ny des prosperitez qu'elle merite, & ie conçoy aysement la multitude des déplaisirs qui se presentent continuellement à elle, & qui sont d'autant plus difficiles à surmonter, que souuent ils sont de telle nature, que la vraye raison n'ordonne pas qu'on s'opose directement à eux & qu'on tasche de les chasser.

Ce sont des ennemis domestiques, auec lesquels estant contraint de conuerser, on est obligé de se tenir sans cesse sur ses gardes, afin d'empescher qu'ils ne nuisent ; et ie ne trouue à cela qu'vn seul remede, qui est d'en diuertir son imagination & ses sens le plus qu'il est possible, & de n'employer que l'entendement seul à les considerer, lors qu'on y est obligé par la prudence.

AT IV 219 On peut, ce me semble, aysement remarquer icy la difference qui est entre l'entendement & l'imagination ou le sens ; car elle est telle, que ie croy qu'vne personne, qui auroit d'ailleurs toute sorte de suiet d'estre contente, mais qui verroit continuellement representer deuant soy des Tragedies dont tous les actes fussent funestes, & qui ne s'ocuperoit qu'à considerer des obiets de tristesse & de pitié, qu'elle sceust estre feints & fabuleux, en sorte qu'ils ne fissent que tirer des larmes de ses yeux, & émouuoir son imagination, sans toucher son entendement, ie croy, dis-ie, que cela seul suffiroit pour acoutumer son cœur à se resserrer & à ietter des soupirs, en suite de quoy la

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DESCARTES Madame,

I could not read the letter Your Highness did me the honor of writing to me without feeling extreme distress at seeing that so rare and so accomplished a virtue is not accompanied by the health, or the prosperity, it deserves. I readily conceive the multitude of troubles that continually present themselves to her. They are all the harder to overcome because they are often of such a nature that true reason does not bid us oppose them directly and try to drive them away.

They are enemies within the household: since one is forced to live in their company, one must be constantly on guard to keep them from doing harm. And I find only one remedy for this, which is to divert one's imagination and senses from them as much as possible, and to use the intellect alone in considering them when prudence obliges one to do so.

It seems to me that one can easily observe here the difference between the intellect and the imagination or the senses. For it is such that I believe the following. Suppose a person had every other reason to be content, but continually saw tragedies performed before her in which every act was calamitous, and occupied herself only in considering objects of sadness and pity that she knew to be feigned and fictitious, so that they merely drew tears from her eyes and moved her imagination without touching her intellect. I believe, I say, that this alone would suffice to accustom her heart to

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circulation du sang estant retardée & allentie, les plus grossieres parties de ce sang, s'attachant les vnes aux autres, pourroient facilement luy opiler la rate, en s'embarassant & s'arrestant dans ses pores ;

& les plus subtiles, retenant leur agitation, luy pourroient alterer le poumon, & causer vne toux, qui à la longue seroit fort à craindre.

Et, au contraire, vne personne qui auroit vne infinité de veritables suiets de déplaisir, mais qui s'étudieroit auec tant de soin à en détourner son imagination, qu'elle ne pensast iamais à eux, que lors que la necessité des affaires l'y obligeroit, & qu'elle employast tout le reste de son temps à ne considerer que des obiets qui luy pussent apporter du contentement & de la ioye, outre que cela luy seroit grandement vtile, pour iuger plus sainement des choses qui luy importeroient, pource qu'elle les regarderoit sans passion, ie ne doute point que cela seul ne fust capable de la remettre en santé, bien que sa rate & ses poumons IV 220 fussent desia fort mal disposez par le mauuais temperament du sang que cause la tristesse.

AT IV 220 Principalement, si elle se seruoit aussi des remedes de la medecine, pour resoudre cette partie du sang qui cause des obstructions ; à quoy ie iuge que les eaux de Spa sont tres-propres, sur tout si vostre Altesse obserue, en les prenant, ce que les Medecins ont coutume de recommander, qui est qu'il se faut entierement déliurer l'esprit de toutes sortes de pensées tristes, & mesme aussi de toutes sortes de meditations serieuses touchant les sciences, & ne s'occuper qu'à imiter ceux qui, en regardant la verdeur d'vn bois, les couleurs d'vne fleur, le vol d'vn oyseau, & telles choses qui ne requerrent aucune attention, se persuadent qu'ils ne pensent à rien.

Ce qui n'est pas perdre temps, mais le bien employer ; car on peut, cependant, se satisfaire par l'esperance que, par ce moyen, on recouurera vne parfaite santé, laquelle est le fondement de tous les autres biens qu'on peut auoir en cette vie.

Ie sçay bien que ie n'écris rien icy que vostre Altesse ne sçache mieux que moy, & que ce n'est pas tant la theorie, que la pratique, qui est difficile en cecy ; mais la faueur extréme qu'elle me fait de témoigner qu'elle n'a pas desagreable d'entendre mes sentimens, me fait prendre la liberté de les écrire tels qu'ils sont, & me donne encore

ENGLISH

contract and to heave sighs. As a result, the circulation of the blood would be slowed and made sluggish, and the coarsest parts of the blood, sticking to one another, could easily obstruct her spleen by becoming entangled and lodged in its pores;

and the subtlest parts, keeping their agitation, could affect her lungs and cause a cough that in the long run would be much to be feared.

Conversely, suppose a person had countless real causes for displeasure, but took such pains to turn her imagination away from them that she never thought of them except when the necessity of her affairs obliged her to, and spent all the rest of her time considering only objects that could bring her contentment and joy. Besides the fact that this would be of great use to her in judging more soundly the things that mattered to her, since she would look at them without passion, I have no doubt that this alone would be capable of restoring her to health, even if her spleen and lungs IV 220 were already in a very bad state because of the poor temperament of the blood that sadness causes.

Especially if she also made use of medical remedies to dissolve the part of the blood that causes obstructions. For this I judge the waters of Spa to be very suitable, above all if Your Highness, while taking them, observes what physicians usually recommend: namely, that one must entirely free one's mind of all kinds of sad thoughts, and even of all kinds of serious meditation on the sciences, and occupy oneself only in imitating those who, looking at the green of a wood, the colors of a flower, the flight of a bird, and such things as require no attention, persuade themselves that they are thinking of nothing.

This is not wasting time but using it well; for meanwhile one can find satisfaction in the hope that by this means one will recover perfect health, which is the foundation of all the other goods one can have in this life.

I know well that I write nothing here that Your Highness does not know better than I, and that in this matter it is not so much the theory as the practice that is difficult. But the extreme favor she does me in letting me know that she is not displeased to hear my views makes me take the

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celle d'adiouter icy, que i'ay experimenté en moy-mesme, qu'vn mal presque semblable, & mesme plus dangereux, s'est guery par le remede que ie viens de dire.

Car, estant né d'vne mere qui mourut, peu de iours apres ma naissance, d'vn mal de [IV 221] poumon, causé par quelques déplaisirs, i'auois herité d'elle vne toux seiche, & vne couleur pasle, que i'ay gardée iusques à l'âge de plus de vingt ans, & qui faisoit que tous les Medecins qui m'ont vû auant ce temps-là, me condamnoient à mourir ieune. Mais ie croy que l'inclination que i'ay tousiours euë à regarder les choses qui se presentoient du biais qui me les pouuoit rendre le plus agreables, & à faire que mon principal contentement ne dependist que de moy seul, est cause que cette indisposition, qui m'estoit comme naturelle, s'est peu à peu entierement passée.

[AT IV 221] I'ay beaucoup d'obligation à vostre Altesse, de ce qu'il luy a plû me mander son sentiment du liure de Monsieur le Cheualier d'Igby, lequel ie ne seray point capable de lire, iusqu'à ce qu'on l'ait traduit en Latin ; ce que Monsieur Ioufon, qui estoit hier icy, m'a dit que quelques-vns veulent faire. Il m'a dit aussi que ie pouuois adresser mes lettres pour vostre Altesse par les Messagers ordinaires, ce que ie n'eusse osé faire sans luy, & l'auois differé d'écrire celle-cy, pour ce que i'attendois qu'vn de mes amis allast à la Haye pour la luy donner.

Ie regrette infiniment l'absence de Monsieur de Pollot, pour ce que ie pouuois apprendre par luy l'état de vostre disposition ; mais les lettres qu'on enuoye pour moy au Messager d'Alkmar ne [IV 222] manquent point de m'estre renduës, & comme il n'y a rien au monde que ie desire auec tant de passion que de pouuoir rendre seruice à vostre Altesse, il n'y a rien aussi qui me puisse rendre plus heureux, que d'auoir l'honneur de receuoir ses commandemens. Ie suis, &c.

ENGLISH

liberty of writing them just as they are. It also gives me the liberty of adding that I have found in my own experience that an almost identical illness, and even a more dangerous one, was cured by the remedy I have just described.

For I was born of a mother who died, a few days after my birth, of a disease of the [IV 221] lungs caused by certain sorrows, and I had inherited from her a dry cough and a pale complexion. I kept these until I was over twenty, and they led all the physicians who saw me before that time to condemn me to die young. But I believe that the inclination I have always had to look at things from the angle that could make them most agreeable to me, and to make my chief contentment depend on myself alone, is the reason this indisposition, which was almost natural to me, gradually passed away entirely.[6]

I am much obliged to Your Highness for being pleased to tell me her opinion of the book by Sir Kenelm Digby, which I shall not be able to read until it has been translated into Latin; Monsieur Jonson, who was here yesterday, told me that some people intend to do this. He also told me that I could send my letters for Your Highness by the ordinary messengers, which I would not have dared to do without his word. I had put off writing this one because I was waiting for one of my friends to go to The Hague to deliver it to her.

I infinitely regret Monsieur Pollot's absence, because I could learn from him the state of your health. But letters sent for me to the Alkmaar messenger never [IV 222] fail to reach me. And just as there is nothing in the world I desire so passionately as to be able to serve Your Highness, so there is nothing that could make me happier than to have the honor of receiving her commands. I am, etc.[7]

ELISABETH TO DESCARTES, 22 JUNE 1645

Elisabeth says she cannot keep her mind from her troubles and envies his freedom.

FRENCH

[AT IV 233] **ELISABETH** Monsieur Descartes,

Vos lettres me seruent tousiours d'antidote contre la melancolie, quand elles ne m'enseigneroient pas,

ENGLISH

ELISABETH Monsieur Descartes,

Your letters always serve me as an antidote to melancholy, even when they do not instruct me, for

6 In fact his mother, Jeanne Brochard, died in 1597, some thirteen months after his birth, following the birth of another child.

FRENCH

detournant mon esprit des obiets desagreables qui luy suruiennent tous les iours, pour lui faire contempler le bonheur que ie possede dans l'amitié d'vne personne de vostre merite, au conseil duquel ie puis commettre la conduite de ma vie. Si ie la pouuois encore conformer a vos derniers preceptes, il n'y a point de doute que ie me guerirois promtement des maladies du corps & des foiblesses de l'esprit. Mais auoue que ie trouue de la difficulté a separer des sens & de l'imagination des choses qui y sont continuellement representées par discours & par lettres, que ie ne saurois euiter sans pecher contre mon deuoir.

Ie considere bien qu'en effaçant de l'idée d'vne affaire tout ce qui me la rend fascheuse (que ie crois m'estre seulement representé par l'imagination), i'en iugerois tout aussi sainement & y trouuerois aussitost les remedes que IV 234 l'affection que i'y aporte. Mais ie ne l'ay iamais seu pratiquer qu'apres que la passion auoit ioué son rôle. Il y a quelque chose de surprenant dans les malheurs, quoy que preueus, dont ie ne suis maistresse qu'apres vn certain tems, auquel mon corps se desordonne si fort, qu'il me faut plusieurs mois pour le remettre, qui ne se passent gueres sans quelque nouueau suiet de trouble.

AT IV 234 Outre que ie suis contrainte de gouuerner mon esprit auec soin, pour luy donner des obiets agreables, la moindre faineantise le fait retomber sur les suiets qu'il a de s'affliger, & l'apprehende que, si ie ne l'employe point, pendant que ie prens les eaux de Spaa, il ne se rende plus melancolique. Si ie pouuois profiter, comme vous faites, de tout ce qui se presente a mes sens, ie me diuertirois, sans le pener. C'est a cette heure que ie sens l'incommodité d'estre vn peu raisonnable. Car, si ie ne l'estois point du tout, ie trouuerois des plaisirs communs auec ceux entre lesquels il me faut viure, pour prendre cette medecine auec profit.

Et au point que vous l'estes, ie me guerirois, comme vous auez fait. Auec cela, la malediction de mon sexe m'empesche le contentement que me donneroit vn voyage vers Egmond, pour y apprendre les verités que vous tirez de vostre nouueau iardin. Toutefois ie me console de la liberté vous me donnez d'en demander quelques fois des nouuelles, en qualité de

ENGLISH

they turn my mind away from the disagreeable objects that come upon it every day and make it contemplate the good fortune I have in the friendship of a person of your merit, to whose counsel I can entrust the conduct of my life. If I could also make it conform to your latest precepts, there is no doubt that I would quickly cure myself of the illnesses of the body and the weaknesses of the mind. But I confess that I find it difficult to separate from the senses and the imagination things that are continually presented to them in conversation and in letters, which I cannot avoid without failing in my duty.

I do see that, if I erased from the idea of an affair everything that makes it vexing to me (which I believe is presented to me only by the imagination), I would judge it just as soundly, and would find remedies for it as promptly as IV 234 I bring my affection to it. But I have never been able to put this into practice until after passion had played its part. There is something startling in misfortunes, even foreseen ones, which I can master only after a certain time; and in that time my body becomes so disordered that I need several months to restore it, and these months seldom pass without some new cause of trouble.

Besides, I am obliged to govern my mind with care and give it agreeable objects, for the least idleness makes it fall back on the reasons it has to grieve; and I fear that, if I do not keep it occupied while I take the waters of Spa, it will become more melancholy. If I could profit, as you do, from everything that presents itself to my senses, I would amuse myself without taxing my mind. It is now that I feel the inconvenience of being somewhat reasonable. For if I were not reasonable at all, I would find pleasures in common with those among whom I must live, and so take this medicine with profit.

And if I were as reasonable as you are, I would cure myself as you did. On top of this, the curse of my sex denies me the satisfaction a journey to Egmond would give me, to learn there the truths you draw from your new garden. Still, I console myself with the freedom you give me to ask for news of it now and then, as[8]

7 Alkmaar, a town in North Holland near Descartes' home.
8 Egmond-Binnen, a village near Alkmaar where Descartes was living.

FRENCH	ENGLISH
Vostre tres-affectionnée amie a vous seruir, Élisabeth. Ce 12/22 de Iuin. Monsieur Descartes.	Your most affectionate friend, always at your service, Elisabeth. 12/22 June. Monsieur Descartes.
AT IV 235 I'ay appris auec beaucoup de ioye que l'Académie de Groningen vous a fait iustice.	I was very glad to learn that the Academy of Groningen has done you justice.[9]

DESCARTES TO ELISABETH, JUNE 1645

Descartes urges her to view misfortune from the side that shows its advantages.

FRENCH	ENGLISH
AT IV 236 **DESCARTES** Madame,	**DESCARTES** Madame,
Ie supplie tres-humblement vostre Altesse de me pardonner, si ie ne puis plaindre son indisposition, lors que i'ay l'honneur de receuoir de ses lettres. Car i'y remarque tousiours des pensées si nettes & des raisonnemens si fermes, qu'il ne m'est pas possible de me persuader qu'vn esprit capable de les conceuoir soit logé dans vn corps foible & malade. Quoy qu'il en soit, la connoissance que vostre Altesse témoigne auoir du mal & des remedes qui le peuuent surmonter, m'assure qu'elle ne manquera pas d'auoir aussi l'adresse qui est requise pour les employer.	I most humbly beg Your Highness to forgive me if I cannot pity her indisposition when I have the honor of receiving her letters. For I always find in them thoughts so clear and reasoning so firm that I cannot persuade myself that a mind capable of conceiving them is lodged in a weak and sickly body. However that may be, the knowledge Your Highness shows of the illness and of the remedies that can overcome it assures me that she will not fail to have the skill needed to use them as well.
Ie sçay bien qu'il est presque impossible de resister aux premiers troubles que les nouueaux malheurs excitent en nous, & mesme que ce sont ordinairement les meilleurs esprits dont les passions sont plus violentes & agissent plus fort sur leurs cors ; mais il me semble que le lendemain, lors que le sommeil a calmé IV 237 l'émotion qui arriue dans le sang en telles rencontres, on peut commencer à se remettre l'esprit, & le rendre tranquile ; ce qui se fait en s'étudiant à considerer tous les auantages qu'on peut tirer de la chose qu'on auoit prise le iour precedent pour vn grand mal-heur, & à détourner son attention des maux qu'on y auoit imaginez.	I know well that it is almost impossible to resist the first disturbances that new misfortunes excite in us, and even that it is usually the best minds whose passions are the most violent and act most strongly on their bodies. But it seems to me that the next day, when sleep has calmed IV 237 the emotion that arises in the blood on such occasions, one can begin to compose one's mind and make it tranquil. This is done by striving to consider all the advantages that can be drawn from the thing one had taken the day before for a great misfortune, and by turning one's attention away from the evils one had imagined in it.
AT IV 237 Car il n'y a point d'éuenemens si funestes, ny si absolument mauuais au iugement du peuple, qu'vne personne d'esprit ne les puisse regarder de quelque biais qui fera qu'ils luy paroistront fauorables. Et vostre Altesse peut tirer cette consolation generale des disgraces de la fortune, qu'elles ont peut-estre beaucoup contribué à luy faire cultiuer son esprit au point qu'elle a fait ; c'est vn bien qu'elle doit estimer plus qu'vn Empire. Les grandes prosperitez éblouissent & enyurent souuent de telle sorte, qu'elles possedent plutost ceux qui les ont, qu'elles ne sont possedées par eux ; et bien que cela	For there are no events so calamitous, or so absolutely bad in the judgment of the people, that an intelligent person cannot view them from some angle that will make them appear favorable. And Your Highness can draw this general consolation from the blows of fortune: that they have perhaps contributed a great deal to making her cultivate her mind to the degree she has. That is a good she should value more than an empire. Great prosperity often dazzles and intoxicates people so much

9 The University of Groningen had ruled in Descartes' favor in his dispute with Martin Schoock, who had written an attack on him under Voetius' influence.

FRENCH

n'arriue pas aux esprits de la trempe du vostre, elles leur fournissent tousiours moins d'ocasions de s'exercer, que ne font les aduersitez.

Et ie croy que, comme il n'y a aucun bien au monde, excepté le bon sens, qu'on puisse absolument nommer bien, il n'y a aussi aucun mal, dont on ne puisse tirer quelque auantage, ayant le bon sens.

I'ay tasché cy-deuant de persuader la nonchalance à vostre Altesse, pensant que les ocupations trop serieuses affoiblissent le cors, en fatiguant l'esprit ; mais ie ne luy voudrois pas pour cela dissuader les soins qui sont necessaires pour détourner sa pensée des obiets qui la peuuent attrister ; & ie ne doute point que les [IV 238] diuertissemens d'étude, qui seroient fort penibles à d'autres, ne luy puissent quelquefois seruir de relasche.

AT IV 238 Ie m'estimerois extremement heureux, si ie pouuois contribuer à les luy rendre plus faciles ; & i'ay bien plus de desir d'aller aprendre à la Haye quelles sont les vertus des eaux de Spa, que de connoistre icy celles des plantes de mon iardin, & bien plus aussi que ie n'ay soin de ce qui se passe à Groningue ou à Vtrech, à mon auantage ou desauantage. Cela m'obligera de suiure dans quatre ou cinq iours cette lettre, & ie seray tous les iours de ma vie, &c.

ENGLISH

that it possesses them rather than being possessed by them; and although this does not happen to minds of your temper, prosperity always gives them fewer occasions to exercise themselves than adversity does.

And I believe that, just as there is no good in the world, except good sense, that can be called good absolutely, so there is no evil from which one cannot draw some advantage, if one has good sense.

I tried earlier to persuade Your Highness to be carefree, thinking that overly serious occupations weaken the body by tiring the mind. But I would not for that reason wish to dissuade her from the efforts needed to turn her thought away from objects that can sadden it; and I have no doubt that the [IV 238] diversions of study, which would be very laborious for others, may sometimes serve her as relaxation.

I would consider myself extremely fortunate if I could help make them easier for her. I have a far greater desire to go to The Hague to learn the properties of the waters of Spa than to learn here those of the plants in my garden—far greater, too, than any concern I have for what is happening in Groningen or Utrecht, to my advantage or disadvantage. This will lead me to follow this letter in four or five days, and I shall be, all the days of my life, etc.

DESCARTES TO ELISABETH, 21 JULY 1645

Descartes proposes that they discuss Seneca's On the Happy Life by letter.

FRENCH

AT IV 251 **DESCARTES** Madame,

L'air a tousiours esté si inconstant, depuis que ie n'ay eu l'honneur de voir vostre Altesse, & il y a eu des iournées si froides pour la saison, que i'ay eu souuant de l'inquietude & de la crainte, que les eaux de Spa ne fussent pas si saines ny si vtiles, qu'elles auroient esté en vn tems plus serain ; & pour ce que vous m'auez fait l'honneur de tesmoigner que mes letres vous pourroient seruir de quelque diuertissement, pendant que les medecins vous recommendent de n'occuper vostre esprit a aucune chose qui le trauaille, ie serois mauuais mesnager de la faueur qu'il vous a pleu me faire en me permettant de vous escrire, si ie manquois d'en prendre les premieres occasions.

ENGLISH

DESCARTES Madame,

The weather has been so changeable ever since I last had the honor of seeing Your Highness, and there have been days so cold for the season, that I have often felt uneasy and afraid that the waters of Spa might not be as healthy or as beneficial as they would have been in calmer weather. And since you have done me the honor of telling me that my letters might offer you some diversion while the physicians advise you not to occupy your mind with anything that strains it, I would be a poor steward of the favor you have been pleased to grant me, in allowing me to write to you, if I failed to take the first opportunities to do so.

FRENCH

Ie m'imagine que la plus part des letres que vous receuez d'ailleurs, vous donnent de l'émotion, & qu'auant mesme que de les lire, vous apprehendez d'y [IV 252] trouuer quelques nouuelles qui vous déplaisent, a cause que la malignité de la fortune vous a des long tems accoustumée a en receuoir souuent de telles ; mais pour celles qui vienent d'icy, vous estes au moins assurée que, si elles ne vous donnent aucun suiet de ioye, elles ne vous en donneront point aussy de tristesse, & que vous les pourrez ouurir a toutes heures, sans craindre qu'elles troublent la digestion des eaux que vous prenez.

AT IV 252 Car, n'apprenant, en ce desert, aucune chose de ce qui se fait au reste du monde, & n'ayant aucunes pensées plus frequentes, que celles qui, me representant les vertus de vostre Altesse, me font souhaiter de la voir aussy heureuse & aussy contente qu'elle merite, ie n'ay point d'autre suiet, pour vous entretenir, que de parler des moyens que la Philosophie nous enseigne pour acquerir cete souueraine felicité, que les ames vulgaires attendent en vain de la fortune, & que nous ne sçaurions auoir que de nous mesmes.

L'vn de ces moyens, qui me semble des plus vtiles, est d'examiner ce que les anciens en ont escrit, & tascher a rencherir par dessus eux, en adioustant quelque chose a leurs preceptes ; car ainsy on peut rendre ces preceptes parfaitement siens, & se disposer a les metre en pratique.

C'est pourquoy, affin de suppleer au defaut de mon esprit, qui ne peut rien produire de soy mesme, que ie iuge meriter d'estre leu par vostre Altesse, & affin que mes letres ne soyent pas entierement vuides & inutiles, ie me propose de les remplir dorenauant des considerations que ie tireray de la lecture [IV 253] de quelque liure, a sçauoir de celuy que Seneque a escrit de *vitâ beatâ*, si ce n'est que vous aymiez mieux en choisir vn autre, ou bien que ce dessein vous soit desagreable.

AT IV 253 Mais si ie voy que vous l'approuuiez (ainsy que ie l'espere), & principalement aussy, s'il vous plaist m'obliger tant que de me faire part de vos remarques touchant le mesme liure, outre qu'elles seruiront de beaucoup a m'instruire, elles me donneront occasion de rendre les mienes plus exactes, & ie les cultiueray auec d'autant plus de soin, que ie iugeray que cet entretien vous sera plus agreable. Car il n'y a rien au monde que ie

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I imagine that most of the letters you receive from elsewhere stir some emotion in you, and that even before reading them you are afraid of [IV 252] finding some unwelcome news in them, since the malice of fortune has long accustomed you to receiving such news often. But as for those that come from here, you can at least be sure that, if they give you no cause for joy, neither will they give you any cause for sadness, and that you can open them at any hour without fear that they will upset the digestion of the waters you are taking.

For in this wilderness I learn nothing of what is happening in the rest of the world. And no thoughts come to me more often than those which set Your Highness's virtues before me and make me wish to see her as happy and as contented as she deserves. So I have no other subject for conversing with you than the means that philosophy teaches us for acquiring that supreme felicity which common souls expect in vain from fortune, and which we can have only from ourselves.

One of these means, and one that seems to me among the most useful, is to examine what the ancients have written about it, and to try to go further than they did by adding something to their precepts. For in this way one can make these precepts entirely one's own, and prepare oneself to put them into practice.

That is why, to make up for the deficiency of my mind, which can produce nothing of itself that I judge worthy of being read by Your Highness, and so that my letters may not be entirely empty and useless, I propose from now on to fill them with reflections drawn from my reading [IV 253] of some book—namely, Seneca's *On the Happy Life*—unless you would rather choose another, or unless this plan is disagreeable to you.[10]

But if I see that you approve of it (as I hope), and above all if you will be so kind as to share your remarks on the same book with me, then, besides doing much to instruct me, they will give me occasion to make my own more exact. And I shall work on mine all the more carefully, the more I judge that this conversation pleases you. For there is

10 Seneca the Younger (c. 4 BC–AD 65), Roman Stoic philosopher and statesman. *De vita beata* (*On the Happy Life*) is one of his moral dialogues.

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desire auec plus de zele, que de tesmoigner, en tout ce qui est de mon pouuoir, que ie suis,	nothing in the world I desire more ardently than to show, in everything within my power, that I am,
Madame, de Vostre Altesse, le tres humble & tres obeissant seruiteur, Descartes. D'Egmond, le 21 de Iuillet 1645.	Madame, Your Highness's most humble and obedient servant, Descartes. Egmond, 21 July 1645.

DESCARTES TO ELISABETH, 4 AUGUST 1645

Descartes distinguishes happiness from good fortune and gives three rules for contentment.

FRENCH	ENGLISH
AT IV 263 **DESCARTES** Madame,	**DESCARTES** Madame,
Lorsque i'ay choisi le liure de Seneque de *vita beata*, pour le proposer a vostre Altesse comme vn entretien qui luy pourroit estre agreable, i'ay eu seulement egard a la reputation de l'auteur & a la dignité de la matiere, sans penser a la façon dont il la traite, laquelle ayant depuis considerée, ie ne la trouue pas assez exacte pour meriter d'estre suiuie. Mais, affin que vostre Altesse en puisse iuger plus aysement, ie tascheray icy d'expliquer en quelle sorte il me semble que cete matiere eust deu estre traitée par vn Philosophe tel que luy, qui, n'estant point esclairé de la foy, n'auoit que la raison naturelle pour guide.	When I chose Seneca's book *On the Happy Life* to propose to Your Highness as a subject of conversation she might find agreeable, I considered only the reputation of the author and the dignity of the subject, without thinking about the way he treats it. Having since considered that, I do not find it exact enough to deserve to be followed. But so that Your Highness may judge of it more easily, I shall try here to explain how it seems to me this subject ought to have been treated by a philosopher such as he, who, not being enlightened by faith, had only natural reason for his guide.
Il dit fort bien, au commencement, *que viuere omnes beate volunt, sed ad peruidendum quid sit quod beatam vitam efficiat, caligant*. Mais il est besoin de sçauoir [IV 264] ce que c'est que *viuere beate* ; ie dirois en françois viure hureusement, sinon qu'il y a de la difference entre l'heur & la beatitude, en ce que l'heur ne depend que des choses qui sont hors de nous, d'ou vient que ceux la sont estimez plus hureux que sages, ausquels il est arriué quelque bien qu'ils ne se sont point procurez, au lieu que la beatitude consiste, ce me semble, en vn parfait contentement d'esprit & vne satisfaction interieure, que n'ont pas ordinairement ceux qui sont le plus fauorisez de la fortune, & que les sages acquerent sans elle.	He says very well at the beginning that *vivere omnes beate volunt, sed ad pervidendum quid sit quod beatam vitam efficiat, caligant* (all men wish to live happily, but when it comes to seeing clearly what makes life happy, they are in the dark). But we need to know [IV 264] what *vivere beate* is. I would put it in French as *vivre heureusement*, "to live happily", except that there is a difference between *heur* and *béatitude*—between good fortune and happiness. Good fortune depends only on things outside us; that is why people to whom some good has come that they did not procure for themselves are thought more lucky than wise. Happiness, by contrast, consists, it seems to me, in a perfect contentment of mind and an inner satisfaction which those most favored by fortune do not usually have, and which the wise acquire without it.[11]
AT IV 264 Ainsy *viuere beate*, viure en beatitude, ce n'est autre chose qu'auoir l'esprit parfaitement content & satisfait.	Thus *vivere beate*, to live in happiness, is nothing other than to have a mind perfectly content and satisfied.
Considerant, apres cela, ce que c'est *quod beatam vitam efficiat*, c'est a dire quelles sont les choses qui nous	Considering next what *quod beatam vitam efficiat* is —that is, what the things are that can give us this supreme contentment—I observe that there are

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peuuent donner ce souuerain contentement, ie remarque qu'il y en a de deux sortes : a sçauoir, de celles qui dependent de nous, comme la vertu & la sagesse, & de celles qui n'en dependent point, comme les honneurs, les richesses & la santé. Car il est certain qu'vn homme bien né, qui n'est point malade, qui ne manque de rien, & qui auec cela est aussy sage & aussy vertueux qu'vn autre qui est pauure, mal sain & contrefait, peut iouir d'vn plus parfait contentement que luy.

Toutefois, comme vn petit vaisseau peut estre aussy plein qu'vn plus grand, encore qu'il contiene moins de liqueur, ainsy, prenant le contentement d'vn chascun pour la plenitude & l'accomplissement de ses desirs reglez selon la raison, ie ne doute point que les plus pauures & les plus disgraciez de la IV 265 fortune ou de la nature ne puissent eslre entièrement contens & satisfaits, aussy bien que les autres, encore qu'ils ne iouissent pas de tant de biens. Et ce n'est que de cete sorte de contentement, de laquelle il est icy question ; car puisque l'autre n'est aucunement en nostre pouuoir, la recherche en seroit superflue.

AT IV 265 Or il me semble qu'vn chascun se peut rendre content de soy mesme & sans rien attendre d'ailleurs, pourueu seulement qu'il obserue trois choses, ausquelles se raportent les trois règles de morale, que i'ay mises dans le discours de la Méthode.

La première est, qu'il tasche tousiours de se seruir, le mieux qu'il luy est possible, de son esprit, pour connoistre ce qu'il doit faire ou ne pas faire en toutes les occurrences de la vie.

La seconde, qu'il ait vne ferme & consiante resolution d'exécuter tout ce que la raison luy conseillera, sans que ses passions ou ses appétits l'en détournent ; & c'est la fermeté de cete resolution, que ie croy deuoir estre prise pour la vertu, bien que ie ne sçache point que personne l'ait iamais ainsy expliquée ; mais on l'a diuisée en plusieurs especes, ausquelles on a donné diuers noms, a cause des diuers obiets ausquels elle s'estend.

La troisiesme, qu'il considere que, pendant qu'il se conduit ainsy, autant qu'il peut, selon la raison, tous les biens qu'il ne possede point sont aussy entièrement hors de son pouuoir les vns que les autres, & IV 266 que, par ce

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two kinds: those that depend on us, such as virtue and wisdom, and those that do not, such as honors, riches and health. For it is certain that a man of good birth, who is not ill and lacks nothing, and who in addition is as wise and as virtuous as another who is poor, sickly and malformed in body, can enjoy a more perfect contentment than he.

Nevertheless, just as a small vessel can be as full as a larger one, even though it holds less liquid, so, if we take each person's contentment to be the fullness and fulfillment of his desires as regulated by reason, I have no doubt that the poorest, and those most ill-favored by IV 265 fortune or by nature, can be entirely content and satisfied, just as much as others, even though they do not enjoy as many goods. And it is only this kind of contentment that is in question here. The other kind is in no way in our power, so seeking it would be pointless.

Now it seems to me that each person can make himself content by himself, without expecting anything from elsewhere, provided only that he observes three things. The three rules of morality that I set out in the *Discourse on the Method* relate to these.[12]

The first is that he always try to use his mind as well as he can, to know what he ought or ought not to do in all the circumstances of life.

The second, that he have a firm and constant resolution to carry out everything that reason advises, without letting his passions or appetites turn him from it. It is the firmness of this resolution that I believe should be taken for virtue, although I do not know that anyone has ever explained it in this way. Instead, it has been divided into several species, which have been given various names because of the various objects to which it extends.

The third, that he consider that, while he conducts himself in this way, as far as he can, according to reason, all the goods he does not possess are all equally and entirely outside his power, and IV 266

11 "Happiness" renders *béatitude* (Latin *beatitudo*, the happy life), which Descartes here distinguishes from mere good fortune (*heur*).
12 The provisional moral code set out in Part III of the *Discourse on the Method* (1637).

FRENCH

moyen, il s'accoustume a ne les point desirer ; car il n'y a rien que le desir, & le regret ou le repentir, qui nous puissent empescher d'estre contens : mais si nous faisons tousiours tout ce que nous dicte nostre raison, nous n'aurons iamais aucun suiet de nous repentir, encore que les euenemens nous fissent voir, par apres, que nous nous sommes trompez, pour ce que ce n'est point par nostre faute.

AT IV 266 Et ce qui fait que nous ne desirons point d'auoir, par exemple, plus de bras ou plus de langues que nous n'en auons, mais que nous desirons bien d'auoir plus de santé ou plus de richesses, c'est seulement que nous imaginons que ces choses icy pourroient estre acquises par nostre conduite, ou bien qu'elles sont deues a nostre nature, & que ce n'est pas le mesme des autres de laquelle opinion nous pourrons nous depouiller, en considerant que, puisque nous auons tousiours suiui le conseil de nostre raison, nous n'auons rien omis de ce qui estoit en nostre pouuoir, & que les maladies & les infortunes ne sont pas moins naturelles a l'homme, que les prosperitez & la santé.

Au reste, toute sorte de desirs ne sont pas incompatibles auec la beatitude ; il n'y a que ceux qui sont accompagnez d'impatience & de tristesse. Il n'est pas necessaire aussy que nostre raison ne se trompe point ; il suffit que nostre conscience nous tesmoigne que nous n'auons iamais manqué de resolution & de vertu, pour executer toutes les choses que nous auons iugé estre les meilleures, & ainsy la vertu seule est suffisante [IV 267] pour nous rendre contens en cete vie.

AT IV 267 Mais neanmoins pour ce que, lorsqu'elle n'est pas esclairée par l'entendement, elle peut estre fausse, c'est a dire que la volonté & resolution de bien faire nous peut porter a des choses mauuaises, quand nous les croyons bonnes, le contentement qui en reuient n'est pas solide ;

& pour ce qu'on oppose ordinairement cete vertu aux plaisirs, aux appetits & aux passions, elle est tres difficile a metre en pratique, au lieu que le droit vsage de la raison, donnant vne vraye connoissance du bien, empesche que la vertu ne soit fausse, & mesme l'accordant auec les plaisirs licites, il en rend l'vsage si aisé, & nous faisant connoistre la condition de nostre nature, il borne tellement nos desirs, qu'il faut auouër que la plus grande felicité de l'homme depend de ce droit vsage de la raison, & par consequent que l'estude qui sert a l'acquerir, est la plus vtile occupation qu'on puisse auoir, comme elle est aussy sans doute la plus agreable & la plus douce.

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that by this means he accustom himself not to desire them. For nothing but desire, and regret or repentance, can prevent us from being content. But if we always do everything our reason dictates, we shall never have any cause to repent, even if events should later show us that we were mistaken, because the mistake is not our fault.

And the reason why we do not desire, for example, to have more arms or more tongues than we have, while we do desire more health or more riches, is only that we imagine that these latter things could be acquired through our own conduct, or else that they are owed to our nature, and that the same is not true of the others. We can rid ourselves of this opinion by considering that, since we have always followed the advice of our reason, we have left out nothing that was in our power, and that illnesses and misfortunes are no less natural to man than prosperity and health.

For the rest, not every kind of desire is incompatible with happiness; only those accompanied by impatience and sadness are. Nor is it necessary that our reason never be mistaken; it is enough that our conscience bear witness that we have never lacked the resolution and virtue to carry out everything we judged to be best. And so virtue alone is sufficient [IV 267] to make us content in this life.

Nevertheless, when virtue is not enlightened by the intellect, it can be false—that is, the will and resolution to do well can lead us to bad things when we believe them to be good—and so the contentment that comes from it is not solid;

and because this virtue is usually set against pleasures, appetites and passions, it is very difficult to put into practice. The right use of reason, on the other hand, by giving a true knowledge of the good, prevents virtue from being false. By reconciling virtue with lawful pleasures, it makes its practice easy. And by making us know the condition of our nature, it so limits our desires that we must admit that man's greatest felicity depends on this right use of reason. Consequently, the study that serves to acquire it is the most useful occupation one can have, as it is also, no doubt, the most agreeable and the most delightful.

FRENCH

En suite de quoy, il me semble que Seneque eust deu nous enseigner toutes les principales veritez, dont la connoissance est requise pour faciliter l'vsage de la vertu, & regler nos desirs & nos passions, & ainsy iouir de la beatitude naturelle ; ce qui auroit rendu son liure le meilleur & le plus vtile qu'vn Philosophe payen eust sceu escrire. Toutefois ce n'est icy que mon opinion, laquelle ie soumets au iugement de vostre Altesse ; & si elle me fait tant de faueur que de m'auertir en quoy ie manque, ie luy en [IV 268] auray tres grande obligation & tesmoigneray, en me corrigeant, que ie suis,

AT IV 268 Madame, de Vostre Altesse le tres humble & tres obeissant seruiteur, Descartes. D'Egmond, le 4 d'Aoust 1645.

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It follows, it seems to me, that Seneca ought to have taught us all the principal truths that we need to know in order to make the practice of virtue easier, to regulate our desires and passions, and so to enjoy natural happiness. That would have made his book the best and most useful that a pagan philosopher could have written. Still, this is only my opinion, which I submit to Your Highness's judgment; and if she does me the favor of telling me where I fall short, I shall [IV 268] be very greatly obliged to her, and shall show, by correcting myself, that I am,

Madame, Your Highness's most humble and obedient servant, Descartes. Egmond, 4 August 1645.

ELISABETH TO DESCARTES, 16 AUGUST 1645

Elisabeth finds Seneca unmethodical and asks whether illness can take away the happiness that depends on us.

FRENCH

ELISABETH Monsieur Descartes,

I'ay trouué, en examinant le liure que vous m'auez recommandé, quantité de belles periodes & de sentences bien imaginées pour me donner suiet d'vne meditation agreable, mais non pas pour m'instruire de celuy dont il traite, puisqu'elles sont sans methode & que l'auteur ne [IV 269] suit pas seulement celle qu'il s'estoit proposée. Car, au lieu de montrer le chemin le plus court vers la beatitude, il se contente de faire voir que ses richesses & son luxe ne l'en rendent point incapable. Ce que i'estois obligée de vous escrire, afin que vous ne croyiez pas que ie sois de vostre opinion par preiugé ou par paresse.

AT IV 269 Ie ne demande point aussi que vous continuiez a corriger Seneque, parceque vostre fasson de raisonner est plus extraordinaire, mais parcequ'elle est la plus naturelle que i'aye rencontrée, & semble ne m'apprendre rien de nouueau, sinon que ie puis tirer de mon esprit des connoissances que ie n'ay pas encore apperçues.

Et c'est ainsi que ie ne saurois encore me desembarrasser du doute, si on peut arriuer a la beatitude dont vous parlez, sans l'assistance de ce qui ne depend pas absolument de la volonté, puisqu'il y a des maladies qui ostent tout a fait le pouuoir de raisonner, & par consequent celuy de iouir d'vne satisfaction raisonnable, d'autres qui diminuent la force, & empeschent de suiure les maximes que le bon sens aura forgées, & qui rendent

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ELISABETH Monsieur Descartes,

In examining the book you recommended to me, I have found a good many fine periods and well-conceived maxims. They give me matter for pleasant meditation, but they do not instruct me in the subject the book treats, since they lack method, and the author does not [IV 269] even follow the method he had set himself. For instead of showing the shortest road to happiness, he is content to show that his riches and his luxury do not make him incapable of it. I felt obliged to write you this, so that you will not think I share your opinion out of prejudice or laziness.

Nor do I ask you to go on correcting Seneca because your way of reasoning is more extraordinary, but because it is the most natural I have come across. It seems to teach me nothing new, except that I can draw from my own mind knowledge I had not yet noticed.

And so it is that I still cannot free myself of the doubt whether one can arrive at the happiness you speak of without the help of things that do not depend absolutely on the will. For there are illnesses that entirely take away the power of reasoning, and consequently the power of enjoying a rational satisfaction. There are others that diminish one's strength and prevent one from following the max-

	FRENCH	ENGLISH
	l'homme le plus moderé, suiet a se laisser emporter de ses passions, & moins capable a se demesler des accidents de la fortune, qui requierent vne resolution promte.	ims that good sense has forged. They make even the most moderate person liable to be carried away by his passions, and less able to deal with the accidents of fortune that call for a prompt resolution.
	Quand Epicure se demenoit, en ses acces de grauelle, pour asseurer ses amis qu'il ne sentoit point de mal, au lieu de crier comme le vulgaire, il menoit la vie de philosophe, non celle de prince, de capitaine ou de courtisan, & sauoit qu'il ne luy arriueroit rien de dehors, pour luy faire oublier son role & manquer a s'en demesler selon les regles de sa philosophie IV 270 Et c'est dans ces occasions que le repentir me semble ineuitable, sans que la connoissance que de faillir est naturel a l'homme comme d'eslre malade, nous en puisse defendre. Car on n'ignore pas aussi qu'on se pouuoit exemter de chaque faute particuliere.	When Epicurus, in his attacks of the stone, struggled to assure his friends that he felt no pain, instead of crying out like ordinary people, he was leading the life of a philosopher, not that of a prince, a captain or a courtier. He knew that nothing would come to him from outside to make him forget his role and fail to acquit himself of it according to the rules of his philosophy. IV 270 And it is on these occasions that repentance seems to me inevitable; knowing that erring is as natural to man as being ill cannot protect us from it. For we also know that we could have avoided each particular fault.[13]
AT IV 270	Mais ie m'asseure que vous m'eclaircirez de ces difficultés, & de quantité d'autres, dont ie ne m'auise point a cet'heure, quand vous m'enseignerez les verités qui doiuent estre connues, pour faciliter l'vsage de la vertu. Ne perdez donc point, ie vous prie, le dessein de m'obliger par vos preceptes, & croyez que ie les estime autant qu'ils le meritent.	But I am sure you will clear up these difficulties for me, and many others that do not occur to me just now, when you teach me the truths that must be known to make the practice of virtue easier. So do not, I beg you, abandon your plan of obliging me with your precepts, and believe that I value them as much as they deserve.
	Il y a huit iours que la mauuaise humeur d'vn frere malade m'empesche de vous faire cette requeste, en me retenant tousiours aupres de luy, pour l'obliger, par la complaisance qu'il a pour moy, a se soumettre aux regles des medecins, ou pour lui tesmoigner la mienne, en tachant de le diuertir, puisqu'il se persuade que i'en suis capable. Ie souhaite l'estre a vous asseurer que ie seray toute ma vie,	For a week now the bad temper of a sick brother has kept me from making you this request, by keeping me constantly at his side—either to get him, through the fondness he has for me, to submit to the doctors' rules, or to show him my own fondness by trying to divert him, since he is convinced that I am capable of it. I wish I were as capable of assuring you that I shall be all my life,
	Monsieur Descartes, Vostre tres-affectionnée amie a vous seruir, Élisabeth. Ce 16/6 d'Aoust.	Monsieur Descartes, Your most affectionate friend, always at your service, Elisabeth. 16/6 August.

DESCARTES TO ELISABETH, 18 AUGUST 1645

Descartes reviews Seneca's first chapters and reconciles Epicurus, Zeno and Aristotle on the supreme good.

	FRENCH	ENGLISH
AT IV 271	**DESCARTES** Madame,	**DESCARTES** Madame,
	Encore que ie ne sçache point si mes dernieres ont esté rendües a vostre Altesse, & que ie ne puisse rien escrire,	I do not know whether my last letters reached Your Highness, and I can write nothing on the sub-

13 Epicurus (341–270 BC), Greek philosopher who held pleasure to be the end of life. Dying of kidney stones, he wrote to a friend that his joy of mind outweighed his pain.

FRENCH

touchant le suiet que i'auois pris pour auoir l'honneur de vous entretenir, que ie ne doiue penser que vous sçauez mieux que moi, ie ne laisse pas toute fois de continuër, sur la creance que i'ay que mes letres ne vous seront pas plus importunes que les liures qui sont en vostre biblioteque ; car d'autant qu'elles ne contienent aucunes nouuelles que vous ayez interest de sçauoir promptement, rien ne vous conuiera de les lire aux heures que vous aurez quelques affaires, & ie tiendray le temps que ie mets a les escrire tres bien employé, si vous leur donnez seulement celuy que vous aurez enuie de perdre.

ENGLISH

ject I chose for the honor of conversing with you that I must not suppose you know better than I. Nevertheless I continue, believing that my letters will be no more troublesome to you than the books in your library. For since they contain no news that you have any interest in learning promptly, nothing will prompt you to read them at times when you have business to attend to. And I shall consider the time I spend writing them very well employed if you give them only the time you feel like wasting.

SENECA CHAPTER BY CHAPTER

Descartes examines Seneca's definitions of the supreme good and finds them obscure.

FRENCH

DESCARTES I'ay dit cy deuant ce qu'il me sembloit que Seneque eust deü traiter en son liure ; i'examineray maintenant IV 272 ce qu'il y traite. Ie n'y remarque en general que trois choses la premiere est qu'il tasche d'expliquer ce que c'est que le souuerain bien, & qu'il en donne diuerses definitions ; la seconde, qu'il dispute contre l'opinion d'Epicure ; & la troisiesme, qu'il repond a ceux qui obiectent aux Philosophes qu'ils ne viuent pas selon les regles qu'ils prescriuent. Mais, affin de voir plus particulierement en quelle façon il traite ces choses, ie m'aresteroy vn peu sur chasque chapitre.

AT IV 272 Au premier, il reprend ceux qui suiuent la coustume & l'exemple plutost que la raison. *Nunquam de vita iudicatur*, dit-il, *semper creditur*. Il approuue bien pourtant qu'on prene conseil de ceux qu'on croit estre les plus sages ; mais il veut qu'on vse aussy de son propre iugement, pour examiner leurs opinions.

En quoy ie suis fort de son auis ; car, encore que plusieurs ne soient pas capables de trouuer d'eux mesmes le droit chemin, il y en a peu toutefois qui ne le puissent assez reconnoistre, lorsqu'il leur est clairement monstré par quelque autre ; & quoy qu'il en soit, on a suiet d'estre satisfait en sa conscience, & de s'assurer que les opinions qu'on a, touchant la morale, sont les meilleures qu'on puisse auoir, lors qu'au lieu de se laisser conduire aueuglement par l'exemple, on a eu soin de rechercher le conseil des plus habiles, & qu'on a employé toutes les forces de son esprit a examiner ce qu'on deuoit suiure.

ENGLISH

DESCARTES I said earlier what it seemed to me Seneca ought to have treated in his book; I shall now examine IV 272 what he does treat in it. In general I notice only three things in it. The first is that he tries to explain what the supreme good is, and gives various definitions of it; the second, that he argues against the opinion of Epicurus; and the third, that he replies to those who object to philosophers that they do not live by the rules they prescribe. But to see more particularly how he treats these things, I shall pause a little over each chapter.

In the first, he rebukes those who follow custom and example rather than reason. *Nunquam de vita iudicatur*, he says, *semper creditur* (no one ever judges about life; everyone always takes it on trust). He does approve, however, of taking advice from those we believe to be wisest; but he wants us also to use our own judgment to examine their opinions.

In this I very much agree with him. For although many people are not capable of finding the right road by themselves, there are few who cannot recognize it well enough when someone else shows it to them clearly. And however that may be, one has reason to be satisfied in one's conscience, and to be confident that one's moral opinions are the best one can have, when, instead of letting oneself be blindly led by example, one has taken care to seek the advice of the ablest people, and has used all the powers of one's mind to examine what one ought to follow.

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Mais, pendant que [IV 273] Seneque s'estudie icy a orner son eloqution, il n'est pas tousiours assez exact en l'expression de sa pensée ; comme, lorsqu'il dit : *Sanabimur, si modo separemur à cætu*, il semble enseigner qu'il suffit d'estre extrauagant pour estre sage, ce qui n'est pas toutefois son intention.	But while [IV 273] Seneca strives here to adorn his style, he is not always exact enough in expressing his thought. For example, when he says *Sanabimur, si modo separemur à cætu* (we shall be cured, if only we separate ourselves from the crowd), he seems to teach that it is enough to be eccentric to be wise—which, however, is not his intention.
AT IV 273 Au second chapitre, il ne fait quasi que redire, en d'autres termes, ce qu'il a dit au premier ; & il adiouste seulement que ce qu'on estime communement estre bien, ne l'est pas.	In the second chapter he does little more than repeat in other words what he said in the first, adding only that what is commonly thought to be good is not.
Puis au troisiesme, apres auoir encore vsé de beaucoup de mots superflus, il dit enfin son opinion touchant le souuerain bien : a sçauoir *que rerum naturæ assentitur*, & que *ad illius legem exemplumque formari sapientia est*, & que *beata vita est conueniens naturæ suæ*.	Then in the third, after once again using many superfluous words, he finally states his opinion about the supreme good: namely, that *rerum naturæ assentitur* (one assents to the nature of things), that *ad illius legem exemplumque formari sapientia est* (to shape oneself by its law and example is wisdom), and that *beata vita est conveniens naturæ suæ* (the happy life is one in accord with its own nature).
Toutes lesquelles explications me semblent fort obscures ; car sans doute que, par la nature, il ne veut pas entendre nos inclinations naturelles, vu qu'elles nous portent ordinairement a suiure la volupté, contre laquelle il dispute ; mais la suite de son discours fait iuger que, par *rerum naturam*, il entend l'ordre establi de Dieu en toutes les choses qui sont au monde, & que, considerant cet ordre comme infallible & independant de nostre volonté, il dit que *rerum naturæ assentiri & ad illius legem exemplumque formari, sapientia est*, c'est a dire que c'est sagesse d'acquiescer a l'ordre des choses, & de faire ce pourquoy nous croyons estre nez ;	All these explanations seem to me very obscure. For by "nature" he surely does not mean our natural inclinations, since these usually lead us to pursue pleasure, which he argues against. But the rest of his discourse leads one to judge that by *rerum naturam* he means the order established by God in all the things there are in the world. Considering this order as infallible and independent of our will, he says that *rerum naturæ assentiri & ad illius legem exemplumque formari, sapientia est*—that is, that it is wisdom to acquiesce in the order of things and to do what we believe we were born for;
ou bien, pour parler en Chrestien, que c'est sagesse de se soumetre a la volonté de Dieu, & de la suiure en toutes nos actions ; & que *beata* [IV 274] *vita est conueniens naturæ suæ*, c'est a dire que la beatitude consiste a suiure ainsy l'ordre du monde, & prendre en bonne part toutes les choses qui nous arriuent.	or else, to speak as a Christian, that it is wisdom to submit to the will of God and to follow it in all our actions; and that *beata* [IV 274] *vita est conveniens naturæ suæ*—that is, that happiness consists in following the order of the world in this way, and in taking in good part everything that happens to us.
AT IV 274 Ce qui n'explique presque rien, & on n'en voit pas assez la connexion auec ce qu'il adiouste incontinent apres, que cete beatitude ne peut arriuer, *nisi sana mens est &c.*, si ce n'est qu'il entende aussy que *secundùm naturam viuere*, c'est viure suiuant la vraye raison.	This explains almost nothing, and one cannot see well enough how it connects with what he adds immediately afterward, that this happiness cannot come about *nisi sana mens est*, etc. (unless the mind is sound)—unless he also means that *secundùm naturam vivere*, to live according to nature, is to live in accordance with true reason.

FRENCH

Au quatre & cinquiesme chapitre, il donne quelques autres definitions du souuerain bien, qui ont toutes quelque raport auec le sens de la premiere, mais aucune desquelles ne l'explique suffisamment ; & elles font paroistre, par leur diuersité, que Seneque n'a pas clairement entendu ce qu'il vouloit dire ; car, d'autant qu'on conçoit mieux vne chose, d'autant est on plus determiné a ne l'exprimer qu'en vne seule façon. Celle ou il me semble auoir le mieux rencontré, est au 5e chap., ou il dit que *beatus est qui nec cupit nec timet beneficio rationis, & que beata vita est in recto certoque iudicio stabilita*.

Mais pendant qu'il n'enseigne point les raisons pour lesquelles nous ne deuons rien craindre ni desirer, tout cela nous ayde fort peu.

Il commence, en ces mesmes chapitres, a disputer contre ceux qui metent la beatitude en la volupté, & il continue dans les suiuans. C'est pourquoy, auant que de les examiner, ie diray icy mon sentiment touchant cette question.

AT IV 275 Ie remarque, premierement, qu'il y a de la difference entre la beatitude, le souuerain bien & la derniere fin ou le but auquel doiuent tendre nos actions car la beatitude n'est pas le souuerain bien ; mais elle le presuppose, & elle est le contentement ou la satisfaction d'esprit qui vient de ce qu'on le possede. Mais, par la fin de nos actions, on peut entendre l'vn & l'autre ; car le souuerain bien est sans doute la chose que nous nous deuons proposer pour but en toutes nos actions, & le contentement d'esprit qui en reuient, estant l'attrait qui fait que nous le recherchons, est aussy a bon droit nommé nostre fin.

Ie remarque, outre cela, que le mot volupté a esté pris en autre sens par Epicure que par ceux qui ont disputé contre luy. Car tous ses aduersaires ont restreint la signification de ce mot aux plaisirs des sens ;. & luy, au contraire, l'a estendüe a tous les contentemens de l'esprit, comme on peut aysement iuger de ce que Seneque & quelques autres ont escrit de luy.

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In the fourth and fifth chapters he gives some other definitions of the supreme good. They all bear some relation to the sense of the first, but none of them explains it sufficiently; and their very diversity shows that Seneca did not clearly understand what he meant. For the better one conceives a thing, the more one is determined to express it in only one way. The definition in which he seems to me to have come closest is in the fifth chapter, where he says that *beatus est qui nec cupit nec timet beneficio rationis* (happy is he who, thanks to reason, neither desires nor fears), and that *beata vita est in recto certoque iudicio stabilita* (the happy life is founded on right and sure judgment).

But so long as he does not teach the reasons why we ought neither to fear nor to desire anything, all this helps us very little.

In these same chapters he begins to argue against those who place happiness in pleasure, and he continues in the following ones. That is why, before examining them, I shall give my own view on this question here.

I observe, first, that there is a difference between happiness, the supreme good, and the final end or goal toward which our actions ought to tend. Happiness is not the supreme good, but it presupposes it: it is the contentment or satisfaction of mind that comes from possessing it. By the end of our actions, however, one can understand either of the two. For the supreme good is undoubtedly the thing we ought to set ourselves as the goal of all our actions; and the contentment of mind that comes from it, being the attraction that makes us seek it, is also rightly called our end.

I observe, in addition, that the word *volupté*, "pleasure", was taken in a different sense by Epicurus than by those who argued against him. All his opponents restricted the meaning of this word to the pleasures of the senses; he, on the contrary, extended it to all the contentments of the mind, as one can easily judge from what Seneca and some others have written of him.

EPICURUS, ZENO AND ARISTOTLE

Descartes argues that the three ancient views of the supreme good can be reconciled.

FRENCH

DESCARTES Or il y a eu trois principales opinions, entre les Philosophes payens, touchant le souuerain bien & la fin de nos actions, a sçauoir celle d'Epicure, qui a dit que c'estoit la volupté ; celle de Zenon, qui a voulu que ce fust la vertu ; & celle d'Aristote, qui l'a composé de toutes les perfections, tant du cors que de l'esprit. Lesquelles 3 opinions peuuent, ce me semble, IV 276 estre receuës pour vrayes & accordées entre elles, pouruu qu'on les interprete fauorablement.

AT IV 276 Car Aristote ayant consideré le souuerain bien de toute la nature humaine en general, c'est a dire celuy que peut auoir le plus accompli de tous les hommes, il a eu raison de le composer de toutes les perfections dont la nature humaine est capable ; mais cela ne sert point a nostre vsage.

Zenon, au contraire, a consideré celuy que chasque homme en son particulier peut posseder ; c'est pourquoy il a eu aussy tres bonne raison de dire qu'il ne consiste qu'en la vertu, pource qu'il n'y a qu'elle seule, entre les biens que nous pouuons auoir, qui depende entierement de nostre libre arbitre. Mais il a representé cete vertu si seuere & si ennemie de la volupté, en faisant tous les vices egaux, qu'il n'y a eu, ce me semble, que des melancholiques, ou des esprits entierement detachez du cors, qui ayent pû estre de ses sectateurs.

Enfin Epicure n'a pas eu tort, considerant en quoy consiste la beatitude, & quel est le motif, ou la fin a laquelle tendent nos actions, de dire que c'est la volupté en general, c'est a dire le contentement de l'esprit ; car, encore que la seule connoissance de nostre deuoir nous pourroit obliger a faire de bonnes actions, cela ne nous feroit toutefois iouir d'aucune beatitude, s'il ne nous en reuenoit aucun plaisir. Mais pource qu'on attribuë souuent le nom de volupté a IV 277 de faux plaisirs, qui sont accompagnez ou suiuis d'inquietude, d'ennuis & de repentirs, plusieurs ont creu que cete opinion d'Epicure enseignoit le vice ; &, en effect, elle n'enseigne pas la vertu.

AT IV 277 Mais comme, lors qu'il y a quelque part vn prix pour tirer au blanc, on fait auoir enuie d'y tirer a ceux a qui on

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DESCARTES Now there were three principal opinions among the pagan philosophers about the supreme good and the end of our actions: that of Epicurus, who said it was pleasure; that of Zeno, who held that it was virtue; and that of Aristotle, who made it up of all the perfections, both of the body and of the mind. These three opinions can, it seems to me, IV 276 be accepted as true and reconciled with one another, provided they are interpreted charitably.[14]

For Aristotle considered the supreme good of human nature as a whole and in general—that is, the good that the most accomplished of all men can have—and so he was right to compose it of all the perfections of which human nature is capable. But that is of no use to us.

Zeno, by contrast, considered the good that each man can possess as an individual. That is why he too was quite right to say that it consists only in virtue, since virtue alone, among the goods we can have, depends entirely on our free will. But he represented this virtue as so severe and so hostile to pleasure, by making all vices equal, that only melancholics, it seems to me, or minds entirely detached from the body, could have been his followers.

Finally, Epicurus was not wrong, when he considered what happiness consists in and what the motive or end is to which our actions tend, to say that it is pleasure in general, that is, contentment of mind. For although the mere knowledge of our duty might oblige us to do good actions, it would not make us enjoy any happiness if no pleasure came to us from them. But because the name of pleasure is often given to IV 277 false pleasures, which are accompanied or followed by anxiety, vexation and repentance, many have believed that this opinion of Epicurus taught vice; and indeed it does not teach virtue.

When there is a prize somewhere for shooting at a target, showing people the prize makes them want

14 Zeno of Citium (c. 334–262 BC), founder of the Stoic school.

FRENCH

monstre ce prix, mais ils ne le peuuent gaingner pour cela, s'ils ne voyent le blanc, & ceux qui voyent le blanc ne sont pas pour cela induits a tirer, s'ils ne sauent qu'il y ait vn prix a gaingner : ainsy la vertu, qui est le blanc, ne se fait pas fort desirer, lors qu'on la voit toute seule ; & le contentement, qui est le prix, ne peut estre acquis, si ce n'est qu'on la suiue.

C'est pourquoy ie croy pouuoir icy conclure que la beatitude ne consiste qu'au contentement de l'esprit, c'est a dire au contentement en general ; car bien qu'il y ait des contentemens qui dependent du cors, & des autres qui n'en dependent point, il n'y en a toutefois aucun que dans l'esprit : mais que, pour auoir vn contentement qui soit solide, il est besoin de suiure la vertu, c'est a dire d'auoir vne volunté ferme & constante d'executer tout ce que nous iugerons estre le meilleur, & d'employer toute la force de nostre entendement a en bien iuger.

Ie reserue pour vne autre fois a considerer ce que Seneque a escrit de cecy ; car ma letre est desia trop longue, & il ne m'y [IV 278] reste qu'autant de place qu'il faut pour escrire que ie suis,

AT IV 278 Madame, de vostre Altesse le tres humble & tres obeissant seruiteur, Des Cartes. D'Egmond, le 18 d'Aoust 1645.

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to shoot at it; yet they cannot win it unless they see the target. And those who see the target are not thereby induced to shoot unless they know there is a prize to be won. In the same way virtue, which is the target, is not much desired when it is seen all by itself; and contentment, which is the prize, cannot be acquired unless one pursues virtue.

That is why I think I may conclude here that happiness consists only in contentment of mind, that is, in contentment in general—for although some contentments depend on the body and others do not, there is none that exists anywhere but in the mind—but that, to have a contentment that is solid, one must follow virtue. That is, one must have a firm and constant will to carry out everything one judges to be best, and to use all the strength of one's intellect in judging well.

I shall leave for another time the consideration of what Seneca has written on this. My letter is already too long, and there [IV 278] is only enough room left in it for me to write that I am,

Madame, Your Highness's most humble and obedient servant, Descartes. Egmond, 18 August 1645.

ELISABETH TO DESCARTES, AUGUST 1645

Elisabeth comments on Seneca's treatment of Epicurus and asks how to strengthen the intellect for judging well.

FRENCH

ELISABETH Monsieur Descartes,

Ie crois que vous aurez desia veu, dans ma derniere du 16me, que la vostre du 4me m'a esté rendue. Et ie n'ay pas besoin d'y aiouter qu'elle m'a donné plus de lumiere, [IV 279] au suiet qu'elle traite, que tout ce que i'en ay pu lire ou mediter. Vous cognoissez trop ce que vous faites, ce que puis, & auez trop bien examiné ce qu'ont fait des autres, pour en pouuoir douter, quoy que, par un exces de generosité, vous voulez vous rendre ignorant de l'extreme obligation que ie vous ay, de m'auoir donné vne occupation si vtile & si agreable, comme celle de lire & considerer vos lettres.

AT IV 279 Sans la derniere, ie n'aurois pas si bien entendu ce que Seneque iuge de la beatitude, comme ie crois faire maintenant. I'ay attribué l'obscurité, qui se trouue audit liure, comme en la plupart des anciens, a la fasson de s'expliquer, toute differente de la nostre, de ce que les

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ELISABETH Monsieur Descartes,

I think you will already have seen from my last letter, of the 16th, that yours of the 4th reached me. And I need not add that it has given me more light [IV 279] on the subject it treats than everything I have been able to read or meditate on it. You know too well what you are doing, and what I am capable of, and you have examined too well what others have done, to be able to doubt this—even though, through an excess of generosity, you choose to be unaware of the extreme obligation I owe you for giving me so useful and agreeable an occupation as reading and considering your letters.

Without your last letter I would not have understood Seneca's view of happiness as well as I think I now do. I attributed the obscurity of that book, as of most of the ancients, to their way of expressing themselves, which is quite different from ours,

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mesmes choses, qui sont problematiques parmy nous, pouuoient passer pour hypotheses entre eux ; & le peu de connexion & d'ordre qu'il obserue, au dessein de s'acquerir des admirateurs, en surprenant l'imagination, plustost que des disciples, en informant le iugement ; que Seneque se seruoit de bons mots, comme les autres de poesies & de fables, pour attirer la ieunesse a suiure son opinion. La fasson dont il refute celle d'Epicure, semble appuyer ce sentiment.

Il confesse dudit philosophe : quam nos virtuti legem dicimus, eam ille dicit voluptati. Et, vn peu deuant, il dit, au nom de ses sectateurs : ego enim nego quemquam posse iucunde viuere, nisi simul & honeste viuat. D'ou il paroit clairement, qu'ils donnoient le nom de volupté a la ioye & satisfaction de l'esprit, que celui cy appelle consequentia summum bonum. Et neantmoins, dans tout le reste du liure, il parle IV 280 de cette volupté epicurienne plus en satyre qu'en philosophe, comme si elle estoit purement sensuelle.

AT IV 280 Mais ie luy en veux beaucoup de bien, depuis que cela est cause que vous auez pris le soin d'expliquer leurs opinions & reconcilier leurs differens, mieux qu'ils n'auroient seu faire, & d'oster par la vne puissante obiection contre la recherche de ce souuerain bien, que pas vn de ces grands esprits n'ont pu definir, & contre l'autorité de la raison humaine, puisqu'elle n'a point eclairé ces excellens personnages en la cognoissance de ce qui leur estoit le plus necessaire & le plus a cœur.

I'espere que vous continuerez, de ce que Seneque a dit, ou de ce qu'il deuoit dire, a m'enseigner les moiens de fortisier l'entendement, pour iuger du meilleur en toutes les actions de la vie, qui me semble estre la seule difficulté, puisqu'il est impossible de ne point suiure le bon chemin, quand il est cognu. Ayez encore, ie vous prie, la franchise de me dire si i'abuse de vostre bonté, en demandant trop de vostre loisir, pour la satisfaction de

Vostre tres-affectionnée amie a vous seruir, Élisabeth.

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since the very things that are problematic among us could pass for hypotheses among them. And I attributed the lack of connection and order he observes to his design of winning admirers, by surprising the imagination, rather than disciples, by informing the judgment: Seneca used witty sayings, as others used poetry and fables, to draw young people to follow his opinion. The way he refutes that of Epicurus seems to support this view.

He admits of that philosopher: *quam nos virtuti legem dicimus, eam ille dicit voluptati* (the law we lay down for virtue, he lays down for pleasure). And a little earlier he says, in the name of Epicurus's followers: *ego enim nego quemquam posse iucunde vivere, nisi simul & honeste vivat* (for I deny that anyone can live pleasantly unless he also lives honorably). From this it clearly appears that they gave the name of pleasure to the joy and satisfaction of mind which Seneca calls *consequentia summum bonum* (what follows from the supreme good). And yet, throughout the rest of the book, he speaks IV 280 of this Epicurean pleasure more as a satirist than as a philosopher, as if it were purely sensual.

But I think all the better of him for it, since it has led you to take the trouble to explain their opinions and reconcile their differences better than they could have done themselves. You have thereby removed a powerful objection against the search for this supreme good, which none of those great minds were able to define, and against the authority of human reason, since reason did not enlighten those excellent men in the knowledge of what was most necessary to them and closest to their hearts.

I hope you will go on, from what Seneca said or from what he ought to have said, to teach me the means of strengthening the intellect so as to judge what is best in all the actions of life. That seems to me the only difficulty, since it is impossible not to follow the right road once it is known. Please, too, be frank enough to tell me whether I am abusing your kindness by asking too much of your leisure, for the satisfaction of

Your most affectionate friend, always at your service, Elisabeth.

DESCARTES TO ELISABETH, 1 SEPTEMBER 1645

Descartes grants that illness can take away reason and weighs the pleasures of the mind against those of the body.

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AT IV 281 **DESCARTES** Madame,

Estant dernierement incertain si vostre Altesse estoit a la Haye ou a Rhenen, i'adressay ma letre par Leyde, & celle que vous m'auiez fait l'honneur de m'escrire ne me fut rendue qu'apres que le messager, qui l'auoit portée a Alckmar, en fut parti. Ce qui m'a empesché de pouuoir tesmoigner plustost, combien ie suis glorieux de ce que le iugement que i'ay fait du liure que vous auez pris la peine de lire, n'est pas different du vostre, & que ma façon de raisonner vous paroist assez naturelle.

Ie m'assure que, si vous auiez eu le loysir de penser, autant que i'ay fait, aux choses dont il traite, ie n'en pourrois rien escrire, que vous n'eussiez mieux remarqué que moy ; mais, pour ce que l'aage, la naissance & les occupations de V. A. ne l'ont pû permetre, peut estre que ce que i'escris pourra seruir pour vous espargner vn peu le tems, & que mes fautes mesme vous fourniront des occasions pour remarquer la verité.

Comme, lorsque i'ay parlé d'vne beatitude qui depend entierement de nostre libre arbitre & que tous les hommes peuuent acquerir sans aucune assistance d'ailleurs, vous remarquez fort bien qu'il y a des IV 282 maladies qui, ostant le pouuoir de raisonner, ostent aussy celuy de iouir d'vne satisfaction d'esprit raisonnable ; & cela m'apprent que ce que i'auois dit generalement de tous les hommes, ne doit estre entendu que de ceux qui ont l'vsage libre de leur raison, & auec cela qui sçauent le chemin qu'il faut tenir pour paruenir a cete beatitude.

AT IV 282 Car il n'y a personne qui ne desire se rendre hureux ; mais plusieurs n'en sçauent pas le moyen ; & souuent l'indisposition qui est dans le corps, empesche que la volonté ne soit libre. Comme il arriue aussy quand nous dormons ; car le plus philosophe du monde ne sçauroit s'empescher d'auoir de mauuais songes, lorsque son temperament l'y dispose. Toutefois l'experience fait voir que, si on a eu souuent quelque pensée, pendant qu'on a eu l'esprit en liberté, elle reuient encore apres, quelque indisposition qu'ait le cors ; ainsy ie puis dire que mes songes ne me representent iamais rien de fascheux, & sans doute qu'on a grand auantage de s'estre des long tems accoustumé a n'auoir point de tristes pensées.

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DESCARTES Madame,

Not being sure lately whether Your Highness was at The Hague or at Rhenen, I sent my letter by way of Leiden, and the one you did me the honor of writing to me was delivered only after the messenger who had brought it to Alkmaar had left. This prevented me from telling you sooner how proud I am that my judgment of the book you took the trouble to read does not differ from yours, and that my way of reasoning seems natural enough to you.[15]

I am sure that, if you had had the leisure to think as much as I have about the things the book treats, I could write nothing about them that you would not have noticed better than I. But since Your Highness's age, birth and occupations have not allowed this, perhaps what I write may serve to save you a little time, and even my mistakes may give you occasions to notice the truth.

For example, when I spoke of a happiness that depends entirely on our free will, and that all men can acquire without any help from elsewhere, you very rightly observe that there are IV 282 illnesses which, by taking away the power of reasoning, also take away the power of enjoying a rational satisfaction of mind. And this teaches me that what I had said generally of all men should be understood only of those who have the free use of their reason, and who also know the road to take to arrive at this happiness.

For there is no one who does not desire to make himself happy; but many do not know how, and often an indisposition in the body prevents the will from being free. The same happens when we sleep: the greatest philosopher in the world cannot keep himself from having bad dreams when his temperament disposes him to them. Yet experience shows that, if one has often had a certain thought while one's mind was free, it still comes back afterward, whatever indisposition the body may have. Thus I can say that my dreams never present anything distressing to me; and there is no

15 Rhenen, a small town near Utrecht, where Elisabeth's exiled family had a summer residence.

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Mais nous ne pouuons respondre absolument de nous mesmes, que pendant que nous sommes a nous, & c'est moins de perdre la vie que de perdre l'vsage de la raison ; car, mesme sans les enseignemens de la foy, la seule philosophie naturelle fait esperer a nostre ame vn estat plus hureux, apres la mort, que celuy ou elle est a present ; & elle ne luy fait rien craindre de plus fascheux, que d'estre attachée a vn cors qui luy oste entierement sa liberté.

Pour les autres indispositions, qui ne troublent pas [IV 283] tout a fait le sens, mais alterent seulement les humeurs, & font qu'on se trouue extraordinairement enclin a la tristesse, a la cholere, ou a quelque autre passion, elles donnent sans doute de la peine, mais elles peuuent estre surmontées, & mesme donnent matiere a l'ame d'vne satisfaction d'autant plus grande, qu'elles ont esté plus difficiles a vaincre. Et ie croy aussy le semblable de tous les empeschemens de dehors, comme de l'esclat d'vne grande naissance, des caioleries de la cour, des aduersitez de la fortune, & aussy de ses grandes prosperitez, lesquelles ordinairement empeschent plus qu'on ne puisse iouer le rolle de Philosophe, que ne sont ses disgraces.

AT IV 283 Car lorsqu'on a toutes choses a souhait, on s'oublie de penser a soy, & quand, par apres, la fortune change, on se trouue d'autant plus surpris, qu'on s'estoit plus fié en elle. Enfin on peut dire generalement qu'il n'y a aucune chose qui nous puisse entierement oster le moyen de nous rendre hureux, pourueu qu'elle ne trouble point nostre raison ; & que ce ne sont pas tousiours celles qui paroissent les plus fascheuses, qui nuisent le plus.

Mais affin de sçauoir exactement combien chasque chose peut contribuer a nostre contentement, il faut considerer quelles sont les causes qui le produisent, & c'est aussy l'vne des principales connoissances qui peuuent seruir a faciliter l'vsage de la vertu ; car toutes les actions de nostre ame qui nous acquerent quelque perfection, sont vertueuses, & tout nostre [IV 284] contentement ne consiste qu'au tesmoignage interieur que nous auons d'auoir quelque perfection. Ainsy nous ne sçaurions iamais pratiquer aucune vertu (c'est a dire faire ce que nostre raison nous persuade que nous deuons faire), que nous n'en receuions de la satisfaction & du plaisir.

AT IV 284 Mais il y a deux sortes de plaisirs les vns qui apartienent a l'esprit seul, & les autres qui apartienent a l'homme,

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doubt that it is a great advantage to have long accustomed oneself not to have sad thoughts.

But we can answer for ourselves absolutely only while we are our own masters, and it is a lesser thing to lose one's life than to lose the use of one's reason. For even without the teachings of faith, natural philosophy alone gives our soul hope of a happier state after death than the one it is in at present; and it makes the soul fear nothing more distressing than to be attached to a body that entirely takes away its freedom.

As for the other indispositions, which do not [IV 283] entirely cloud one's judgment but only alter the humors, and make one unusually inclined to sadness, anger or some other passion, they undoubtedly cause distress. But they can be overcome, and they even give the soul matter for a satisfaction that is all the greater, the harder they were to conquer. And I believe the same of all external obstacles, such as the brilliance of high birth, the flatteries of the court, the adversities of fortune, and also its great prosperities, which usually do more than its misfortunes to prevent one from playing the role of philosopher.

For when one has everything one could wish for, one forgets to think of oneself; and when fortune later changes, one is all the more taken by surprise the more one had trusted in it. In short, one can say generally that nothing can entirely take from us the means of making ourselves happy, provided it does not disturb our reason; and that it is not always the things that seem most distressing that do the most harm.

But in order to know exactly how much each thing can contribute to our contentment, we must consider what causes produce it; and this is also one of the chief pieces of knowledge that can serve to make the practice of virtue easier. For all the actions of our soul that acquire some perfection for us are virtuous, and all our [IV 284] contentment consists only in the inner testimony we have of possessing some perfection. Thus we can never practice any virtue (that is, do what our reason persuades us we ought to do) without receiving satisfaction and pleasure from it.

But there are two kinds of pleasures: those that belong to the mind alone, and those that belong to

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c'est a dire a l'esprit en tant qu'il est vni au cors ; & ces derniers, se presentant confusement a l'imagination, paroissent souuent beaucoup plus grans qu'ils ne sont, principalement auant qu'on les possede, ce qui est la source de tous les maux & de toutes les erreurs de la vie. Car, selon la regle de la raison, chasque plaisir se deuroit mesurer par la grandeur de la perfection qui le produit, & c'est ainsy que nous mesurons ceux dont les causes nous sont clairement conneues.

Mais souuent la passion nous fait croyre certaines choses beaucoup meilleures & plus desirables qu'elles ne sont ; puis, quand nous auons pris bien de la peine a les acquerir, & perdu cependant l'occasion de posseder d'autres biens plus veritables, la iouissance nous en fait connoistre les defaux, & de la vienent les dedains, les regrets & les repentirs.

C'est pourquoy le vray office de la raison est d'examiner la iuste valeur de tous les biens dont l'acquisition semble dependre en quelque façon de nostre conduite, affin que nous ne manquions iamais d'employer tous nos soins a tascher de nous procurer ceux qui sont, en effect, les plus desirables ; en quoy, si la fortune s'oppose a nos IV 285 desseins & les empesche de reüssir, nous aurons au moins la satisfaction de n'auoir rien perdu par nostre faute, & ne lairrons pas de iouir de toute la beatitude naturelle dont l'acquisition aura esté en nostre pouuoir.

AT IV 285 Ainsy, par exemple, la cholere peut quelquefois exciter en nous des desirs de vengeance si violens qu'elle nous fera imaginer plus de plaisir a chastier nostre ennemi, qu'a conseruer nostre honneur ou nostre vie, & nous fera exposer imprudemment l'vn & l'autre pour ce suiet. Au lieu que, si la raison examine quel est le bien ou la perfection sur laquelle est fondé ce plaisir, qu'on tire de la vengeance, elle n'en trouuera aucune autre (au moins quand cete vengeance ne sert point pour empescher qu'on ne nous offence derechef), sinon que cela nous fait imaginer que nous auons quelque sorte de superiorité & quelque auantage au dessus de celuy dont nous nous vengeons.

Ce qui n'est souuent qu'vne vaine imagination, qui ne merite point d'estre estimée a comparaison de l'honneur ou de la vie, ny mesme a comparaison de la satisfaction qu'on auroit de se voir maistre de sa cholere, en s'abstenant de se vanger.

Et le semblable arriue en toutes les autres passions ; car il n'y en a aucune qui ne nous represente le bien auquel elle

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the human being, that is, to the mind insofar as it is united to the body. These latter, presenting themselves confusedly to the imagination, often appear much greater than they are, especially before we possess them; and this is the source of all the evils and all the errors of life. For according to the rule of reason, each pleasure ought to be measured by the greatness of the perfection that produces it, and that is how we measure those whose causes are clearly known to us.

But passion often makes us believe certain things to be much better and more desirable than they are. Then, when we have taken great pains to acquire them, and meanwhile lost the opportunity to possess other, truer goods, enjoying them makes us aware of their defects; and from this come disdain, regret and repentance.

That is why the true office of reason is to examine the just value of all the goods whose acquisition seems to depend in some way on our conduct, so that we never fail to devote all our care to procuring for ourselves those that are in fact the most desirable. In this, if fortune opposes our IV 285 plans and prevents them from succeeding, we shall at least have the satisfaction of having lost nothing through our own fault, and we shall still enjoy all the natural happiness whose acquisition was in our power.

Thus, for example, anger can sometimes arouse in us desires for revenge so violent that it makes us imagine more pleasure in punishing our enemy than in preserving our honor or our life, and makes us recklessly expose both for that purpose. Whereas if reason examines what the good or perfection is on which this pleasure drawn from revenge is founded, it will find none (at least when the revenge does not serve to prevent our being offended again) except that revenge makes us imagine we have some kind of superiority and some advantage over the person on whom we take it.

And this is often only an empty fancy, which deserves no esteem in comparison with honor or life, nor even in comparison with the satisfaction one would have in seeing oneself master of one's anger by refraining from revenge.

And the same happens with all the other passions. There is none that does not represent the good it

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tend, auec plus d'esclat qu'il n'en merite, & qui ne nous face imaginer des plaisirs beaucoup plus grands, auant que nous les possedions, que nous ne les trouuons par apres, quand nous les auons. Ce qui fait qu'on blasme communement la volupté, pour ce qu'on ne se sert de ce mot que pour signifier des IV 286 plaisirs qui nous trompent souuent par leur apparence, & nous en font negliger d'autres beaucoup plus solides, mais dont l'attente ne touche, pas tant, tels que sont ordinairement ceux de l'esprit seul.

AT IV 286 Ie dis ordinairement ; car tous ceux de l'esprit ne sont pas louables, pour ce qu'ils peuuent estre fondez sur quelque fausse opinion, comme le plaisir qu'on prent a medire, qui n'est fondé que sur ce qu'on pense deuoir estre d'autant plus estimé que les autres le seront moins ; & ils nous peuuent aussy tromper par leur apparence, lorsque quelque forte passion les accompagne, comme on void en celuy que donne l'ambition.

Mais la principale difference qui est entre les plaisirs du cors & ceux de l'esprit, consiste en ce que, le cors estant suiet a vn changement perpetuel, & mesme sa conseruation & son bien estre dependant de ce changement, tous les plaisirs qui le regardent ne durent gueres ; car ils ne procedent que de l'acquisition de quelque chose qui est vtile au cors, au moment qu'on les reçoit ; & si tost qu'elle cesse de luy estre vtile, ils cessent aussy, au lieu que ceux de l'ame peuuent estre immortels comme elle, pouruû qu'ils ayent vn fondement si solide que ny la connoissance de la verité ny aucune fausse persuasion ne le destruisent.

Au reste, le vray vsage de nostre raison pour la conduite de la vie ne consiste qu'a examiner & considerer sans passion la valeur de toutes les perfections, tant du cors que de l'esprit, qui peuuent estre acquises par IV 287 nostre conduite, affin qu'estant ordinairement obligez de nous priuer de quelques vnes, pour auoir les autres, nous choisissions tousiours les meilleures. Et pour ce que celles du cors sont les moindres, on peut dire generalement que, sans elles, il y a moyen de se rendre hureux.

AT IV 287 Toutefois, ie ne suis point d'opinion qu'on les doiue entierement mespriser, ny mesme qu'on doiue s'exempter d'auoir des passions ; il suffit qu'on les rende suiettes a la raison, & lorsqu'on les a ainsy appriuoisées, elles sont quelquefois d'autant plus vtiles qu'elles penchent plus vers l'exces. Ie n'en auray iamais de plus

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tends toward with more luster than it deserves, and that does not make us imagine pleasures much greater before we possess them than we find them afterward, when we have them. This is why pleasure (*volupté*) is commonly condemned: the word is used only to mean IV 286 pleasures that often deceive us by their appearance, and make us neglect others that are much more solid but whose anticipation does not move us so much—as is usually the case with those of the mind alone.

I say "usually", for not all pleasures of the mind are praiseworthy. They can be founded on some false opinion, like the pleasure one takes in speaking ill of others, which is founded only on the thought that one will be esteemed all the more, the less others are. And they too can deceive us by their appearance when some strong passion accompanies them, as can be seen in the pleasure that ambition gives.

But the chief difference between the pleasures of the body and those of the mind is this. The body is subject to perpetual change, and its very preservation and well-being depend on this change; so all the pleasures that concern it last hardly any time. For they arise only from the acquisition of something that is useful to the body at the moment one receives them, and as soon as it ceases to be useful to it, they cease too. The pleasures of the soul, by contrast, can be immortal like the soul itself, provided they have a foundation so solid that neither the knowledge of the truth nor any false persuasion destroys it.

For the rest, the true use of our reason in the conduct of life consists only in examining and considering without passion the value of all the perfections, both of the body and of the mind, that can be acquired by IV 287 our conduct. Since we are usually obliged to deprive ourselves of some in order to have others, we may then always choose the best. And because those of the body are the least, one can say generally that it is possible to make oneself happy without them.

Nevertheless, I am not of the opinion that they should be entirely despised, or even that one should free oneself from having passions. It is enough to make them subject to reason; and once they have been tamed in this way, they are sometimes all the more useful the more they lean to-

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excessiue, que celle qui me porte au respect & a la veneration que ie vous doy, & me fait estre,

Madame, de Vostre Altesse le tres humble & tres obeissant seru(iteur), Descartes. D'Egmond, le premier de Sept. 1645.

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ward excess. I shall never have a more excessive one than the passion that carries me to the respect and veneration I owe you, and makes me,

Madame, Your Highness's most humble and obedient servant, Descartes. Egmond, 1 September 1645.

ELISABETH TO DESCARTES, 13 SEPTEMBER 1645

Elisabeth asks how one can value goods without infinite knowledge and asks him to define the passions.

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AT IV 288 **ELISABETH** Monsieur Descartes,

Si ma conscience demeuroit satisfaite des pretextes que vous donnez a mon ignorance, comme des remedes, ie luy aurois beaucoup d'obligation, & serois exempte du repentir d'auoir si mal employé le tems auquel i'ay ioui de l'vsage de la raison, qui m'a esté d'autant plus long qu'a d'autres de mon age, que ma naissance & ma fortune me forcerent d'employer mon iugement de meilleure heure, pour la conduite d'vne vie assez penible & libre des prosperités qui me pouuoient empescher de songer a moy, comme de la suiection qui m'obligeroit a m'en fier a la prudence d'vne gouuernante.

Ce ne sont pas, toutesfois, ces prosperités, ni les flatteries qui les accompagnent, que ie crois absolument capables d'oster la fortitude d'esprit aux ames bien nées, & les empescher de receuoir le changement de fortune en philosophe. Mais ie me persuade que la multitude d'accidents, qui surprennent les personnes gouuernant le public, sans leur donner le tems d'examiner l'expedient le plus vtile, les porte souuent (quelque vertueux qu'ils soient) a faire des actions qui causent apres le repentir, que vous dites estre vn des principaux obstacles de la beatitude.

Il est vray qu'vne habitude d'estimer les biens selon qu'ils peuuent contribuer au contentement, de mesurer ce [IV 289] contentement selon les perfections qui font naistre les plaisirs, & de iuger sans passion de ces perfections & de ces plaisirs, les garantira de quantité de fautes. Mais, pour estimer ainsi les biens, il faut les connoistre parfaitement ; & pour connoistre tous ceux dont on est contraint de faire choix dans vne vie actiue, il faudroit posseder vne science infinie. Vous direz qu'on ne laisse pas d'estre satisfait, quand la conscience tesmoigne qu'on s'est serui de toutes les precautions possibles. Mais cela n'arriue iamais, lorsqu'on ne trouue point son conte. Car

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ELISABETH Monsieur Descartes,

If my conscience remained satisfied with the excuses you offer for my ignorance, as remedies for it, I would owe it a great deal, and I would be free of repentance for having spent so badly the time in which I have enjoyed the use of reason. That time has been longer for me than for others of my age, since my birth and my fortune forced me to use my judgment earlier, in conducting a rather difficult life—one free both of the prosperity that might have kept me from thinking of myself and of the subjection that would have obliged me to rely on the prudence of a governess.

Yet I do not believe that this prosperity, or the flattery that goes with it, is absolutely capable of taking fortitude of mind away from well-born souls, or of preventing them from meeting a change of fortune like philosophers. But I am convinced that the host of accidents that take those who govern the public by surprise, without giving them time to examine the most useful expedient, often leads them (however virtuous they may be) to do things that afterward cause the repentance which you say is one of the chief obstacles to happiness.

It is true that a habit of valuing goods by how far they can contribute to contentment, of measuring this [IV 289] contentment by the perfections that give rise to pleasures, and of judging these perfections and pleasures without passion, will protect them from a great many mistakes. But to value goods in this way one must know them perfectly. And to know all those one is forced to choose among in an active life, one would need infinite knowledge. You will say that one is satisfied all the same when one's conscience testifies that one has taken every possible precaution. But that never happens when

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on se rauise tousiours de choses qui restoient a considerer.	things do not turn out as one reckoned. For one always thinks afterward of things that remained to be considered.
AT IV 289 Pour mesurer le contentement selon la perfection qui le cause, il faudroit voir clairement la valeur de chacune, si celles qui ne seruent qu'a nous, ou celles qui nous rendent encore vtiles aux autres, sont preferables. Ceux icy semblent estre estimés auec exces d'vne humeur qui se tourmente pour autruy, & ceux la, de celuy qui ne vit que pour soy mesme. Et neantmoins chacun d'eux apuie son inclination de raisons assez fortes pour la faire continuer toute sa vie. Il est ainsi des autres perfections du corps & de l'esprit, qu'vn sentiment tacite fait approuuer a la raison, qui ne se doit appeler passion, par ce qu'il est né auec nous.	To measure contentment by the perfection that causes it, one would need to see clearly the value of each, and whether those perfections that serve only ourselves, or those that also make us useful to others, are preferable. The latter seem to be valued to excess by a temperament that torments itself for others, and the former by one who lives only for himself. And yet each of them supports his inclination with reasons strong enough to make him keep to it all his life. It is the same with the other perfections of body and mind, which a tacit feeling makes reason approve—a feeling that should not be called a passion, because it is born with us.
Dites moy donc, s'il vous plaist, iusqu'ou il le faut suiure (estant vn don de nature), & comment le corriger.	So tell me, if you please, how far it should be followed (since it is a gift of nature), and how to correct it.
Ie vous voudrois encore voir definir les passions, pour les bien connoistre ; car ceux qui les nomment perturbations de l'ame, me persuaderoient que leur force ne consiste qu'a eblouir & soumettre la raison, si l'experience ne me IV 290 montroit qu'il y en a qui nous portent aux actions raisonnables. Mais ie m'asseure que vous m'y donnerez plus de lumiere, quand vous expliquerez comment la force des passions les rend d'autant plus vtiles, lorsqu'elles sont suiettes a la raison.	I should also like to see you define the passions, so that I may know them well. For those who call them perturbations of the soul would convince me that their force consists only in dazzling and subduing reason, if experience did not IV 290 show me that some of them move us to reasonable actions. But I am sure you will give me more light on this when you explain how the force of the passions makes them all the more useful when they are subject to reason.[16]
AT IV 290 Ie receuray cette faueur a Riswyck, ou nous allons demeurer, iusqu'a ce que cette maison ici soit nettoyée, en celle du prince d'Orange ; mais vous n'auez point besoin de changer pour cela l'adresse de vos lettres a	I shall receive this favor at Rijswijk, where we are going to stay, in the Prince of Orange's house, until this house here has been cleaned. But you need not change the address on your letters for that reason, to[17]
Vostre tres-affectionnée amie a vous seruir, Élisabeth. Ce 3/13 7 bre. Monsieur Descartes.	Your most affectionate friend, always at your service, Elisabeth. 3/13 September. Monsieur Descartes.

DESCARTES TO ELISABETH, 15 SEPTEMBER 1645

Descartes lists the truths most useful for judging well: God, the soul, the universe, and our place in the whole.

FRENCH	ENGLISH
DESCARTES Madame,	**DESCARTES** Madame,

16 The Stoic definition, familiar through Cicero's *perturbationes animi* (*Tusculan Disputations*, Book IV).
17 Rijswijk, a village near The Hague, where the Prince of Orange, Frederick Henry, had a residence.

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Vostre Altesse a si exactement remarqué toutes les causes qui ont empesché Seneque de nous exposer clairement son opinion touchant le souuerain bien. IV 291 & vous auez pris la peine de lire son liure auec tant de soin, que ie craindrois de me rendre importun, si ie continuois icy a examiner par ordre tous ses chapitres, & que cela me fist differer de respondre a la difficulté qu'il vous a pleu me proposer, touchant les moyens de se fortisier l'entendement pour discerner ce qui est le meilleur en toutes les actions de la vie. C'est pourquoy, sans m'arester maintenant a suiure Seneque, ie tascheray seulement d'expliquer mon opinion touchant cete matiere.

AT IV 291 Il ne peut, ce me semble, y auoir que deux choses qui soyent requises pour estre tousiours disposé a bien iuger : l'vne est la connoissance de la verité, & l'autre l'habitude qui fait qu'on se souuient & qu'on acquiesce a cete connoissance, a toutes les fois que l'occasion le requert. Mais, pour ce qu'il n'y a que Dieu seul qui sçache parfaitement toutes choses, il est besoin que nous nous contentions de sçauoir celles qui sont le plus a nostre vsage.

Entre lesquelles la premiere & la principale est qu'il y a vn Dieu, de qui toutes choses dependent, dont les perfections sont infinies, dont le pouuoir est immense, dont les decrets sont infallibles car cela nous apprend a receuoir en bonne part toutes les choses qui nous arriuent., comme nous estant expressement enuoyées de Dieu ; & pour ce que le vray obiet de l'amour est la perfection, lorsque nous éleuons nostre esprit a IV 292 le considerer tel qu'il est, nous nous trouuons naturellement si enclins a l'aymer, que nous tirons mesme de la ioye de nos afflictions, en pensant que sa volonté s'execute en ce que nous les receuons.

AT IV 292 La seconde chose, qu'il faut connoistre, est la nature de nostre ame, en tant qu'elle subsiste sans le cors, & est beaucoup plus noble que luy, & capable de iouir d'vne infinité de contentemens qui ne se trouuent point en cete vie : car cela nous empesche de craindre la mort, & detache tellement nostre affection des choses du monde, que nous ne regardons qu'auec mepris tout ce qui est au pouuoir de la fortune.

A quoy peut aussy beaucoup seruir qu'on iuge dignement des œuures de Dieu, & qu'on ait cete vaste idée de l'estendue de l'vniuers, que i'ay tasché de faire conceuoir au 3 liure de mes Principes car si on s'imagine qu'au dela des cieux il n'y a rien que des espaces imaginaires, & que tous ces cieux ne sont faits que pour le seruice de la terre, ny la terre que pour l'homme, cela fait qu'on est enclin a

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Your Highness has noted so precisely all the causes that kept Seneca from setting out his opinion on the supreme good clearly, IV 291 and you have taken the trouble to read his book with such care, that I would be afraid of becoming tiresome if I went on here to examine all his chapters in order, and if this made me put off answering the difficulty you were pleased to put to me: how to strengthen the intellect so as to discern what is best in all the actions of life. That is why, without stopping now to follow Seneca, I shall try only to explain my own opinion on this matter.

Only two things, it seems to me, can be required in order to be always disposed to judge well. One is knowledge of the truth. The other is the habit that makes us remember this knowledge and assent to it whenever the occasion requires. But since God alone knows all things perfectly, we must be content to know those that are of most use to us.

Among these, the first and chief is that there is a God on whom all things depend, whose perfections are infinite, whose power is immense, whose decrees are infallible. For this teaches us to take in good part everything that happens to us, as sent to us expressly by God. And since the true object of love is perfection, when we raise our mind IV 292 to consider him as he is, we find ourselves naturally so inclined to love him that we draw joy even from our afflictions, thinking that his will is carried out in our receiving them.

The second thing we must know is the nature of our soul, insofar as it subsists without the body, is much nobler than the body, and is capable of enjoying countless contentments not to be found in this life. For this keeps us from fearing death, and so detaches our affection from the things of the world that we regard with nothing but contempt whatever lies in the power of fortune.

It can also help a great deal to judge worthily of God's works, and to have that vast idea of the extent of the universe that I tried to convey in the third book of my *Principles*. For if we imagine that beyond the heavens there is nothing but imaginary spaces, and that all these heavens are made

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penser que cete terre est nostre principale demeure, & cete vie nostre meilleure ; & qu'au lieu de connoistre les perfections qui sont veritablement en nous, on attribue aux autres creatures des imperfections qu'elles n'ont pas, pour s'esleuer au dessus d'elles, & entrant en vne presomption impertinente, on veut estre du conseil de Dieu, & prendre auec luy la charge de conduire le monde, ce qui cause vne infinité de vaines inquietudes & fascheries.

Apres qu'on a ainsy reconnu la bonté de Dieu, IV 293
l'immortalité de nos ames & la grandeur de l'vniuers, il y a encore vne verité dont la connoissance me semble fort vtile qui est que, bien que chascun de nous soit vne personne separée des autres, & dont, par consequent, les interets sont en quelque façon distincts de ceux du reste du monde, on doit toutefois penser qu'on ne sçauroit subsister seul, & qu'on est, en effect, l'vne des parties de l'vniuers, & plus particulierement encore l'vne des parties de cete terre, l'vne des parties de cet Estat, de cete societé, de cete famille, a laquelle on est ioint par sa demeure, par son serment, par sa naissance.

AT IV 293 Et il faut tousiours preferer les interets du tout, dont on est partie, a ceux de sa personne en particulier ; toutefois auec mesure & discretion, car on auroit tort de s'exposer a vn grand mal, pour procurer seulement vn petit bien a ses parens ou a son pais ; & si vn homme vaut plus, luy seul, que tout le reste de sa ville, il n'auroit pas raison de se vouloir perdre pour la sauuer.

Mais si on raportoit tout a soy mesme, on ne craindroit pas de nuire beaucoup aux autres hommes, lorsqu'on croiroit en retirer quelque petite commodité, & on n'auroit aucune vraye amitié, ny aucune fidelité, ny generalement aucune vertu ; au lieu qu'en se considerant comme vne partie du public, on prend plaisir a faire du bien a tout le monde, & mesme on ne craint pas d'exposer sa vie pour le seruice d'autruy, lorsque l'occasion s'en presente ; voyre on voudroit perdre son ame, s'il se pouuoit, pour sauuer les autres.

En sorte que cete consideration est la source & l'origine de toutes les plus heroiques actions IV 294 que facent les hommes ; car pour ceux qui s'exposent a la mort par vanité, pour ce qu'ils esperent en estre louëz, ou par stupidité, pour ce qu'ils n'apprehendent pas le danger, ie croy qu'ils sont plus a plaindre qu'a priser.

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only to serve the earth, and the earth only for man, we become inclined to think that this earth is our principal dwelling and this life our best. And instead of recognizing the perfections that are truly in us, we attribute to other creatures imperfections they do not have, so as to raise ourselves above them. Falling into an absurd presumption, we want a seat on God's council and a share with him in the task of governing the world—which causes endless vain anxieties and vexations.

Once we have thus recognized the goodness of God, IV 293 the immortality of our souls and the greatness of the universe, there is yet another truth that seems to me very useful to know. It is this: although each of us is a person separate from others, whose interests are therefore in some way distinct from those of the rest of the world, we must nevertheless bear in mind that we could not subsist alone, and that we are in fact one of the parts of the universe—and more particularly still, one of the parts of this earth, one of the parts of this state, this society, this family, to which we are joined by our residence, our oath, our birth.

And we must always prefer the interests of the whole of which we are a part to those of our own person in particular—but with measure and discretion. For we would be wrong to expose ourselves to a great evil merely to procure a small good for our relatives or our country; and if one man is worth more on his own than all the rest of his city, he would not be right to be willing to sacrifice himself to save it.

But if we referred everything to ourselves, we would not be afraid of doing others great harm whenever we thought we could gain some small advantage from it, and we would have no true friendship, no fidelity, and in general no virtue. Whereas, by considering ourselves as a part of the public, we take pleasure in doing good to everyone, and we are not even afraid to risk our life in the service of others when the occasion arises; indeed, we would be willing to lose our soul, if that were possible, to save others.

So this consideration is the source and origin of all the most heroic actions IV 294 that human beings perform. As for those who expose themselves to death out of vanity, because they hope to be praised for it, or out of stupidity, because they do

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not perceive the danger, I think they are more to be pitied than prized.

AT IV 294 Mais, lorsque quelqu'vn s'y expose, pour ce qu'il croit que c'est de son deuoir, ou bien lorsqu'il souffre quelque autre mal, affin qu'il en reuiene du bien aux autres, encore qu'il ne considere peut-estre pas auec reflexion qu'il fait cela pour ce qu'il doit plus au public, dont il est partie, qu'a soy mesme en son particulier, il le fait toutefois en vertu de cete consideration, qui est confusement en sa pensée.

But when someone exposes himself to death because he believes it is his duty, or suffers some other evil so that good may come of it to others, he may not reflect that he does this because he owes more to the public, of which he is a part, than to himself as an individual; yet he does it by virtue of this consideration, which is present, though confusedly, in his thought.

Et on est naturellement porté a l'auoir, lorsqu'on connoist & qu'on ayme Dieu comme il faut car alors, s'abandonnant du tout a sa volonté, on se despouille de ses propres interests, & on n'a point d'autre passion que de faire ce qu'on croit luy estre agreable ; en suite de quoy on a des satisfactions d'esprit & des contentemens, qui valent incomparablement dauantage que toutes les petites ioyes passageres qui dependent des sens.

And we are naturally led to have it when we know and love God as we should. For then, abandoning ourselves entirely to his will, we strip ourselves of our own interests and have no other passion than to do what we believe pleases him. As a result we enjoy satisfactions of mind and contentments worth incomparably more than all the little passing joys that depend on the senses.

Outre ces veritez, qui regardent en general toutes nos actions, il en faut aussy sçauoir plusieurs autres, qui se raportent plus particulierement a chascune d'elles. Dont les principales me semblent estre celles que i'ay remarquées en ma derniere letre : a sçauoir que toutes nos passions nous representent les biens, a [IV 295] la recherche desquels elles nous incitent, beaucoup plus grans qu'ils ne sont veritablement ; & que les plaisirs du cors ne sont iamais si durables que ceux de l'ame, ny si grands, quand on les possede, qu'ils paroissent, quand on les espere.

Besides these truths, which concern all our actions in general, we must also know several others that bear more particularly on each of them. The chief of these seem to me to be the ones I noted in my last letter: namely, that all our passions represent the goods they incite us [IV 295] to pursue as much greater than they really are; and that the pleasures of the body are never as lasting as those of the soul, nor as great when we possess them as they seem when we hope for them.

AT IV 295 Ce que nous deuons soigneusement remarquer, affin que, lorsque nous nous sentons emeus de quelque passion, nous suspendions nostre iugement, iusques a ce qu'elle soit apaisée ; & que nous ne nous laissions pas aysement tromper par la fausse apparence des biens de ce monde.

We must note this carefully, so that when we feel ourselves stirred by some passion we suspend our judgment until it has calmed down, and do not let ourselves be easily deceived by the false appearance of the goods of this world.

A quoy ie ne puis adiouster autre chose, sinon qu'il faut aussy examiner en particulier toutes les mœurs des lieux ou nous viuons, pour sçauoir iusques ou elles doiuent estre suiuies. Et bien que nous ne puissions auoir des demonstrations certaines de tout, nous deuons neanmoins prendre parti, & embrasser les opinions qui nous paroissent les plus vraysemblables, touchant toutes les choses qui vienent en vsage, affin que, lorsqu'il est question d'agir, nous ne soyons iamais irresolus. Car il n'y a que la seule irresolution qui cause les regrets & les repentirs.

To this I can add nothing else, except that we must also examine in particular all the customs of the places where we live, to know how far they should be followed. And although we cannot have certain demonstrations of everything, we must nevertheless take sides and embrace the opinions that seem most probable to us on all matters that come up in practice, so that when it is a question of acting we are never irresolute. For irresolution alone is what causes regret and repentance.

Au reste, i'ay dit cy dessus qu'outre la connoissance de la verité, l'habitude est aussy requise, pour estre tousiours disposé a bien iuger. Car, d'autant que nous ne pouuons

For the rest, I said above that besides knowledge of the truth, habit is also required in order to be always disposed to judge well. For since we cannot

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estre continuellement attentifs a mesme chose, quelques claires & euidentes qu'ayent esté les raisons qui nous ont persuadé cy deuant quelque verité, nous pouuons, par apres, estre detournez de la croyre par de fausses apparences, si ce n'est que, par IV 296 vne longue & frequente meditation, nous l'ayons tellement imprimée en nostre esprit, qu'elle soit tournée en habitude.

AT IV 296 Et en ce sens on a raison, dans l'Eschole, de dire que les vertus sont des habitudes ; car, en effect, on ne manque gueres, faute d'auoir, en theorie, la connoissance de ce qu'on doit faire, mais seulement faute de l'auoir en pratique, c'est a dire faute d'auoir vne ferme habitude de la croyre. Et pour ce que, pendant que i'examine icy ces veritez, i'en augmente aussy en moy l'habitude, i'ay particulierement obligation a Vostre Altesse, de ce qu'elle permet que ie l'en entretiene, & il n'y a rien en quoy i'estime mon loysir mieux employé, qu'en ce ou ie puis tesmoigner que ie suis,

Madame, de Vostre Altesse le tres humble & tres obeissant seruiteur de cartes.

Lorsque ie fermois cete letre, i'ay receu celle de V. A. du 13 ; mais i'y trouue tant de choses a considerer, que ie n'ose entreprendre d'y respondre sur le champ, & ie m'assure que V. A. aymera mieux que ie prene vn peu de tems pour y penser.

D'Egmont, 15 Sept. 1645.

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attend continually to the same thing, however clear and evident the reasons that once persuaded us of some truth may have been, we can later be turned away from believing it by false appearances—unless, IV 296 by long and frequent meditation, we have impressed it so deeply on our mind that it has become a habit.

In this sense the Schools are right to say that the virtues are habits. For in fact we seldom go wrong for lack of knowing in theory what we should do, but only for lack of knowing it in practice—that is, for lack of a firm habit of believing it. And since, as I examine these truths here, I also strengthen the habit of them in myself, I am particularly obliged to Your Highness for allowing me to discuss them with her; and there is nothing on which I think my leisure better spent than on what allows me to show that I am,[18]

Madame, Your Highness's most humble and obedient servant, Descartes.

As I was sealing this letter I received Your Highness's of the 13th. But I find so many things to consider in it that I dare not undertake to answer it on the spot, and I am sure Your Highness would rather I took a little time to think about it.

Egmond, 15 September 1645.

ELISABETH TO DESCARTES, 30 SEPTEMBER 1645

Elisabeth questions each of these truths, especially how God's providence fits with free human choices.

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AT IV 301 **ELISABETH** Monsieur Descartes,

Quoy que vos obseruations sur les sentiments que Seneque auoit du souuerain bien, m'en rendroient la lecture IV 302 plus profitable que ie ne la saurois trouuer de mon chef, ie ne suis point faschée de les changer pour des verités si necessaires que celles qui comprennent les moyens de fortisier l'entendement, pour discerner ce qui est le meilleur en toutes les actions de la vie, a condition que vous y aioutiez encore l'explication dont ma stupidité a besoin, touchant l'vtilité des connoissances que vous proposez.

AT IV 302 Celle de l'exislence de Dieu & de ses attributs nous peut consoler des malheurs qui nous viennent du cours

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ELISABETH Monsieur Descartes,

Although your observations on Seneca's views about the supreme good would make reading him IV 302 more profitable than I could ever make it on my own, I am not at all sorry to exchange them for truths as necessary as those that contain the means of strengthening the intellect so as to discern what is best in all the actions of life—on condition that you also add the explanation my stupidity needs concerning the usefulness of the kinds of knowledge you propose.

Knowledge of the existence of God and of his attributes can console us for the misfortunes that

18 The scholastic philosophers, following Aristotle, for whom a virtue is a *habitus* (Greek *hexis*), a settled disposition.

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ordinaire de la nature & de l'ordre qu'il y a établi, comme de perdre le bien par l'orage, la santé par l'infection de l'air, les amis par la mort ; mais non pas de ceux qui nous sont imposés des hommes, dont l'arbitre nous paroist entierement libre, n'y ayant que la foi seule qui nous puisse persuader que Dieu prend le soin de regir les volontés, & qu'il a determiné la fortune de chaque personne auant la creation du monde.

L'immortalité de l'ame, & de sauoir qu'elle est de beaucoup plus noble que le corps, est capable de nous faire chercher la mort, aussi bien que la mespriser, puisqu'on ne sauroit douter que nous viurons plus heureusement, exemts des maladies & passions du corps. Et ie m'estonne que ceux qui se disoient persuadés de cette verité & viuoient sans la loi reuelée, prefereroient vne vie penible a vne mort auantageuse.

La grande estendue de l'vniuers, que vous auez [IV 303] au troisiéme liure de vos principes, sert a detacher nos affections de ce que nous en voyons ; mais elle separe aussi cette prouidence particuliere, qui est le fondement de la theologie, de l'idée que nous auons de Dieu.

[AT IV 303] La consideration que nous sommes vne partie du tout, dont nous deuons chercher l'auantage, est bien la source de toutes les actions genereuses ; mais ie trouue beaucoup de difficultés aux conditions que vous leur prescriuez. Comment mesurer les maux qu'on se donne pour le public, contre le bien qui en arriuera, sans qu'ils nous paroissent plus grands, d'autant que leur idée est plus distincte ? Et quelle regle aurons nous pour la comparaison des choses qui ne nous sont point egalement connues, comme nostre merite propre & celuy de ceux auec qui nous viuons ? Vn naturel arrogant fera tousiours pancher la balance de son costé, & vn modeste s'estimera moins qu'il vaut.

Pour profiter des verités particulieres dont vous parlez, il faut connoistre exactement toutes ces passions & toutes ces preoccupations, dont la plupart sont insensibles. En obseruant les mœurs des pays ou nous sommes, nous en trouuons quelques fois de fort deraisonnables, qu'il est necessaire de suiure pour euiter de plus grands inconuenients.

Depuis que ie suis icy, i'en fais vne epreuue bien fascheuse ; car i'esperois profiter du seiour des champs,

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come to us from the ordinary course of nature and the order he has established in it—losing our property in a storm, our health through infected air, our friends through death. But it cannot console us for those imposed on us by other people, whose choices seem to us entirely free; for faith alone can persuade us that God takes care to govern wills, and that he determined the fortune of each person before the creation of the world.

The immortality of the soul, and the knowledge that it is much nobler than the body, can make us seek death as well as despise it, since we cannot doubt that we shall live more happily when free from the illnesses and passions of the body. And I am astonished that those who claimed to be persuaded of this truth, and lived without the revealed law, should have preferred a painful life to an advantageous death.

The great extent of the universe, which you have [IV 303] set out in the third book of your *Principles*, serves to detach our affections from what we see of it. But it also separates that particular providence, which is the foundation of theology, from the idea we have of God.

The consideration that we are a part of the whole whose advantage we must seek is indeed the source of all generous actions; but I find many difficulties in the conditions you prescribe for them. How are we to measure the evils we take on for the public against the good that will come of it, without those evils seeming greater to us, inasmuch as our idea of them is more distinct? And what rule shall we have for comparing things that are not equally known to us, such as our own merit and that of the people we live with? An arrogant nature will always tip the scales its own way, and a modest one will value itself at less than it is worth.

To profit from the particular truths you speak of, one must know exactly all these passions and all these prejudices, most of which go unnoticed. In observing the customs of the countries where we find ourselves, we sometimes come upon very unreasonable ones that must be followed to avoid greater drawbacks.

Since I have been here I have had a very tiresome experience of this. I hoped to profit from a stay in

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au tems que l'employerois a l'estude, & i'y rencontre, sans comparaison, moins de loisir que ie n'auois a la Haye, par les diuersions de ceux qui ne sauent que faire ; & quoy [IV 304] qu'il soit tres-iniuste de me priuer de biens reels, pour leur en donner d'imaginaires, ie suis contrainte de ceder aux lois impertinentes de la ciuilité qui sont establies, pour ne m'acquerir point d'ennemis. Depuis que i'escris celle-cy, i'ay esté interrompue, plus de sept fois, par ces visites incommodes.

AT IV 304 C'est vne bonté excessiue qui garantit mes lettres d'vn predicament pareil aupres de vous, & qui vous oblige de vouloir augmenter l'habitude de vos cognoissances, en les communiquant a vne personne indocile comme

Votre tres-affectionnée a vous seruir, Élisabeth. Ce dernier de Septembre. Monsieur Descartes.

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the country by spending the time in study, and I find here incomparably less leisure than I had at The Hague, because of the diversions of people who do not know what to do with themselves. And although [IV 304] it is most unjust to deprive me of real goods in order to give them imaginary ones, I am forced to yield to the absurd laws of civility in force here, so as not to make enemies. Since I began writing this letter I have been interrupted more than seven times by these tiresome visits.

It is only your excessive kindness that keeps my letters from being placed in the same category in your eyes, and that makes you want to strengthen the habit of your knowledge by sharing it with a person as unteachable as

Yours most affectionately, always at your service, Elisabeth. The last day of September. Monsieur Descartes.

DESCARTES TO ELISABETH, 6 OCTOBER 1645

Descartes prefers knowledge to cheerful illusion, defines the passions, and argues that God causes even free actions.

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DESCARTES Madame,

Ie me suis quelquefois proposé vn doute : sçauoir s'il est mieux d'estre gay & content, en imaginant les [IV 305] biens qu'on possede estre plus grands & plus estimables qu'ils ne sont, & ignorant ou ne s'arestant pas a considerer ceux qui manquent, que d'auoir plus de consideration & de sçauoir, pour connoistre la iuste valeur des vns & des autres, & qu'on deuiene plus triste. Si ie pensois que le souuerain bien fust la ioye. ie ne douterois point qu'on ne deust tascher de se rendre ioyeux, a quelque prix que ce pust estre, & i'approuuerois la brutalité de ceux qui noyent leurs deplaisirs dans le vin, ou les estourdissent auec du petun.

AT IV 305 Mais ie distingue entre le souuerain bien, qui consiste en l'exercice de la vertu, ou, ce qui est le mesme, en la possession de tous les biens dont l'acquisition depend de nostre libre arbitre, & la satisfaction d'esprit qui suit de cette acquisition. C'est pourquoy, voyant que c'est vne plus grande perfection de connoistre la verité, encore mesme qu'elle soit a nostre desauantage, que l'ignorer, i'auouë qu'il vaut mieux estre moins gay & auoir plus de connoissance. Aussy n'est-ce pas tousiours, lorsqu'on a le plus de gayeté, qu'on a l'esprit plus satisfait ; au contraire, les grandes ioyes sont ordinairement mornes &

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DESCARTES Madame,

I have sometimes put a question to myself: is it better to be cheerful and content, imagining the [IV 305] goods one possesses to be greater and more valuable than they are, and not knowing, or not stopping to consider, those one lacks? Or is it better to have more reflection and knowledge, so as to know the true value of both, and to become sadder? If I thought the supreme good was joy, I would not doubt that one ought to try to make oneself joyful at any cost, and I would approve the brutishness of those who drown their sorrows in wine or dull them with tobacco.

But I distinguish between the supreme good, which consists in the exercise of virtue—or, what comes to the same thing, in the possession of all the goods whose acquisition depends on our free will—and the satisfaction of mind that follows from this acquisition. That is why, seeing that it is a greater perfection to know the truth, even when it is to our disadvantage, than to be ignorant of it, I admit that it is better to be less cheerful and have more knowledge. Besides, it is not always when we are most cheerful that our mind is most satisfied. On the contrary, great joys are usually subdued

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serieuses, & il n'y a que les mediocres & passageres, qui soient accompagnées du ris.

Ainsy ie n'approuue point qu'on tasche a se tromper, en se repaissant de fausses imaginations ; car tout le plaisir qui en reuient, ne peut toucher que la superficie d'ame, laquelle sent cependant [IV 306] vne amertume interieure, en s'aperceuant qu'ils sont faux. Et encore qu'il pourroit arriuer qu'elle fust si continuellement diuertie ailleurs, que iamais elle ne s'en apperceust, on ne iouiroit pas pour cela de la beatitude dont il est question, pour ce qu'elle doit dependre de nostre conduite, & cela ne viendroit que de la fortune.

AT IV 306 Mais lors qu'on peut auoir diuerses considerations egalement vrayes, dont les vnes portent a estre contens, & les autres, au contraire, nous en empeschent, il me semble que la prudence veut que nous nous arestions principalement a celles qui nous donnent de la satisfaction ; & mesme, a cause que presque toutes les choses du monde sont telles, qu'on les peut regarder de quelque costé qui les fait paroistre bonnes, & de quelque autre qui fait qu'on y remarque des defaux, ie croy que, si on doit vser de son adresse en quelque chose, c'est principalement a les sçauoir regarder du biais qui les fait paroistre le plus a nostre auantage, pouruu que ce soit sans nous tromper.

Ainsy, lorsque vostre Altesse remarque les causes pour lesquelles elle peut auoir eu plus de loysir, pour cultiuer sa raison, que beaucoup d'autres de son aage, s'il luy plaist aussy considerer combien elle a plus profité que ces autres, ie m'assure qu'elle aura de quoy se contenter. Et ie ne voy pas pourquoy elle ayme mieux se comparer a elles, en ce dont elle prend suiet de [IV 307] se plaindre, qu'en ce qui luy pourroit donner de la satisfaction.

AT IV 307 Car la constitution de nostre nature estant telle, que nostre esprit a besoin de beaucoup de relasche, affin qu'il puisse employer vtilement quelques momens en la recherche de la verité, & qu'il s'assoupiroit, au lieu de se polir, s'il s'appliquoit trop a l'estude, nous ne deuons pas mesurer le tems que nous auons pû employer a nous instruire, par le nombre des heures que nous auons euës a nous, mais plustost, ce me semble, par l'exemple de ce que nous voyons communement arriuer aux autres, comme estant vne marque de la portée ordinaire de l'esprit humain.

Il me semble aussy qu'on n'a point suiet de se repentir, lorsqu'on a fait ce qu'on a iugé estre le meilleur au tems

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and serious, and only moderate and passing ones are accompanied by laughter.

So I do not approve of trying to deceive ourselves by feeding on false imaginings. For all the pleasure that comes of them can touch only the surface of the soul, which meanwhile feels [IV 306] an inner bitterness on perceiving that they are false. And even if the soul could be so continually diverted elsewhere that it never noticed this, we would not on that account enjoy the happiness in question, because that must depend on our own conduct, and this would come only from fortune.

But when we can entertain different considerations that are equally true, some of which lead us to be content while others, on the contrary, prevent us, it seems to me that prudence requires us to dwell chiefly on those that give us satisfaction. Indeed, since almost everything in the world can be seen from some side that makes it appear good, and from some other that makes us notice its defects, I believe that if we should use our skill in anything, it is above all in knowing how to look at things from the angle that shows them most to our advantage—provided we do so without deceiving ourselves.

Thus, when Your Highness notes the causes for which she may have had more leisure to cultivate her reason than many others of her age, if she will also be pleased to consider how much more she has profited than they have, I am sure she will find reason enough to be content. And I do not see why she prefers to compare herself with them in what gives her cause [IV 307] to complain rather than in what could give her satisfaction.

For the constitution of our nature is such that our mind needs a great deal of rest in order to spend a few moments usefully in the search for truth, and it would grow dull instead of sharper if it applied itself too much to study. So we should not measure the time we have been able to devote to our instruction by the number of hours we have had to ourselves, but rather, it seems to me, by the example of what we commonly see happen to others, since that is a sign of the ordinary reach of the human mind.

It also seems to me that we have no reason to repent when we have done what we judged best at

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qu'on a deu se resoudre a l'execution, encore que, par apres, y repensant auec plus de loysir, on iuge auoir failly. Mais on deuroit plutost se repentir, si on auoit fait quelque chose contre sa conscience, encore qu'on reconnust, par apres, auoir mieux fait qu'on n'auoit pensé : car nous n'auons a respondre que de nos pensées ; & la nature de l'homme n'est pas de tout sçauoir, ny de iuger tousiours si bien sur le champ, que lorsqu'on a beaucoup de temps a deliberer.

Au reste, encore que la vanité qui fait qu'on a meilleure opinion de soy qu'on ne doit, soit vn vice qui n'appartient qu'aux ames foibles & basses, ce n'est pas a dire que les plus fortes & genereuses se doiuent mespriser ; mais il se faut faire iustice a soy mesme, en reconnoissant ses perfections aussy bien que ses de [IV 308] faux ; & si la bienseance empesche qu'on ne les publie, elle n'empesche pas pour cela qu'on ne les resente.

AT IV 308 Enfin, encore qu'on n'ait pas vne science infinie, pour connoistre parfaitement tous les biens dont il arriue qu'on doit faire choix dans les diuerses rencontres de la vie, on doit, ce me semble, se contenter d'en auoir vne mediocre des choses plus necessaires, comme sont celles que i'ai denombrées en ma derniere letre.

En laquelle i'ay desia declaré mon opinion, touchant la difficulté que vostre Altesse propose : sçauoir, si ceux qui raportent tout a eux mesmes, ont plus de raison que ceux qui se tourmentent pour les autres. Car si nous ne pensions qu'a nous seuls, nous ne pourrions iouir que des biens qui nous sont particuliers ; au lieu que, si nous nous considerons comme parties de quelque autre cors, nous participons aussy aux biens qui luy sont communs, sans estre priuez pour cela d'aucun de ceux qui nous sont propres.

Et il n'en est pas de mesme des maux ; car, selon la Philosophie, le mal n'est rien de reel, mais seulement vne priuation ; & lorsque nous nous atristons, a cause de quelque mal qui arriue a nos amis, nous ne participons point pour cela au defaut dans lequel consiste ce mal ; & quelque tristesse ou quelque peine que nous ayons en telle occasion, elle ne sçauroit estre si grande qu'est la satisfaction interieure qui accompagne [IV 309] tousiours les bonnes actions, & principalement celles qui procedent d'vne pure affection pour autruy qu'on ne raporte point a soy mesme, c'est a dire de la vertu chrestiene qu'on nomme charité.

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the time we had to decide to act, even if later, thinking it over at greater leisure, we judge that we were wrong. We should rather repent if we had done something against our conscience, even if we later recognized that we had done better than we thought. For we are answerable only for our thoughts; and it is not in human nature to know everything, nor to judge as well on the spur of the moment as when we have plenty of time to deliberate.

For the rest, although the vanity that makes us think better of ourselves than we should is a vice that belongs only to weak and base souls, that does not mean that the strongest and most generous souls should despise themselves. We must do ourselves justice, recognizing our perfections as well as our [IV 308] defects; and if propriety prevents us from proclaiming them, it does not on that account prevent us from being aware of them.

Finally, although we do not have infinite knowledge, so as to know perfectly all the goods we happen to have to choose among in the various circumstances of life, we should, it seems to me, be content with a moderate knowledge of the most necessary things, such as those I listed in my last letter.

In that letter I already stated my opinion on the difficulty Your Highness raises: namely, whether those who refer everything to themselves are more reasonable than those who torment themselves for others. For if we thought only of ourselves, we could enjoy only the goods that are ours in particular; whereas if we consider ourselves as parts of some other body, we also share in the goods common to it, without being deprived of any of those that are our own.

It is not the same with evils. For according to philosophy, evil is nothing real, but only a privation. When we grieve over some evil that befalls our friends, we do not thereby share in the defect in which that evil consists; and whatever sadness or distress we may feel on such an occasion, it could never be as great as the inner satisfaction that always [IV 309] accompanies good actions—above all those that proceed from a pure affection for others, one we do not refer to ourselves, that is, from the Christian virtue called charity.

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AT IV 309 Ainsy on peut, mesme en pleurant & prenant beaucoup de peine, auoir plus de plaisir que lorsqu'on rit & se repose.

Et il est aysé a prouuer que le plaisir de l'ame auquel a consiste la beatitude, n'est pas inseparable de la gayeté & de l'ayse du cors, tant par l'exemple des tragedies, qui nous plaisent d'autant plus qu'elles excitent en nous plus de tristesse, que par celuy des exercices du cors, comme la chasse, le ieu de la paume & autres semblables, qui ne laissent pas d'estre agreables, encore qu'ils soient fort penibles ; & mesme on voit que souuent c'est la fatigue & la peine qui en augmente le plaisir.

Et la cause du contentement que l'ame reçoit en ces exercices, consiste en ce qu'ils luy font remarquer la force, ou l'adresse, ou quelque autre perfection du cors auquel elle est iointe ; mais le contentement qu'elle a de pleurer, en voyant representer quelque action pitoyable & funeste sur vn theatre, vient principalement de ce qu'il luy semble qu'elle fait vne action vertueuse, ayant compassion des affligez ; & generalement elle se plaist a sentir emouuoir en soi des passions, de quelle nature qu'elles soient, pouruû qu'elle en demeure maistresse.

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Thus, even while weeping and taking great pains, we can have more pleasure than when we laugh and rest.

And it is easy to prove that the pleasure of the soul in which happiness consists is not inseparable from cheerfulness and bodily ease. Tragedies show this, for they please us all the more the more sadness they arouse in us; and so do bodily exercises such as hunting, tennis and the like, which are no less agreeable for being very strenuous. Indeed, we often see that it is the fatigue and effort that increase the pleasure.

The contentment the soul receives from these exercises arises from their making it aware of the strength, or skill, or some other perfection of the body to which it is joined. But the contentment it has in weeping when it sees some pitiful and tragic action represented on a stage comes chiefly from its seeming to itself to perform a virtuous action in having compassion for the afflicted. And in general the soul is pleased to feel passions stirred up in it, of whatever kind, provided it remains their master.

DEFINING THE PASSIONS

Descartes distinguishes passions from sensations, reveries and imagination.

FRENCH

DESCARTES Mais il faut que i'examine plus particulierement ces [IV 310] passions, affin de les pouuoir definir ; ce qui me sera icy plus aysé, que si l'écriuois a quelque autre ; car vostre Altesse ayant pris la peine de lire le traité que i'ay autrefois esbauché, touchant la nature des animaux, vous sçauez desia comment ie conçoy que se forment diuerses impressions dans leur cerueau, les vnes par les obiets exterieurs qui meuuent les sens, les autres par les dispositions interieures du cors, ou par les vestiges des impressions precedentes qui sont demeurées en la memoire, ou par l'agitation des esprits qui vienent du cœur, ou aussy en l'homme par l'action de l'ame, laquelle a quelque force pour changer les impressions qui sont dans le cerueau, comme, reciproquement, ces impressions ont la force d'exciter en l'ame des pensées qui ne dependent point de sa volonté.

AT IV 310 En suite de quoy, on peut generalement nommer passions toutes les pensées qui sont ainsy excitées en l'ame sans le

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DESCARTES But I must examine these [IV 310] passions more closely in order to be able to define them. This will be easier here than if I were writing to anyone else. For since Your Highness has taken the trouble to read the treatise I once sketched on the nature of animals, you already know how I conceive the formation of various impressions in their brain: some by external objects that move the senses; others by the internal dispositions of the body, or by the traces of previous impressions that have remained in the memory, or by the agitation of the spirits that come from the heart; or also, in man, by the action of the soul, which has some power to change the impressions in the brain, just as, in turn, these impressions have the power to arouse in the soul thoughts that do not depend on its will.[19]

It follows that we can, in general, call passions all the thoughts that are thus aroused in the soul

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concours de sa volonté, & par consequent, sans aucune action qui viene d'elle, par les seules impressions qui sont dans le cerueau, car tout ce qui n'est point action est passion. Mais on restraint ordinairement ce nom aux pensées qui sont causées par quelque particuliere agitation des esprits. Car celles qui vienent des obiets exterieurs, ou bien des dispositions interieures du cors, comme la perception des couleurs, des sons, des odeurs, la faim, la soif, la douleur & semblables, se nomment des sentiments [IV 311] , les vns exterieurs, les autres interieurs.

AT IV 311 Celles qui ne dependent que de ce que les impressions precedentes ont laissé en la memoire, & de l'agitation ordinaire des esprits, sont des resueries, soit qu'elles vienent en songe, soit aussy lorsqu'on est eueillé, & que l'ame, ne se determinant a rien de soy mesme, suit nonchalament les impressions qui se rencontrent dans le cerueau. Mais, lorsqu'elle vse de sa volonté pour se determiner a quelque pensée qui n'est pas seulement intelligible, mais imaginable, cette pensée fait vne nouuelle impression dans le cerueau, cela n'est pas en elle vne passion, mais vne action, qui se nomme proprement imagination.

Enfin, lorsque le cours ordinaire des esprits est tel qu'il excite communement des pensées tristes ou gayes, ou autres semblables, on ne l'attribue pas a la passion, mais au naturel ou a l'humeur de celuy en qui elles sont excitées, & cela fait qu'on dit que cet homme est d'vn naturel triste, cet autre d'vne humeur gaye &c. Ainsy il ne reste que les pensées qui vienent de quelque particuliere agitation des esprits, & dont on sent les effets comme en l'ame mesme, qui soient proprement nommées des passions.

Il est vray que nous n'en auons quasi iamais aucunes qui ne dependent de plusieurs des causes que ie viens de distinguer ; mais on leur donne la denomination de celle qui est la principale, ou a laquelle [IV 312] on a principalement egard : ce qui fait que plusieurs confondent le sentiment de la douleur auec la passion de la tristesse, & celuy du chatouillement auec la passion de la ioye, laquelle ils nomment aussy volupté ou plaisir, & ceux de la soif ou de la faim auec les desirs de boire ou de manger, qui sont des passions : car ordinairement les causes qui font la douleur, agitent aussy les esprits, en la façon qui est requise pour exciter la tristesse, & celles qui font sentir quelque chatouillement, les agitent en la

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without the concurrence of its will—and so without any action coming from it—by the impressions in the brain alone; for everything that is not action is passion. But the name is usually restricted to thoughts caused by some particular agitation of the spirits. For those that come from external objects, or from internal dispositions of the body—such as the perception of colors, sounds and smells, hunger, thirst, pain and the like—are called sensations [IV 311] , some external, others internal.

Those that depend only on what previous impressions have left in the memory and on the ordinary agitation of the spirits are reveries, whether they come in dreams or when we are awake and the soul, not determining itself to anything of its own accord, idly follows whatever impressions it finds in the brain. But when the soul uses its will to determine itself to some thought that is not only intelligible but imaginable, this thought makes a new impression in the brain; and that is not a passion in the soul but an action, which is properly called imagination.

Finally, when the ordinary course of the spirits is such that it commonly arouses sad or cheerful thoughts, or others of the kind, we do not attribute this to passion but to the nature or temperament of the person in whom they are aroused. That is why we say that this man has a sad nature, that one a cheerful temperament, and so on. So there remain only the thoughts that come from some particular agitation of the spirits, and whose effects are felt as in the soul itself, that are properly called passions.

It is true that we hardly ever have any that do not depend on several of the causes I have just distinguished. But we name them after the principal one, or the one to which [IV 312] we chiefly attend. This is why many people confuse the sensation of pain with the passion of sadness, the sensation of titillation with the passion of joy (which they also call delight or pleasure), and the sensations of thirst or hunger with the desires to drink or eat, which are passions. For ordinarily the causes that produce pain also agitate the spirits in the way required to arouse sadness, and those that make us

19 Probably Descartes' unpublished *Treatise on Man*, the physiological part of his *World* (1633).

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façon qui est requise pour exciter la ioye, & ainsy des autres.

AT IV 312 On confond aussy quelquefois les inclinations ou habitudes qui disposent a quelque passion, auec la passion mesme, ce qui est neanmoins facile a distinguer. Car, par exemple, lorsqu'on dit, dans vne ville, que les ennemis la vienent assieger, le premier iugement, que font les habitans, du mal qui leur en peut arriuer, est vne action de leur ame, non vne passion. Et bien que ce iugement se rencontre semblable en plusieurs, ils n'en sont pas toutefois egalement emeus, mais les vns plus, les autres moins, selon qu'ils ont plus ou moins d'habitude ou d'inclination a la crainte.

Et auant que leur ame reçoiue l'emotion, en laquelle seule consiste la passion, il faut qu'elle face ce iugement, ou bien, sans iuger, qu'elle conçoiue au moins le danger, & en imprime l'image dans le cerueau (ce qui se fait par vne autre action qu'on nomme imaginer), & que, par mesme moyen, elle determine les IV 313 esprits, qui vont du cerueau par les nerfs dans les muscles, a entrer en ceux qui seruent a reserrer les ouuertures du cœur, ce qui retarde la circulation du sang ; en suite de quoy, tout le cors deuient pale, froid & tremblant, & les nouueaux esprits, qui vienent du cœur vers le cerueau, sont agitez de telle façon qu'ils ne peuuent ayder a y former d'autres images que celles qui excitent en l'ame la passion de la crainte toutes lesquelles choses se suiuent de si pres l'vne l'autre, qu'il semble que ce ne soit qu'vne seule operation.

AT IV 313 Et ainsy en toutes les autres passions il arriue quelque particuliere agitation dans les esprits qui vienent du cœur.

Voyla ce que ie pensois escrire, il y a 8 iours, a vostre Altesse, & mon dessein estoit d'y adiouster vne particuliere explication de toutes les passions ; mais ayant trouué de la difficulté a les denombrer, ie fus contraint de laisser partir le messager sans ma letre, & ayant receu cependant celle que V. A.

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feel some titillation agitate them in the way required to arouse joy, and so on for the others.

We also sometimes confuse the inclinations or habits that dispose us to some passion with the passion itself, though the difference is easy to see. For example, when it is announced in a town that the enemy are coming to besiege it, the inhabitants' first judgment of the harm that may come to them from it is an action of their soul, not a passion. And although many of them make the same judgment, they are not equally moved by it: some are moved more, others less, according as they have more or less of a habit of, or inclination to, fear.

Before their soul receives the emotion in which alone the passion consists, it must make this judgment—or else, without judging, at least conceive the danger and imprint its image on the brain (which is done by another action, called imagining). By the same means it must determine the IV 313 spirits that go from the brain through the nerves into the muscles to enter those that serve to narrow the openings of the heart, which slows the circulation of the blood. As a result the whole body becomes pale, cold and trembling, and the new spirits coming from the heart to the brain are agitated in such a way that they can help form there no images other than those that arouse in the soul the passion of fear. All these things follow one another so closely that they seem to be a single operation.

And so, in all the other passions, some particular agitation occurs in the spirits that come from the heart.

That is what I meant to write to Your Highness a week ago, and I intended to add a detailed explanation of all the passions. But finding it difficult to enumerate them, I was forced to let the messenger leave without my letter. And having meanwhile received the one Your Highness

GOD AND FREE WILL

Descartes argues that God is the total cause even of actions that depend on free will.

FRENCH

DESCARTES m'a fait l'honneur de m'escrire, i'ay vne nouuelle occasion de respondre, qui m'oblige de remetre

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DESCARTES has done me the honor of writing to me, I have a new occasion to reply, which obliges

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a vne autre fois cet examen des passions, pour dire icy que toutes les raisons qui prouuent l'existence de Dieu, & qu'il [IV 314] est la cause premiere & immuable de tous les effects qui ne dependent point du libre arbitre des hommes, prouuent, ce me semble, en mesme façon qu'il est aussy la cause de touts ceux qui en dependent. Car on ne sçauroit demonstrer qu'il existe, qu'en le considerant comme vn estre souuerainement parfait ; & il ne seroit pas souuerainement parfait, s'il pouuoit arriuer quelque chose dans le monde, qui ne vint pas entierement de luy.

AT IV 314 Il est vray qu'il n'y a que la foy seule, qui nous enseigne ce que c'est que la grace, par laquelle Dieu nous éleue a vne beatitude surnaturelle ; mais la seule Philosophie suffit pour connoistre qu'il ne sçauroit entrer la moindre pensée en l'esprit d'vn homme, que Dieu ne veuille & ait voulu de toute eternité qu'elle y entrast.

Et la distinction de l'Eschole, entre les causes vniuerselles & particulieres, n'a point icy de lieu car ce qui fait que le soleil, par exemple, estant la cause vniuerselle de toutes les fleurs, n'est pas cause pour cela que les tulipes different des roses, c'est que leur production depend aussy de quelques autres causes particulieres qui ne luy sont point subordonnées ; mais Dieu est tellement la cause vniuerselle de tout, qu'il en est en mesme façon la cause totale ; & ainsy rien ne peut arriuer sans sa volonté.

Il est vray aussy que la connoissance de l'immortalité de l'ame & des felicitez dont elle sera capable estant hors de cete vie, pourroit donner suiet d'en [IV 315] sortir a ceux qui s'y ennuyent, s'ils estoient assurez qu'ils iouiroient, par apres, de toutes ces felicitez ; mais aucune raison ne les en assure, & il n'y a que la fausse Philosophie d'Hegesias, dont le liure fut defendu par Ptolomée, pource que plusieurs s'estoient tuez appres l'auoir leu, qui tasche a persuader que cete vie est mauuaise ; la vraye enseigne, tout au contraire, que, mesme parmi les plus tristes accidens & les plus pressantes douleurs, on y peut tousiours estre content, pouruû qu'on sçache vser de la raison.

AT IV 315 Pour ce qui est de l'estenduë de l'vniuers, ie ne voy pas comment, en la considerant, on est conuié a separer la prouidence particuliere de l'idée que nous auons de Dieu

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me to put off this examination of the passions to another time, and to say here that all the reasons that prove the existence of God, and that he [IV 314] is the first and immutable cause of all the effects that do not depend on human free will, prove in the same way, it seems to me, that he is also the cause of all those that do. For one cannot demonstrate that he exists except by considering him as a supremely perfect being; and he would not be supremely perfect if anything could happen in the world that did not come entirely from him.

It is true that faith alone teaches us what grace is, by which God raises us to a supernatural happiness. But philosophy alone is enough to show that not the slightest thought could enter a man's mind unless God willed, and had willed from all eternity, that it should.

And the distinction the Schools draw between universal and particular causes has no place here. The sun, for example, is the universal cause of all flowers, yet it is not on that account the cause of tulips being different from roses; and the reason is that their production also depends on certain other particular causes that are not subordinate to it. But God is the universal cause of everything in such a way that he is, in the same way, its total cause; and so nothing can happen without his will.

It is also true that knowing the soul is immortal, and knowing the felicities it will be capable of outside this life, could give those who are weary of this life reason to [IV 315] leave it, if they were assured that they would afterward enjoy all those felicities. But no reason assures them of this. Only the false philosophy of Hegesias—whose book was banned by Ptolemy because many had killed themselves after reading it—tries to persuade us that this life is bad. The true philosophy teaches, quite the contrary, that even amid the saddest accidents and the most pressing pains we can always be content, provided we know how to use reason.[20]

As for the extent of the universe, I do not see how considering it invites us to separate particular providence from the idea we have of God. For God

20 Hegesias of Cyrene (3rd century BC), a philosopher nicknamed "the death-persuader"; Cicero (*Tusculan Disputations* I.83–84) reports that King Ptolemy of Egypt forbade him to lecture on the subject.

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car c'est tout autre chose de Dieu que des puissances finies, lesquelles pouuant estre espuisées, nous auons raison de iuger, en voyant qu'elles sont employées a plusieurs grands effects, qu'il n'est pas vraysemblable qu'elles s'estendent aussy iusques aux moindres ; mais d'autant que nous estimons les œuures de Dieu estre plus grands, d'autant mieux remarquons nous l'infinité de sa puissance ; & d'autant que cete infinité nous est mieux connue, d'autant sommes nous plus assurez qu'elle s'estend iusques a toutes les plus particulieres actions des hommes.

Ie ne croy pas aussy que, par cete prouidence particuliere de Dieu, que V. A. a dit estre le fondement [IV 316] de la theologie, vous entendiez quelque changement qui arriue en ses decrets a l'occasion des actions qui dependent de nostre libre arbitre. Car la theologie n'admet point ce changement ; & lorsqu'elle nous oblige a prier Dieu, ce n'est pas affin que nous luy enseignions de quoy c'est que nous auons besoin, ny affin que nous taschions d'impetrer de luy qu'il change quelque chose en l'ordre establi de toute eternité par sa prouidence : l'un & l'autre seroit blasmable ; mais c'est seulement affin que nous obtenions ce qu'il a voulu de toute eternité estre obtenu par nos prieres.

AT IV 316 Et ie croy que tous les Theologiens sont d'accord en cecy, mesme les Arminiens, qui semblent estre ceux qui deferent le plus au libre arbitre.

I'auoüe qu'il est difficile de mesurer exactement iusques ou la raison ordonne que nous nous interessions pour le public ; mais aussy n'est ce pas vne chose en quoy il soit necessaire d'estre fort exact : il suffit de satisfaire a sa conscience, & on peut en cela donner beaucoup a son inclination. Car Dieu a tellement establi l'ordre des choses, & conioint les hommes ensemble d'vne si estroite societé, qu'encore que chascun raportast tout a soy mesme, & n'eust aucune charité pour les autres, il ne laisseroit pas de s'employer ordinairement pour eux en tout ce qui seroit de son pouuoir, pouruû qu'il vsast de prudence, principalement [IV 317] s'il viuoit en vn siecle ou les mœurs ne fussent point corrompuës.

AT IV 317 Et, outre cela, comme c'est vne chose plus haute & plus glorieuse, de faire du bien aux autres hommes que de s'en procurer a soy mesme, aussy sont ce les plus grandes ames qui y ont le plus d'inclination, & font de moins d'estat des biens qu'elles possedent. Il n'y a que les

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is quite a different matter from finite powers. Since these can be exhausted, when we see them used for many great effects we have reason to judge it unlikely that they also extend to the smallest ones. But the greater we judge God's works to be, the better we perceive the infinity of his power; and the better we know this infinity, the more certain we are that it extends to all the most particular actions of human beings.

Nor do I think that by this particular providence of God, which Your Highness said is the foundation [IV 316] of theology, you mean some change occurring in his decrees on account of actions that depend on our free will. For theology does not admit such change. When it obliges us to pray to God, it is not so that we may teach him what we need, nor so that we may try to persuade him to change something in the order established from all eternity by his providence—either would be blameworthy—but only so that we may obtain what he has willed from all eternity to be obtained through our prayers.

And I believe all theologians agree on this, even the Arminians, who seem to be the ones who grant most to free will.[21]

I admit that it is difficult to measure exactly how far reason requires us to concern ourselves with the public. But then this is not a matter in which great exactness is necessary: it is enough to satisfy one's conscience, and here one may allow a good deal to one's inclination. For God has so established the order of things, and bound human beings together in so close a society, that even if each person referred everything to himself and had no charity for others, he would still usually exert himself on their behalf in everything within his power, provided he used prudence—especially [IV 317] if he lived in an age whose morals were not corrupt.

Moreover, just as it is a higher and more glorious thing to do good to others than to procure it for oneself, so it is the greatest souls that are most inclined to it and set least store by the goods they

21 Followers of the Dutch theologian Jacobus Arminius (1560–1609), who defended free will against strict Calvinist predestination and were condemned at the Synod of Dort (1618–1619).

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foibles & basses qui s'estiment plus qu'elles ne doiuent, & sont comme les petits vaisseaux, que trois gouttes d'eau peuuent remplir. Ie sçay que V. A. n'est pas de ce nombre, & qu'au lieu qu'on ne peut inciter ces ames basses a prendre de la peine pour autruy, qu'en leur faisant voir qu'ils en retireront quelque profit pour eux mesmes, il faut, pour l'interest de V.

A., luy representer qu'elle ne pourroit estre longuement vtile a ceux qu'elle affectione, si elle se negligeoit soy mesme, & la prier d'auoir soin de sa santé. C'est ce que fait,

Madame, de Vostre Altesse le tres humble & tres obeissant seruiteur Des Cartes. D'Egmond, le 6 Octob. 1645.

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possess. Only weak and base souls value themselves more than they should; they are like small vessels that three drops of water can fill. I know that Your Highness is not of that number. And whereas these base souls can be induced to take trouble for others only by showing them that they will gain some profit for themselves, for Your Highness's own good one must point out to her that she could not long be useful to those she cares for if she neglected herself, and beg her to take care of her health. That is what is done by

Madame, Your Highness's most humble and obedient servant, Descartes. Egmond, 6 October 1645.

ELISABETH TO DESCARTES, 28 OCTOBER 1645

Elisabeth presses him on repentance, free will and particular providence, and on how passions can be both excessive and ruled.

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AT IV 321 **ELISABETH** Monsieur Descartes,

Apres auoir donné de si bonnes raisons, pour montrer qu'il vaut mieux connoistre des verités a nostre desauantage, que se tromper agreablement, & qu'il n'y a que les choses qui admettent diuerses considerations egalement vrayes, qui nous doiuent obliger de nous arrester a celle qui nous apportera plus de contentement, ie m'estonne que vous voulez que ie me compare a ceux de mon age, plutost en chose qui m'est inconnue qu'en ce que ie ne saurois ignorer, encore que celle-la soit plus a mon auantage.

Il n'y a rien qui me puisse eclaircir si i'ay profité dauantage, a cultiuer ma raison, que d'autres n'ont fait aux choses qu'ils affectoient, & ie ne doute nullement qu'auec le temps de relasche que mon corps requeroit, il ne m'en soit resté encore pour auancer au dela de ce que ie suis. En mesurant la portée de l'esprit humain par l'exemple du commun des hommes, elle se trouueroit de bien petite estendue, parce que la plupart ne se seruent de la pensée qu'au regard des sens. Mesme de ceux qui s'appliquent a l'estude, il y en a peu qui y emploient autre chose que la memoire, ou qui ayent la verité pour but de leur labeur.

Que s'il y a du vice a ne me plaire point de considerer si i'ay plus gagné que ces personnes, ie ne crois pas que c'est l'exces d'humilité, qui est aussi nuisible que la presomption. IV 322 mais non pas si ordinaire. Nous sommes plus enclins a meconnoistre nos defauts, que nos

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ELISABETH Monsieur Descartes,

After giving such good reasons to show that it is better to know truths to our disadvantage than to be pleasantly deceived, and that only things admitting of different, equally true considerations should oblige us to dwell on the one that will bring us more contentment, I am surprised that you want me to compare myself with people of my age in a matter unknown to me rather than in one of which I cannot be ignorant, even though the former is more to my advantage.

Nothing can make clear to me whether I have profited more in cultivating my reason than others have in the pursuits they cared about; and I have no doubt at all that, even after the time for rest my body required, I would still have had time left to advance beyond where I am. If we measured the reach of the human mind by the example of the common run of people, it would prove very limited indeed, because most of them use thought only in regard to the senses. Even among those who apply themselves to study, few use anything but memory, or make truth the aim of their labor.

If there is something wrong in my not liking to consider whether I have gained more than these people, I do not think it is an excess of humility—which is as harmful as presumption, IV 322 but not as common. We are more inclined to overlook our

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perfections. Et en fuyant le repentir des fautes commises, comme vn ennemi de la felicité, on pourroit courir hasard de perdre l'enuie de s'en corriger, principalement quand quelque passion les a produites, puisque nous aimons naturellement d'en estre emeus, & d'en suiure les mouuemens ; il n'y a que les incommodités procedant de cette suite, qui nous apprennent qu'elles peuuent estre nuisibles.

AT IV 322 Et c'est, a mon iugement, ce qui fait que les tragedies plaisent d'autant plus, qu'elles excitent plus de tristesse, parce que nous cognoissons qu'elle ne sera point assez violente pour nous porter a des extrauagances, ni assez durable pour corrompre la santé.

Mais cela ne suffit point, pour appuyer la doctrine contenue dans vne de vos precedentes, que les passions sont d'autant plus vtiles, qu'elles panchent plus vers l'exces, lorsqu'elles sont soumises a la raison, parce qu'il semble qu'elles ne peuuent point estre excessiues & soumises. Mais ie crois que vous eclaircirez ce doute, en prenant la peine de decrire comment cette agitation particuliere des esprits sert a former toutes les passions que nous experimentons, & de quelle fasson elle corromt le raisonnement. Ie n'oserois vous en prier, si ie ne sauois que vous ne laissez point d'œuure imparfaite, & qu'en entreprenant d'enseigner vne personne stupide, comme moy, vous vous estes preparé aux incommodités que cela vous apporte.

C'est ce qui me fait continuer a vous dire, que ie ne suis point persuadée, par les raisons qui prouuent l'existence de Dieu, & qu'il est la cause immuable de tous les effets qui ne dependent point du libre arbitre de l'homme, qu'il l'est IV 323 encore de ceux qui en dependent. De sa perfection souueraine il suit necessairement qu'il pourroit l'estre, c'est-a-dire qu'il pourroit n'auoir point donné de libre arbitre a l'homme ; mais, puisque nous sentons en auoir, il me semble qu'il repugne au sens commun de le croire dependant en ses operations, comme il l'est dans son estre.

AT IV 323 Si on est bien persuadé de l'immortalité de l'ame, il est impossible de douter qu'elle ne sera plus heureuse apres la separation du corps (qui est l'origine de tous les deplaisirs de la vie, comme l'ame des plus grands contentements), sans l'opinion de M. Digby, par laquelle son precepteur (dont vous auez veu les escrits) luy a fait croire la necessité du purgatoire, en luy persuadant que les passions qui ont dominé sur la raison, durant la vie de l'homme, laissent encore quelques vestiges en l'ame, apres le deces du corps, qui la tourmentent d'autant plus

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defects than our perfections. And by fleeing repentance for faults committed, as an enemy of felicity, we might run the risk of losing the wish to correct them—especially when some passion produced them, since we naturally love to be moved by the passions and to follow their impulses. Only the troubles that come from following them teach us that they can be harmful.

And this, in my judgment, is why tragedies please us all the more the more sadness they arouse: we know that it will not be violent enough to drive us to extravagant behavior, nor lasting enough to damage our health.

But this is not enough to support the doctrine in one of your earlier letters, that the passions are all the more useful the more they tend toward excess, when they are subject to reason; for it seems they cannot be both excessive and subject. But I believe you will clear up this doubt if you take the trouble to describe how this particular agitation of the spirits serves to form all the passions we experience, and in what way it corrupts reasoning. I would not dare ask this of you if I did not know that you never leave a work unfinished, and that in undertaking to teach a person as stupid as I am, you prepared yourself for the inconveniences this brings you.

That is why I go on telling you that the arguments proving the existence of God, and proving that he is the immutable cause of all the effects that do not depend on man's free will, do not persuade me that he is IV 323 also the cause of those that do. From his supreme perfection it follows necessarily that he could be, that is, that he could have given man no free will at all. But since we feel that we have it, it seems to me contrary to common sense to believe that it depends on him in its operations, as it does in its being.

If one is fully persuaded of the immortality of the soul, it is impossible to doubt that it will be happier after its separation from the body. The body is the source of all the displeasures of life, as the soul is of its greatest contentments. That is, unless one holds the opinion of Monsieur Digby. His tutor (whose writings you have seen) made him believe that purgatory is necessary, by persuading him that the passions which ruled over reason during

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qu'elles ne trouuent aucun moyen de se satisfaire dans vne substance si pure. Ie ne vois pas comment cela s'accorde a son immaterialité.

Mais ie ne doute nullement, qu'encore que la vie ne soit point mauuaise de soy, elle doit estre abandonnée pour vne condition qu'on connoistra meilleure.

Par cette prouidence particuliere, qui est le fondement de la theologie, i'entends celle par laquelle Dieu a, de toute eternité, prescrit des moyens si estranges, comme son incarnation, pour vne partie du tout cree, si inconsiderable au prix du reste, comme vous nous representez ce globe [IV 324] en vostre physique ; & cela, pour en estre glorifié, qui semble vne fin fort indigne du createur de ce grand vniuers. Mais ie vous presentois, en cecy, plutost l'obiection de nos theologiens que la mienne, l'ayant tousiours creu chose tres impertinente, pour des personnes finies, de iuger de la cause finale des actions d'vn estre infini.

AT IV 324 Vous ne croyez pas qu'on a besoin d'vne cognoissance exacte, iusqu'ou la raison ordonne que nous nous interessions pour le public, a cause qu'encore qu'vn chacun raportast tout a soy, il trauailleroit aussi pour les autres, s'il se seruoit de prudence. Et cette prudence est le tout, dont ie ne vous demande qu'vne partie. Car, en la possedant, on ne sauroit manquer a faire iustice aux autres, comme a soy mesme, & c'est son defaut qui est cause qu'vn esprit franc perd quelquefois le moien de seruir sa patrie, en s'abandonnant trop legerement pour son interest, & qu'vn timide se perd auec elle, a faute de hazarder son bien & sa fortune pour sa conseruation.

I'ay tousiours esté en vne condition, qui rendoit ma vie tres inutile aux personnes que i'aime ; mais ie cherche sa conseruation auec beaucoup plus de soin, depuis que i'ay le bonheur de vous connoistre, parce que vous m'auez montré les moyens de viure plus heureusement que ie ne faisois. Il ne me manque que la satisfaction de vous pouuoir tesmoigner combien cette obligation est ressentie de

Vostre affectionnée amie a vous seruir, Élisabeth. De La Haye, ce 28 d'8bre. M. Descartes.

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a person's life still leave some traces in the soul after the death of the body. These torment it all the more because they find no means of satisfying themselves in so pure a substance. I do not see how this squares with its immateriality.[22]

But I have no doubt at all that, even though life is not bad in itself, it should be given up for a condition one knows will be better.

By that particular providence which is the foundation of theology, I mean the one by which God has, from all eternity, prescribed such strange means as his incarnation for a part of the created whole. That part is as insignificant compared with the rest as you represent this globe [IV 324] to us in your physics. And he has done this in order to be glorified by it, which seems a very unworthy end for the creator of this great universe. But here I was putting to you our theologians' objection rather than my own. I have always thought it most inappropriate for finite persons to judge the final cause of the actions of an infinite being.

You do not think one needs exact knowledge of how far reason requires us to concern ourselves with the public good. Your reason is that, even if each person referred everything to himself, he would also be working for others, provided he used prudence. But this prudence is the whole, of which I am asking you only for a part. For if one possesses it, one cannot fail to do justice to others as well as to oneself. And it is the lack of it that sometimes makes a candid mind lose the means of serving its country, by sacrificing itself too lightly for the country's interest. It also makes a timid one perish along with his country, for want of risking his property and his fortune to preserve it.

I have always been in a situation that made my life of very little use to the people I love. But I have taken much greater care to preserve it since I have had the good fortune to know you, because you have shown me the means of living more happily than I did. All I lack is the satisfaction of being able to show you how deeply this obligation is felt by

22 The tutor is Thomas White, the "Albanus" of Elisabeth's letter of 24 May 1645.

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Your affectionate friend, always at your service, Elisabeth. The Hague, 28 October. Monsieur Descartes.

DESCARTES TO ELISABETH, 3 NOVEMBER 1645

Descartes distinguishes two kinds of excess and holds that free will depends on God.

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AT IV 330 **DESCARTES** Madame,

Il m'arriue si peu souuent de rencontrer de bons raisonnemens, non seulement dans les discours de ceux que ie frequente en ce desert, mais aussy dans les liures que ie consulte, que ie ne puis lire ceux qui sont dans les letres de vostre Altesse, sans en auoir vn resentiment de ioye extraordinaire ; et ie les trouue si forts, que i'ayme mieux auouer d'en estre vaincu, que d'entreprendre de leur resister. Car, encore que la [IV 331] comparaison que V. A.

AT IV 331 refuse de faire a son auantage, puisse assez estre verifiée par l'experience, c'est toutefois vne vertu si louable de iuger fauorablement des autres, & elle s'accorde si bien auec la generosité qui vous empesche de vouloir mesurer la portée de l'esprit humain par l'exemple du commun des hommes, que ie ne puis manquer d'estimer extremement l'vne & l'autre.

Ie n'oserois aussy contredire a ce que V. A. escrit du repentir, vu que c'est vne vertu chrestiene, laquelle sert pour faire qu'on se corrige, non seulement des fautes commises volontairement, mais aussy de celles qu'on a faites par ignorance, lorsque quelque passion a empesché qu'on ne connust la verité.

Et i'auouë bien que la tristesse des tragedies ne plairoit pas, comme elle fait, si nous pouuions craindre qu'elle deuint si excessiue que nous en fussions incommodez. Mais, lorsque i'ay dit qu'il y a des passions qui sont d'autant plus vtiles qu'elles penchent plus vers l'exces, i'ay seulement voulu parler de celles qui sont toutes bonnes ; ce que i'ay tesmoigné, en adioustant qu'elles doiuent estre suietes a la raison. Car il y a deux sortes d'exces : l'vn qui, changeant la nature de la chose, & de bonne la rendant mauuaise, empesche qu'elle ne demeure soumise a la raison ; l'autre qui en augmente seulement la mesure, & ne fait que de bonne [IV 332] la rendre meilleure.

AT IV 332 Ainsy la hardiesse n'a pour exces la temerité, que lorsqu'elle va au dela des limites de la raison ; mais

DESCARTES Madame,

I so rarely come across good reasoning, not only in the conversation of the people I see in this solitude of mine but also in the books I consult, that I cannot read the reasoning in Your Highness's letters without feeling an extraordinary joy. And I find it so strong that I would rather admit to being defeated by it than undertake to resist it. For although the [IV 331] comparison that Your Highness

refuses to make in her own favor may well be borne out by experience, judging others favorably is nonetheless a most praiseworthy virtue. It also agrees so well with the generosity that keeps you from measuring the reach of the human mind by the example of the common run of people that I cannot help esteeming both extremely.

Nor would I dare contradict what Your Highness writes about repentance. It is a Christian virtue, which serves to make us correct not only the faults we have committed voluntarily but also those we have committed through ignorance, when some passion prevented us from knowing the truth.

And I readily admit that the sadness of tragedies would not please us as it does if we could fear it might become so excessive as to harm us. But when I said that there are passions which are all the more useful the more they tend toward excess, I meant only those that are wholly good. I indicated this by adding that they must be subject to reason. For there are two kinds of excess. One changes the nature of the thing and makes it bad instead of good, and so prevents it from remaining subject to reason. The other only increases its measure, and merely makes a good thing [IV 332] better.

Thus boldness has rashness as its excess only when it goes beyond the limits of reason. But so

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pendant qu'elle ne les passe point, elle peut encore auoir vn autre exces, qui consiste a n'estre accompagnée d'aucune irresolution ny d'aucune crainte.

I'ay pensé ces iours au nombre & a l'ordre de toutes ces passions, affin de pouuoir plus particulierement examiner leur nature ; mais ie n'ay pas encore assez digeré mes opinions, touchant ce suiet, pour les oser escrire a V. A., & ie ne manqueray de m'en acquiter de plustost qu'il me sera possible.

Pour ce qui est du libre arbitre, ie confesse qu'en ne pensant qu'a nous mesmes, nous ne pouuons ne le pas estimer independant ; mais lorsque nous pensons a la puissance infinie de Dieu, nous ne pouuons ne pas croyre que toutes choses dependent de luy, &, par consequent, que nostre libre arbitre n'en est pas exemt. Car il implique contradiction de dire que Dieu ait creé les hommes de telle nature, que les actions de leur volonté ne dependent point de la siene, pour ce que c'est le mesme que si on disoit que sa puissance est tout ensemble finie & infinie : finie, puisqu'il y a quelque chose qui n'en depend point ; & infinie, puisqu'il a pu creer cete chose independante.

Mais, comme la connoissance de l'existence de Dieu ne nous doit pas empescher d'estre assurez de nostre libre arbitre, pour ce que nous l'experimentons & le sentons en [IV 333] nous mesmes, ainsy celle de nostre libre arbitre ne nous doit point faire douter de l'existence de Dieu. Car l'independance que nous experimentons & sentons en nous, & qui suffit pour rendre nos actions louables ou blasmables, n'est pas incompatible auec vne dependance qui est d'autre nature, selon laquelle toutes choses sont suietes a Dieu.

[AT IV 333] Pour ce qui regarde l'estat de l'ame apres cete vie, i'en ay bien moins de connoissance que Mr d'Igby ; car, laissant a part ce que la foy nous en enseigne, ie confesse que, par la seule raison naturelle, nous pouuons bien faire beaucoup de coniectures a nostre auantage & auoir de belles esperances, mais non point aucune assurance. Et pour ce que la mesme raison naturelle nous apprent aussy que nous auons tousiours plus de biens que de maux en cete vie, & que nous ne deuons point laisser le certain pour l'incertain, elle me semble nous enseigner que nous ne deuons pas veritablement craindre la mort, mais que nous ne deuons aussy iamais la rechercher.

Ie n'ay pas besoin de respondre a l'obiection que peuuent faire les Theologiens, touchant la vaste estendue que i'ay attribuée a l'vniuers, pour ce que V. A. y a desia respondu

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long as it does not overstep them, it can still have another excess, which consists in being accompanied by no irresolution or fear at all.

These past days I have been thinking about the number and order of all these passions, so as to examine their nature more closely. But I have not yet digested my opinions on this subject well enough to dare write them to Your Highness, and I will not fail to do so as soon as I possibly can.

As for free will, I confess that when we think only of ourselves, we cannot help regarding it as independent. But when we think of the infinite power of God, we cannot help believing that all things depend on him, and consequently that our free will is not exempt from this. For it involves a contradiction to say that God has created human beings of such a nature that the actions of their will do not depend on his. That would amount to saying that his power is at once finite and infinite: finite, since there is something that does not depend on it; and infinite, since he was able to create that independent thing.

But the knowledge of God's existence should not prevent us from being certain of our free will, since we experience and feel it in [IV 333] ourselves. In the same way, the knowledge of our free will should not make us doubt God's existence. For the independence we experience and feel in ourselves, which suffices to make our actions praiseworthy or blameworthy, is not incompatible with a dependence of another nature, according to which all things are subject to God.

As for the state of the soul after this life, I know much less about it than Monsieur Digby does. Setting aside what faith teaches us about it, I confess that by natural reason alone we can indeed make many conjectures in our favor and have fine hopes, but no assurance at all. And the same natural reason also teaches us that we always have more goods than evils in this life, and that we must not give up the certain for the uncertain. So it seems to me to teach us that we should not truly fear death, but that we should also never seek it.

I do not need to answer the objection the theologians may make about the vast extension I have attributed to the universe, because Your Highness

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pour moy. I'adiouste seulement que, si cete estenduë pouuoit rendre les mysteres de nostre religion moins croyables, celle que les astronomes ont attribuée de tout tems aux cieux, auroit pu faire le mesme, pour ce qu'ils les ont considerez si grans [IV 334] que la terre n'est, a leur comparaison, que comme vn point ; & toutefois cela ne leur est point obiecté.

AT IV 334 Au reste, si la prudence estoit maitresse des euenemens, ie ne doute point que V. A. ne vint a bout de tout ce qu'elle voudroit entreprendre ; mais il faudroit que tous les hommes fussent parfaitement sages, affin que, sçachant ce qu'ils doiuent faire, on pust estre assuré de ce qu'ils seront. Ou bien il faudroit connoistre particulierement l'humeur de tous ceux auec lesquels on a quelque chose a demesler ; & encore ne seroit-ce pas assez, a cause qu'ils ont, outre cela, leur libre arbitre, dont les mouuemens ne sont connus que de Dieu seul.

Et pour ce qu'on iuge ordinairement de ce que les autres feront, par ce qu'on voudroit faire, si on estoit en leur place, il arriue souuent que les esprits ordinaires & mediocres, estant semblables a ceux auec lesquels ils ont a traiter, penetrent mieux dans leurs conseils, & font plus aysement reussir ce qu'ils entreprenent, que ne font les plus releuez, lesquels, ne traitant qu'auec ceux qui leur sont de beaucoup inferieurs en connoissance & en prudence iugent tout autrement qu'eux des affaires. C'est ce qui doit consoler V. A., lorsque la fortune s'oppose a vos desseins. Ie prie Dieu qu'il les fauorise, & ie suis.

Madame, De vostre Altesse le tres humble & tres obeissant seruiteur, Des Cartes. D'Egmond, le 3 Nou. 1645.

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has already answered it for me. I add only this. If that extension could make the mysteries of our religion less credible, the extension that astronomers have always attributed to the heavens could have done the same. They have considered the heavens so large [IV 334] that, compared with them, the earth is no more than a point; and yet this is never raised as an objection against them.

For the rest, if prudence were mistress of events, I have no doubt that Your Highness would succeed in everything she might undertake. But all human beings would have to be perfectly wise, so that, knowing what they ought to do, one could be sure of what they will do. Or else one would have to know in detail the temperament of everyone one has any dealings with. And even that would not be enough, because they also have their free will, whose movements are known to God alone.

We usually judge what others will do by what we would want to do in their place. So it often happens that ordinary and middling minds, being like the people they have to deal with, see further into their plans and succeed more easily in what they undertake than the most elevated minds do. For the latter deal only with people far inferior to them in knowledge and prudence, and judge affairs quite differently from them. This is what should console Your Highness when fortune opposes your plans. I pray God to favor them, and I am,

Madame, Your Highness's most humble and obedient servant, Descartes. Egmond, 3 November 1645.

ELISABETH TO DESCARTES, 30 NOVEMBER 1645

Grieved by her brother's conversion to Catholicism, Elisabeth still cannot reconcile free will with God's decrees.

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AT IV 335 **ELISABETH** Monsieur Descartes,

Vous aurez suiet de vous estonner, qu'apres m'auoir tesmoigné que mon raisonnement ne vous paroissoit pas tout a fait ridicule, ie demeure si longtemps sans en tirer l'auantage que vos responses me donnent. Et c'est auec honte que ie vous en auoue la cause, puisqu'elle a renuersé tout ce que vos lessons sembloient auoir establi dans mon esprit. Ie croyois qu'vne forte resolution de ne chercher la beatitude qu'aux choses qui dependent de ma volonté, me rendroit moins sensible a celles qui me viennent d'ailleurs, auant que la folie d'vn de mes freres

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ELISABETH Monsieur Descartes,

You have assured me that my reasoning did not seem wholly ridiculous to you, so you will have reason to be surprised that I have gone so long without taking advantage of what your replies give me. It is with shame that I confess the cause, since it has overturned everything your lessons seemed to have established in my mind. I believed that a firm resolution to seek happiness only in the things that depend on my will would make me less

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m'ait fait connoistre ma foiblesse. Car elle m'a plus troublée la santé du corps & la tranquillité de l'ame, que tous les malheurs qui me sont encore arriués.

Si vous prenez la peine de lire la gazette, vous ne sauriez ignorer qu'il est tombé entre les mains d'vne certaine sorte de gens, qui ont IV 336 plus de haine pour nostre maison que d'affection pour culte, & s'est laissé prendre en leurs pieges, iusqu'a changer de Religion pour se rendre catholique romain, sans faire la moindre grimasse qui pourroit persuader aux plus credules qu'il y alloit de sa conscience. Il faut que ie voie vne personne, que l'aimois auec autant de tendresse que i'en saurois auoir, abandonnée au mepris du monde & a la perte de son ame (selon ma croyance).

AT IV 336 Si vous n'auiez pas plus de charité que de bigoterie, ce seroit vne impertinence de vous entretenir de cette matiere, & cecy ne m'en garentiroit pas, si ie n'estois en possession de vous dire tous mes defauts, comme a la personne du monde la plus capable de m'en corriger.

Ie vous auoüe de mesme, qu'encore que ie ne comprenne pas que l'independance du libre arbitre ne repugne pas moins a l'idée que nous auons de Dieu, que sa dependance a sa liberté, il m'est impossible de les aiuster, estant autant impossible, pour la volonté, d'estre en mesme temps libre & attachée aux decrets de la Prouidence, que, pour le pouuoir diuin, d'estre infini & limité tout ensemble. Ie ne vois point leur compatibilité, dont vous parlez, ni comment cette dependance de la volonté peut estre d'autre nature que sa liberté, si vous ne prenez la peine de me l'enseigner.

Au regard du contentement, ie confesse que la possession presente est de beaucoup plus asseurée que l'attente du futur, sur quelque bonne raison qu'elle soit fondée. Mais i'ay de la peine a me persuader que nous auons tousiours IV 337 plus de biens, dans la vie, que de maux, puisqu'il faut plus pour composer ceux la que ceux ci ; que l'homme a plus d'endroits, pour receuoir du deplaisir, que du plaisir ; qu'il y a vn nombre infini d'erreurs, pour vne verité ; tant de moiens de se fouruoyer, pour vn qui mene le droit chemin ; quantité de personnes en dessein

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sensitive to those that come to me from elsewhere. Then the folly of one of my brothers made me realize my weakness. For it has disturbed my bodily health and my peace of soul more than all the misfortunes that have befallen me so far.[23]

If you take the trouble to read the gazette, you cannot be unaware of what happened. He fell into the hands of a certain kind of people who have IV 336 more hatred for our house than affection for their own worship, and he let himself be caught in their traps. He went so far as to change his religion and become a Roman Catholic, without the slightest pretense that might persuade even the most credulous that his conscience was at stake. I must watch a person I loved with all the tenderness I am capable of being left to the scorn of the world and to the loss of his soul (according to my belief).

If you did not have more charity than bigotry, it would be improper to talk to you about this matter. And even your charity would not excuse me, were I not in the habit of telling you all my faults, as to the person in the world most capable of correcting me.

I likewise confess that I do not see how the independence of free will is any less contrary to the idea we have of God than its dependence is to its freedom. Even so, it is impossible for me to reconcile the two. It is as impossible for the will to be at the same time free and bound to the decrees of Providence as it is for divine power to be at once infinite and limited. I do not see the compatibility between them that you speak of. Nor do I see how this dependence of the will can be of a different nature from its freedom, unless you take the trouble to teach me.

As for contentment, I confess that present possession is much surer than expectation of the future, however good the reason it is founded on. But I find it hard to persuade myself that we always have IV 337 more goods than evils in life. More is needed to make up the former than the latter. A human being has more places for receiving displeasure than pleasure. There are countless errors for every truth, and so many ways of going astray for the one that leads down the right road. And a great many people have both the intention and the

23 Her brother Edward (1625–1663) had converted to Catholicism in Paris in 1645 in order to marry Anne de Gonzague.

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& en pouuoir de nuire, pour peu qui ayent l'vn & l'autre a seruir.

AT IV 337 Enfin tout ce qui depend de la volonté & du cours du reste du monde, est capable d'incommoder ; & selon vostre propre sentiment, il n'y a rien que ce qui depend absolument de la nostre, suffisant pour nous donner vne satisfaction reelle & constante.

Pour la prudence, en ce qui concerne la societé humaine, ie n'en attens point de regle infaillible, mais ie serois bien aise de voir celles que vous voudriez donner a celui qui, en viuant seulement pour soy, en quelque profession qu'il aye, ne lairroit pas de trauailler encore pour autruy, si i'osois vous demander plus de lumiere, apres auoir si mal employé celle que vous auez desia donné a

Vostre tres affectionnée amie a vous seruir, Élisabeth. Monsieur Descartes.

ENGLISH

power to do harm, while few have both the intention and the power to be of service.

In short, everything that depends on the will of others and on the course of the rest of the world can cause us trouble. And, by your own account, nothing but what depends absolutely on our own will is enough to give us a real and constant satisfaction.

As for prudence in matters of human society, I do not expect any infallible rule. But I would be very glad to see the rules you would give to someone who, while living only for himself, whatever his profession, would still be working for others as well. That is, if I dared ask you for more light after making such poor use of the light you have already given to

Your most affectionate friend, always at your service, Elisabeth. Monsieur Descartes.

ELISABETH TO DESCARTES, 27 DECEMBER 1645

Elisabeth reports her efforts for Frans van Schooten's candidacy at Leiden.

FRENCH

AT IV 339 **ELISABETH** Monsieur Descartes,

Le fils du feu professeur Schooten m'a rendu aujourd'hui la lettre que vous m'escriuiez en la consideration, pour m'empescher que ie ne m'engage a fauoriser son concurrant. Et comme ie lui tesmoignay que ie n'estois pas seulement sans dessein de lui nuire, mais obligée de le seruir, autant que ie le pourray, depuis que vous me mandez de l'aimer & de lui estre redeuable, il me pria ensuite de le recommander aux Curateurs. N'y ayant que deux de ma cognoissance, MM.

de Wimenom & Bewen, IV 340 & le dernier hors de la ville, i'ay fait d'abord parler au premier, qui me promet de s'employer pour ledit sieur Schooten, encore qu'on auoit fait dessein d'abolir entierement cette profession comme superflue, qui semble estre la seule difficulté qu'il aura a combattre, son competiteur n'estant point considere, aupres de luy, si ce n'est de quelques scrupuleux, qui craignent que celuy cy n'introduise les erreurs de la religion Arminienne en ses lessons de mathematiques.

ENGLISH

ELISABETH Monsieur Descartes,

Today the son of the late Professor Schooten handed me the letter you wrote me on his behalf, to keep me from committing myself to support his rival. I told him that not only did I have no intention of harming him, but that I was obliged to serve him as far as I can, since you tell me that you love him and are indebted to him. He then asked me to recommend him to the Curators. There are only two of them I know, Messrs.[24]

de Wimenom and Bewen, IV 340 and the latter is out of town. So I had someone speak at once to the former, who promises me to exert himself on behalf of Monsieur Schooten. There had been a plan to abolish this professorship altogether as superfluous, and that seems to be the only difficulty he will have to overcome. His competitor counts for nothing beside him, except with a few scrupulous people who fear that he might introduce the errors of the Arminian religion into his mathematics lessons.

24 Frans van Schooten the Younger (1615–1660), mathematician and later editor of the Latin edition of Descartes' *Geometry*, was seeking his late father's mathematics post at Leiden. The Curators were the governors of Leiden University.

FRENCH	ENGLISH
AT IV 340 S'il m'eut donné le tems de le prier de reuenir aupres de moy, pour apprendre le succes de mes recommandations, i'aurois eu moyen de l'informer des choses que ie crois lui deuoir seruir en ses pretentions ; mais il eut tant de haste a se retirer, que ie fus contrainte de le suiure iusqu'a la porte, pour lui demander a qui ie deuois adresser mes offices pour luy. Ie say que, s'il m'auoit seulement considerée comme vostre amie, sans songer aux titres qui embarrassent ceux qui n'y sont point accoutumés, il en auroit vsé autrement, iugeant bien que ie ne saurois agir, en vne affaire que ie connois vous estre agreable, auec des soins ordinaires.	If he had given me time to ask him to come back and see me to learn the outcome of my recommendations, I could have told him some things that I think would help him in his candidacy. But he was in such a hurry to leave that I had to follow him to the door to ask him whom I should approach on his behalf. I know that if he had regarded me simply as your friend, without thinking of the titles that embarrass those who are not used to them, he would have behaved differently. He would have understood that I could not act with merely ordinary care in a matter I know to be agreeable to you.
Et ie vous prie de croire que ie ne perdray iamais d'occasion ou ie vous puis tesmoigner, par esset, que ie suis veritablement,	And I beg you to believe that I will never miss an opportunity to show you, in deed, that I am truly,
Monsieur Descartes, Vostre tres-affectionnée a vous seruir, Élisabeth. Ce 27e de 10bre	Monsieur Descartes, Yours most affectionately, always at your service, Elisabeth. 27 December
AT IV 341 I'ay peur que vous n'auez pas receu ma derniere du 30me du passé, parce que vous n'en faites point mention. Ie serois fachée qu'elle venoit entre les mains de quelqu'vn de ces critiques, qui condamnent pour heresies tous les doutes qu'on fait des opinions receues.	I am afraid you did not receive my last letter, of the 30th of last month, because you make no mention of it. I would be sorry if it had fallen into the hands of one of those critics who condemn as heresy every doubt raised about received opinions.

1646

The passions and Machiavelli
Elisabeth reads the draft Passions of the Soul; at her request Descartes judges Machiavelli's Prince.

DESCARTES TO ELISABETH, JANUARY 1646

FRENCH

AT IV 351 **DESCARTES** Madame,

Ie ne puis nier que ie n'aye esté surpris d'apprendre que vostre Altesse ait eu de la fascherie, iusqu'à en estre incommodée en sa santé, pour vne chose que la plus grande part du monde trouuera bonne, & que plusieurs fortes raisons peuuent rendre excusable enuers les autres.

Car tous ceux de la Religion dont ie suis (qui sont, sans doute, le plus grand nombre dans l'Europe), sont obligez de l'approuuer, encore mesme qu'ils y vissent des circonstances & des motifs apparens qui fussent blamables ; car nous croyons que Dieu se sert de diuers moyens pour attirer les ames à soy, & que tel est entré dans le Cloistre, auec vne mauuaise intention, lequel y a mené, par apres, vne vie fort sainte. Pour ceux qui sont d'vne autre creance, s'ils en parlent mal, on peut recuser leur iugement [IV 352] ; car, comme en toutes les autres affaires, touchant lesquelles il y a diuers partis, il est impossible de plaire aux vns, sans déplaire aux autres.

AT IV 352 S'ils considerent qu'ils ne seroient pas de la Religion dont ils sont, si eux, ou leurs peres, ou leurs ayeuls n'auoient quitté la Romaine, ils n'auront pas suiet de se mocquer, ni de nommer inconstans ceux qui quitent la leur.

Pour ce qui regarde la prudence du siecle, il est vray que ceux qui ont la fortune chez eux, ont raison de demeurer tous autour d'elle, & de ioindre leurs forces ensemble pour empescher qu'elle n'échape ; mais ceux de la maison desquels elle est fugitiue, ne sont, ce me semble, point mal de s'accorder à suiure diuers chemins, afin que, s'ils ne la peuuent trouuer tous, il y en ait au moins quelqu'vn qui la rencontre. Et cependant, pource qu'on croit que chacun d'eux a plusieurs resources, ayant des amis en diuers partis, cela les rend plus considerables, que s'ils estoient tous engagez dans vn seul.

ENGLISH

DESCARTES Madame,

I cannot deny that I was surprised to learn that Your Highness has been so vexed as to have her health affected by it. The cause is something most people will think good, and which several strong reasons can make excusable in the eyes of others.

For all those of the religion to which I belong (who are, no doubt, the greatest number in Europe) are bound to approve of it, even if they saw in it circumstances and apparent motives that were blameworthy. We believe that God uses various means to draw souls to himself, and that someone who entered the cloister with a bad intention has sometimes afterward led a very holy life there. As for those of another belief, if they speak ill of it, one may reject their judgment [IV 352] ; for, as in all other matters on which there are various parties, it is impossible to please some without displeasing others.

They would not belong to the religion they do if they, or their fathers, or their grandfathers had not left the Roman one. If they consider this, they will have no grounds to mock those who leave theirs, or to call them inconstant.

As for worldly prudence, it is true that those who have fortune in their house are right to stay close around her and join forces to keep her from escaping. But those from whose house she has fled do not do badly, it seems to me, in agreeing to follow different paths. That way, if they cannot all find her, at least one of them may come upon her. Meanwhile, because each of them is thought to have several resources, having friends in various parties, this makes them more considerable than if they were all committed to a single one.

FRENCH

Ce qui m'empesche de pouuoir imaginer que ceux qui ont esté autheurs de ce conseil, ayent en cela voulu nuire à vostre Maison. Mais ie ne prétens point que mes raisons puissent empescher le ressentiment de vostre Altesse ; i'espere seulement que le temps l'aura diminué, auant que cette lettre vous soit presentée, & ie craindrois de le rafraischir, si ie m'étendois dauantage sur ce suiet.

ENGLISH

This is what prevents me from imagining that those who gave this advice meant to harm your House by it. But I do not claim that my reasons can prevent Your Highness's hurt. I only hope that time will have lessened it before this letter is presented to you, and I would be afraid of reviving it if I dwelt any longer on this subject.

THE KING AND THE DUELISTS

A king who arranges for two quarreling gentlemen to meet illustrates how free will depends on God.

FRENCH

DESCARTES C'est pourquoy ie passe à la difficulté que vostre Altesse propose touchant le libre arbitre, duquel ie tascheray d'expliquer la dependance & la liberté par [IV 353] vne comparaison. Si vn Roy qui a deffendu les duels, & qui sçait tres-assurément que deux Gentils-hommes de son Royaume, demeurans en diuerses villes, sont en querelle, & tellement animez l'vn contre l'autre, que rien ne les sçauroit empescher de se battre s'ils se rencontrent ;

[AT IV 353] si, dis-ie, ce Roy donne à l'vn d'eux quelque commission pour aller à certain iour vers la ville où est l'autre, & qu'il donne aussi commission à cét autre pour aller au mesme iour vers le lieu où est le premier, il sçait bien assurément qu'ils ne manqueront pas de se rencontrer, & de se battre, & ainsi de contreuenir à sa defense, mais il ne les y contraint point pour cela ; et sa connoissance, & mesme la volonté qu'il a euë de les y determiner en cette façon, n'empesche pas que ce ne soit aussi volontairement & aussi librement qu'ils se battent, lors qu'ils viennent à se rencontrer, comme ils auroient fait s'il n'en auoit rien sceu, & que ce fust par quelqu'autre occasion qu'ils se fussent rencontrez, & ils peuuent aussi iustement estre punis, pour ce qu'ils ont contreuenu à sa defense.

Or ce qu'vn Roy peut faire en cela, touchant quelques actions libres de ses suiets, Dieu, qui a vne prescience & vne puissance infinie, le fait infailliblement touchant toutes celles des hommes. Et auant qu'il nous ait enuoyez en ce monde, il a sceu exactement quelles seroient toutes les inclinations de nostre volonté ; c'est luy-mesme qui les a mises en nous, c'est luy aussi qui a disposé toutes les autres choses qui sont hors de nous, pour faire que tels & [IV 354] tels obiets se presentassent à nos sens à tel & tel tems, à l'occasion desquels il a sceu que nostre libre arbitre nous determineroit à telle ou telle chose ; & il l'a ainsi voulu, mais il n'a pas voulu pour cela l'y contraindre.

ENGLISH

DESCARTES That is why I pass on to the difficulty Your Highness raises about free will, whose dependence and freedom I will try to explain by [IV 353] a comparison. Suppose a king has forbidden duels. He knows for certain that two gentlemen of his kingdom, who live in different towns, have quarreled and are so incensed against each other that nothing could stop them from fighting if they meet;

and suppose, I say, this king gives one of them some commission to go on a certain day toward the town where the other lives, and also gives the other a commission to go on the same day toward the place where the first lives. He knows for certain that they will not fail to meet and fight, and so break his prohibition; but he does not compel them to do so. His knowledge, and even his will to bring them to it in this way, do not prevent them from fighting just as voluntarily and just as freely, when they come to meet, as they would have done if he had known nothing about it and they had met on some other occasion. And they can be punished just as justly, because they have broken his prohibition.

Now what a king can do in this way with regard to some of his subjects' free actions, God, whose foreknowledge and power are infinite, does infallibly with regard to all human actions. Before he sent us into this world, he knew exactly what all the inclinations of our will would be. It is he himself who put them in us. It is he, too, who arranged all the other things outside us, so that such and [IV 354] such objects would present themselves to our senses at such and such times; and he knew that, on these occasions, our free will would determine

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AT IV 354 Et comme on peut distinguer en ce Roy deux differens degrez de volonté, l'vn par lequel il a voulu que ces Gentils-hommes se battissent, puis qu'il a fait qu'ils se rencontrassent, & l'autre par lequel il ne l'a pas voulu, puis qu'il a defendu les düels ; ainsi les Theologiens distinguent en Dieu vne volonté absoluë & independante, par laquelle il veut que toutes choses se fassent ainsi qu'elles se font, & vne autre qui est relatiue, & qui se raporte au merite ou demerite des hommes, par laquelle il veut qu'on obeïsse à ses Loix.

Il est besoin aussi que ie distingue deux sortes de biens, pour accorder ce que i'ay cy deuant écrit (à sçauoir qu'en cette vie nous auons tousiours plus de biens que de maux) auec ce que V. Altesse m'obiecte touchant toutes les incommoditez de la vie. Quand on considere l'idée du bien pour seruir de regle à nos actions, on le prend pour toute la perfection qui peut estre en la chose qu'on nomme bonne, & on la compare à la ligne droite, qui est vnique entre vne infinité de courbes ausquelles on compare les maux. C'est en ce sens que les Philosophes ont coutume de dire que *bonum est ex integrâ causâ, malum ex quouis defectu*.

Mais quand on considere les biens & les maux qui peuuent estre en vne mesme chose, pour sçauoir l'estime qu'on en doit faire, comme i'ay fait lors que i'ay parlé de l'estime que nous deuions faire de cette IV 355 vie, on prend le bien pour tout ce qui s'y trouue dont on peut auoir quelque commodité, & on ne nomme mal que ce dont on peut receuoir de l'incommodité ; car pour les autres défauts qui peuuent y estre, on ne les compte point.

AT IV 355 Ainsi, lors qu'on offre vn employ à quelqu'vn, il considere d'vn costé l'honneur & le profit qu'il en peut attendre, comme des biens, & de l'autre la peine, le peril, la perte du temps, & autres telles choses, comme des maux ; et comparant ces maux auec ces biens, selon qu'il trouue ceux-cy plus ou moins grands que ceux-là, il l'accepte ou le refuse.

Or ce qui m'a fait dire, en ce dernier sens, qu'il y a tousiours plus de biens que de maux en cette vie, c'est le peu d'état que ie croy que nous deuons faire de toutes les

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us to this or that thing. He willed it so, but he did not for that reason will to compel it.

One can distinguish in this king two different degrees of will. By one, he willed that these gentlemen should fight, since he brought it about that they would meet; by the other, he did not will it, since he forbade duels. In the same way, the theologians distinguish in God an absolute and independent will, by which he wills that all things should happen as they do, and another will which is relative, and which relates to the merit or demerit of human beings, by which he wills that his laws be obeyed.

I also need to distinguish two kinds of goods, in order to reconcile what I wrote earlier (namely, that in this life we always have more goods than evils) with Your Highness's objection about all the troubles of life. When we consider the idea of the good as a rule for our actions, we take it to be all the perfection that can be in the thing we call good. We compare it to the straight line, which is unique among an infinity of curves, and we compare evils to the curves. It is in this sense that philosophers commonly say that *bonum est ex integrâ causâ, malum ex quouis defectu*.[1]

But sometimes we consider the goods and evils that can be in one and the same thing, in order to know how much we should value it, as I did when I spoke of the value we should place on this IV 355 life. We then take as good everything in it from which we can derive some benefit, and we call evil only what can cause us some harm. As for the other defects that may be in it, we do not count them at all.

Thus, when someone is offered a post, he considers on one side the honor and profit he can expect from it, as goods, and on the other the trouble, the danger, the loss of time and other such things, as evils. And comparing these evils with these goods, he accepts or refuses the post according to whether he finds the goods greater or less than the evils.

Now what made me say, in this latter sense, that there are always more goods than evils in this life, is how little account I think we should take of all

1 "Good comes from a cause that is whole, evil from any defect whatever": a scholastic maxim, going back to Pseudo-Dionysius and cited by Thomas Aquinas.

FRENCH

choses qui sont hors de nous, & qui ne dependent point de nostre libre arbitre, à comparaison de celles qui en dependent, lesquelles nous pouuons tousiours rendre bonnes, lors que nous en sçauons bien vser ; & nous pouuons empescher, par leur moyen, que tous les maux qui viennent d'ailleurs, tant grands qu'ils puissent estre, n'entrent plus auant en nostre ame que la tristesse que y excitent les Comediens, quand ils representent deuant nous quelques actions fort funestes ; mais l'auoüe qu'il faut estre fort philosophe, pour arriuer iusqu'à ce point.

Et toutesfois ie croy aussi que mesme ceux là qui se laissent le plus emporter à leurs passions, iugent tousiours, en leur interieur, qu'il y a plus de biens que de maux en cette vie, encore qu'ils ne s'en aperçoiuent pas eux-mesmes ; car bien qu'ils appellent quelquefois la mort à leur secours, quand ils sentent de grandes douleurs, IV 356 c'est seulement afin qu'elle leur aide à porter leur fardeau, ainsi qu'il y a dans la fable, & ils ne veulent point pour cela perdre la vie ; ou bien, s'il y en a quelques-vns qui la veüillent perdre, & qui se tuent eux-mesmes, c'est par vne erreur de leur entendement, & non point par vn iugement bien raisonné, ny par vne opinion que la nature ait imprimée en eux, comme est celle qui fait qu'on prefere les biens de cette vie à ses maux.

AT IV 356 La raison qui me fait croire que ceux qui ne font rien que pour leur vtilité particuliere, doiuent aussi bien que les autres trauailler pour autruy, & tascher de faire plaisir à vn chacun, autant qu'il est en leur pouuoir, s'ils veulent vser de prudence, est qu'on voit ordinairement arriuer que ceux qui sont estimez officieux & prompts à faire plaisir, reçoiuent aussi quantité de bons offices des autres, mesme de ceux qu'ils n'ont iamais obligez, lesquels ils ne receuroient pas, si on les croyoit d'autre humeur, & que les peines qu'ils ont à faire plaisir, ne sont point si grandes que les commoditez que leur donne l'amitié de ceux qui les connoissent.

Car on n'atend de nous que les offices que nous pouuons rendre commodement, & nous n'en attendons pas dauantage des autres ; mais il arriue souuent que ce qui leur couste peu, nous profite beaucoup, & mesme nous peut importer de la vie. Il est vray qu'on perd quelquefois sa peine en bien faisant, & au contraire qu'on gagne à mal faire ; mais cela ne peut changer la regle de la prudence,

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the things outside us that do not depend on our free will, compared with those that do depend on it. The latter we can always make good, when we know how to use them well. And by means of them we can prevent all the evils that come from elsewhere, however great they may be, from entering our soul any further than the sadness that actors arouse in it when they perform some very tragic events before us. But I admit that one must be very much a philosopher to reach that point.

And yet I also believe that even those who let themselves be most carried away by their passions always judge, deep within, that there are more goods than evils in this life, even if they do not notice it themselves. They sometimes call on death to help them when they feel great pain, IV 356 but it is only so that it may help them carry their burden, as in the fable, and they do not for all that wish to lose their life. And if there are some who do wish to lose it, and who kill themselves, it is through an error of their intellect, not through a well-reasoned judgment. Nor is it through an opinion that nature has imprinted in them, like the one that makes us prefer the goods of this life to its evils.[2]

Why do I believe that those who do nothing except for their own advantage must, just as much as others, work for other people and try to please everyone as far as they can, if they want to use prudence? The reason is that we usually see that those who are thought obliging and quick to do favors also receive many good offices from others. They receive them even from people they have never obliged, and they would not receive them if they were thought to be of another temper. And the trouble they take in doing favors is not as great as the advantages they gain from the friendship of those who know them.

For people expect from us only the services we can render conveniently, and we expect no more from others. But it often happens that what costs them little benefits us greatly, and may even be a matter of life and death to us. It is true that one sometimes wastes one's trouble in doing good and, conversely, gains by doing wrong. But that cannot

2 Aesop's fable of the old man who, worn out by his load of wood, calls on Death, and when Death comes asks only for help in carrying it.

FRENCH

laquelle ne se raporte qu'aux choses qui arrivent le plus souuent IV 357 .

AT IV 357 Et pour moy, la maxime que i'ay le plus obseruée en toute la conduite de ma vie, a esté de suiure seulement le grand chemin, & de croire que la principale finesse est de ne vouloir point du tout vser de finesse.

Les loix communes de la societé, lesquelles tendent toutes à se faire du bien les vns aux autres, ou du moins à ne se point faire de mal, sont, ce me semble, si bien établies, que quiconque les suit franchement, sans aucune dissimulation ny artifice, mene vne vie beaucoup plus heureuse & plus assurée, que ceux qui cherchent leur vtilité par d'autres voyes, lesquels, à la verité, reüssissent quelquefois par l'ignorance des autres hommes, & par la faueur de la fortune ; mais il arriue bien plus souuent qu'ils y manquent, & que, pensant s'établir, ils se ruinent. C'est auec cette ingenuité & cette franchise, laquelle ie fais profession d'obseruer en toutes mes actions, que ie fais aussi particulierement profession d'estre, &c.

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change the rule of prudence, which relates only to what happens most often IV 357 .

As for me, the maxim I have observed most in the whole conduct of my life has been to follow only the main road, and to believe that the chief cunning is to refuse to use any cunning at all.

The common laws of society all tend toward our doing good to one another, or at least doing one another no harm. They are, it seems to me, so well established that whoever follows them openly, without any dissimulation or artifice, leads a much happier and safer life than those who seek their advantage by other ways. These people, it is true, sometimes succeed through the ignorance of others and the favor of fortune. But it far more often happens that they fail, and that, thinking to make their position secure, they ruin themselves. It is with this candor and frankness, which I profess to observe in all my actions, that I also particularly profess to be, etc.

ELISABETH TO DESCARTES, 25 APRIL 1646

Elisabeth raises questions about the physiology and the remedies in his draft treatise on the passions.

FRENCH

AT IV 404 **ELISABETH** Monsieur Descartes,

Le traité que mon frere Philippe a conclu auec la Republique de Venise m'a fait auoir, tout depuis vostre depart, vne occupation beaucoup moins agreable que celle que vous m'auiez laissée, touchant vne matiere qui passe ma science, a laquelle ie n'estois appelée que pour suppleer a l'impatience du ieune homme a qui elle s'adressoit.

Cela m'a empesché iusqu'icy de me preualoir de la permission, que vous m'auez donnée, de vous proposer les obscurités que ma stupidité me fait trouuer en vostre Traité des passions, quoy qu'elles sont en petit nombre, puisqu'il faudroit estre impassible, pour ne point comprendre que l'ordre, la definition & les distinctions que vous donnez aux passions, & enfin toute la partie morale du traité, passe tout ce qu'on a iamais dit sur ce suiet.

Mais puisque sa partie physique n'est pas si claire aux ignorants, ie ne vois point comment on peut sauoir les

ENGLISH

ELISABETH Monsieur Descartes,

Ever since your departure, the treaty my brother Philip has concluded with the Republic of Venice has given me an occupation far less agreeable than the one you left me. It concerns a matter beyond my knowledge, and I was called upon only to make up for the impatience of the young man it concerned.[3]

This has kept me until now from taking advantage of the permission you gave me to put to you the obscurities my stupidity makes me find in your treatise on the passions. They are few in number, however, since one would have to be incapable of passion not to see that the order, the definitions and the distinctions you give to the passions, and indeed the whole moral part of the treatise, surpass everything that has ever been said on this subject.[4]

But its physical part is not so clear to the ignorant. I do not see how one can know the various move-

3 Philip (1627–1650), Elisabeth's younger brother, who had entered the service of the Republic of Venice.
4 An early draft of what became *The Passions of the Soul* (1649), written for Elisabeth in the winter of 1645–1646.

FRENCH

diuers mouuements du sang, qui causent les cinq passions primitiues, puisqu'elles ne sont iamais seules. Par exemple, l'amour est touiours accompagnée de desir & de ioye, ou de desir & de tristesse, & a mesure qu'il se fortifie, les autres croissent aussi,... au contraire. Comment est-il donc possible de remarquer la difference du battement de poulx, de la digestion des viandes, & autres changements du corps, qui seruent a decouurir la nature de ces mouuements ?

Aussi celle que vous notés, en chacune de ces IV 405 passions, n'est pas de mesme en tous les temperaments : & le mien fait que la tristesse m'emporte touiours l'appetit, quoy qu'elle ne soit meslée d'aucune haine, me venant seulement de la mort de quelque ami.

AT IV 405 Lorsque vous parlez des signes exterieurs de ces passions, vous dites que l'admiration, iointe a la ioye, fait enfler le poumon a diuerses secousses, pour causer le rire. A quoy ie vous supplie d'aiouter de quelle fasson l'admiration (qui, selon vostre description, semble n'operer que sur le cerueau) peut ouurir si promtement les orifices du cœur, pour faire cet effet.

Ces passions, que vous notez pour cause des soupirs, ne semblent pas touiours l'estre, puisque la coutume & la repletion de l'estomac les produisent aussi.

Mais ie trouue encore moins de difficulté a entendre tout ce que vous dites des passions, qu'a pratiquer les remedes que vous ordonnez contre leurs excés. Car comment preuoir tous les accidents qui peuuent suruenir en la vie, qu'il est impossible de nombrer ? Et comment nous empescher de desirer auec ardeur les choses qui tendent necessairement a la conseruation de l'homme (comme la santé & les moyens pour viure), qui neantmoins ne dependent point de son arbitre ?

Pour la connoissance de la verité, le desir en est si iuste, qu'il est naturellement en tous les hommes ; mais il faudroit auoir vne connoissance infinie, pour sauoir la iuste valeur des biens & des maux qui ont coutume de nous emouuoir, puisqu'il y en a beaucoup plus qu'vne seule personne ne sauroit imaginer, & qu'il faudra, pour cela, parfaitement connoistre toutes les choses qui sont au monde.

Puisque vous m'auez desia dit les principales, touchant IV 406 la vie particuliere, ie me contenterois de sauoir

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ments of the blood that cause the five primitive passions, since these never occur alone. For example, love is always accompanied by desire and joy, or by desire and sadness, and as it grows stronger, the others grow too,... and conversely. How, then, is it possible to discern the differences in the beating of the pulse, in the digestion of food, and in the other changes in the body that serve to reveal the nature of these movements?

Moreover, the change you note in each of these IV 405 passions is not the same in all temperaments. Mine is such that sadness always takes away my appetite, even when it is mixed with no hatred at all and comes to me only from the death of some friend.

When you speak of the outward signs of these passions, you say that wonder, joined with joy, makes the lungs swell in a series of jolts, producing laughter. To this I beg you to add how wonder (which, according to your description, seems to act only on the brain) can open the orifices of the heart so quickly as to produce this effect.[5]

The passions you give as the cause of sighs do not always seem to be their cause, since habit and a full stomach also produce them.

But I find it even less difficult to understand everything you say about the passions than to put into practice the remedies you prescribe against their excesses. For how can one foresee all the accidents that may occur in life, which are impossible to count? And how can we keep ourselves from ardently desiring the things that necessarily tend toward a person's preservation (such as health and the means of living), which nevertheless do not depend on his choice?

As for knowledge of the truth, the desire for it is so right that it is naturally present in all human beings. But one would need infinite knowledge to know the true value of the goods and evils that usually move us. There are far more of them than a single person could imagine, and to do so one would have to know perfectly all the things in the world.

Since you have already told me the principal maxims concerning IV 406 private life, I would be con-

5 "Wonder" renders Descartes' *admiration*, the passion of being struck by something new or unusual.

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encore vos maximes touchant la vie ciuile, quoy que celle-la nous rende dependants de personnes si peu raisonnables, que iusqu'icy ie me suis touiours mieux trouuée de me seruir de l'experience que de la raison, aux choses qui la concernent.

AT IV 406 I'ay esté si souuent interrompue, en vous escriuant, que ie suis contrainte de vous enuoyer mon brouillon, & de me seruir du messager d'Alcmar, ayant oublié le nom de l'ami, a qui vous vouliez que i'adresse mes lettres ; pour cela ie n'ose vous renuoyer vostre traitté, iusqu'a ce que ie le sache, ne pouuant me resoudre de hazarder entre les mains d'vn iurogne vne piece de si grand prix, qui a donné tant de satisfaction a

Vostre tres-affectionnée amie a vous seruir, Élisabeth. Monsieur Descartes. Ce 15/25 Auril.

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tent to learn your maxims concerning civil life as well. Civil life, though, makes us dependent on people so unreasonable that until now I have always found it better to rely on experience rather than reason in matters that concern it.

I have been interrupted so often while writing to you that I am forced to send you my rough draft, and to use the Alkmaar messenger, since I have forgotten the name of the friend to whom you wanted me to address my letters. For that reason I do not dare send your treatise back until I know it. I cannot bring myself to risk putting into the hands of a drunkard so valuable a piece, which has given so much satisfaction to

Your most affectionate friend, always at your service, Elisabeth. Monsieur Descartes. 15/25 April.

DESCARTES TO ELISABETH, MAY 1646

Descartes explains how he matched movements of the blood to each passion and declines to give political maxims.

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AT IV 407 **DESCARTES** Madame,

Ie reconnois, par experience, que i'ay eu raison de mettre la gloire au nombre des passions ; car ie ne puis m'empescher d'en estre touché, en voyant le fauorable iugement que fait vostre Altesse du petit traité que i'en ay écrit. Et ie ne suis nullement surpris de ce qu'elle y remarque aussi des defauts, pource que ie n'ay point douté qu'il n'y en eust en grand nombre, estant vne matiere que ie n'auois iamais cy-deuant étudiée, & dont ie n'ay fait que tirer le premier crayon, sans adiouter les couleurs & les ornemens qui seroient requis pour la faire paroistre à des yeux moins clair-voyans que ceux de vostre Altesse.

Ie n'y ay pas mis aussi tous les principes de Physique dont ie me suis seruy pour déchifrer quels sont les mouuemens du sang qui accompagnent chaque passion, pource que ie ne les sçaurois bien deduire sans expliquer la formation de toutes les parties du corps humain ; & c'est vne chose si difficile que ie ne l'oserois encore entreprendre, bien que ie me sois à peu prés satisfait moy-mesme touchant la verité des principes que i'ay supposez en cét écrit.

Dont les principaux sont que l'office du foye & de la rate est de contenir tousiours du sang de reserue, moins

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DESCARTES Madame,

I recognize from experience that I was right to count glory among the passions, for I cannot help being touched by it when I see how favorably Your Highness judges the little treatise I have written on them. And I am not at all surprised that she also notices faults in it. I never doubted that there were a great many, since it is a subject I had never studied before. I have only made the first sketch of it, without adding the colors and ornaments that would be needed to make it presentable to eyes less discerning than Your Highness's.[6]

Nor have I included in it all the principles of physics I used to work out which movements of the blood accompany each passion. I could not deduce them properly without explaining the formation of all the parts of the human body, and that is so difficult a task that I would not yet dare undertake it. Still, I have more or less satisfied myself about the truth of the principles I assumed in that treatise.

The chief of these are, first, that the function of the liver and spleen is always to hold blood in reserve,

6 In the treatise, "glory" is the joy founded on self-love that comes from the praise, or the hope of praise, of others.

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purifié que celuy qui est dans les venes ; & que le feu qui est dans le cœur a besoin d'estre continuellement entretenu, ou bien par le suc des viandes, qui vient directement de l'estomac, ou bien, à son défaut, par ce sang qui est en reserue, à cause que l'autre sang, qui est [IV 408] dans les venes, se dilate trop aisément ;

[AT IV 408] et qu'il y a vne telle liaison entre nostre ame & notre corps, que les pensées qui ont accompagné quelques mouuemens du corps, dés le commencement de nostre vie, les accompagnent encore à present, en sorte que, si les mesmes mouuemens sont excitez derechef dans le corps par quelque cause exterieure, ils excitent aussi en l'ame les mesmes pensées, & reciproquement, si nous auons les mesmes pensées, elles produisent les mesmes mouuemens ; et enfin, que la machine de nostre corps est tellement faite, qu'vne seule pensée de ioye, ou d'amour, ou autre semblable, est suffisante pour enuoyer les esprits animaux par les nerfs en tous les muscles qui sont requis pour causer les diuers mouuemens du sang que i'ay dit accompagner les passions.

Il est vray que i'ay eu de la difficulté à distinguer ceux qui appartiennent à chaque passion, à cause qu'elles ne sont iamais seules ; mais neantmoins, pource que les mesmes ne sont pas tousiours iointes ensemble, i'ay tasché de remarquer les changemens qui arriuoient dans le corps, lors qu'elles changeoient de compagnie. Ainsi, par exemple, si l'amour estoit tousiours iointe à la ioye, ie ne sçaurois à laquelle des deux il faudroit attribuer la chaleur & la dilatation qu'elles font sentir autour du cœur ; mais, pour ce qu'elle est aussi quelquefois iointe à la tristesse, & qu'alors on sent encore cette chaleur & non plus cette dilatation, i'ay iugé que la chaleur appartient à l'amour, & la dilatation à la ioye.

Et bien que le desir soit quasi tousiours auec l'amour, ils ne sont pas neantmoins tousiours ensemble au mesme degré : car, encore qu'on [IV 409] ayme beaucoup, on desire peu, lors qu'on ne conçoit aucune esperance ; & pource qu'on n'a point alors la diligence & la promptitude qu'on auroit, si le desir estoit plus grand, on peut iuger que c'est de luy qu'elle vient, & non de l'amour.

[AT IV 409] Ie croy bien que la tristesse oste l'apetit à plusieurs ; mais, pource que i'ay tousiours éprouué en moy qu'elle l'augmente, ie m'estois reglé là dessus. Et i'estime que la difference qui arriue en cela, vient de ce que le premier suiet de tristesse que quelques-vns ont eu au commencement de leur vie, a esté qu'ils ne receuoient pas assez de nourriture, & que celuy des autres a esté que celle qu'ils receuoient leur estoit nuisible. Et en ceux-cy

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less purified than the blood in the veins. Second, that the fire in the heart needs to be fed continually, either by the juice of food coming directly from the stomach or, failing that, by this reserve blood, because the other blood, which is [IV 408] in the veins, expands too easily;

third, that there is such a connection between our soul and our body that the thoughts which accompanied certain movements of the body from the beginning of our life still accompany them now. So if the same movements are aroused again in the body by some external cause, they also arouse the same thoughts in the soul; and conversely, if we have the same thoughts, they produce the same movements. And finally, that the machine of our body is so made that a single thought of joy, or of love, or something similar, is enough to send the animal spirits through the nerves into all the muscles needed to cause the various movements of the blood that I said accompany the passions.

It is true that I had difficulty distinguishing the movements that belong to each passion, because the passions are never alone. But since the same ones are not always joined together, I tried to note the changes that occurred in the body when they changed company. Thus, for example, if love were always joined to joy, I would not know to which of the two to attribute the warmth and the expansion they make us feel around the heart. But love is also sometimes joined to sadness, and one then still feels that warmth but no longer that expansion. So I judged that the warmth belongs to love and the expansion to joy.

And although desire almost always goes with love, the two are not always present in the same degree. Even when one [IV 409] loves greatly, one desires little if one conceives no hope. And since one then lacks the diligence and promptness one would have if the desire were greater, one can judge that these come from desire, and not from love.

I do believe that sadness takes away many people's appetite. But since I have always found in my own case that it increases mine, I had gone by that. I think the difference arises because some people's first cause of sadness, at the beginning of their life, was that they were not getting enough nourishment, while for others it was that the nourishment they received was harmful to them. In the

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le mouuement des esprits qui oste l'apetit est tousiours depuis demeuré ioint auec la passion de la tristesse. Nous voyons aussi que les mouuemens qui accompagnent les autres passions ne sont pas entierement semblables en tous les hommes, ce qui peut estre attribué à pareille cause.

Pour l'admiration, encore qu'elle ait son origine dans le cerueau, & ainsi que le seul temperament du sang ne la puisse causer, comme il peut souuent causer la ioye ou la tristesse, toutesfois elle peut, par le moyen de l'impression qu'elle fait dans le cerueau, agir sur le corps autant qu'aucune des autres passions, ou mesme plus en quelque façon, à cause que la surprise qu'elle contient cause les mouuemens les plus promts de tous.

Et comme on peut mouuoir la main ou le pié IV 410 quasi au mesme instant qu'on pense à les mouuoir, pource que l'idée de ce mouuement, qui se forme dans le cerueau, enuoye les esprits dans les muscles qui seruent à cét effet ; ainsi l'idée d'vne chose plaisante qui surprend l'esprit, enuoye aussi-tost les esprits dans les nerfs qui ouurent les orifices du cœur ; & l'admiration ne fait en cecy autre chose, sinon que, par sa surprise, elle augmente la force du mouuement qui cause la ioye, & fait que, les orifices du cœur estant dilatez tout à coup, le sang qui entre dedans par la vene caue, & qui en sort par la vene arterieuse, enfle subitement le poumon.

AT IV 410 Les mesmes signes exterieurs, qui ont coutume d'accompagner les passions, peuuent bien aussi quelquefois estre produits par d'autres causes. Ainsi la rougeur du visage ne vient pas tousiours de la honte ; mais elle peut aussi venir de la chaleur du feu, ou bien de ce qu'on fait de l'exercice. Et le ris qu'on nomme sardonien, n'est autre chose qu'vne conuulsion des nerfs du visage. Et ainsi on peut soupirer quelquefois par coutume, ou par maladie, mais cela n'empesche pas que les soupirs ne soient des signes exterieurs de la tristesse & du desir, lors que ce sont ces passions qui les causent.

Ie n'auois iamais oüy dire ny remarqué qu'ils fussent aussi quelquefois causez par la repletion de l'estomac ; mais, lors que cela arriue, ie croy que c'est vn mouuement dont la nature se sert pour faire que le suc des viandes passe plus promptement par le cœur, & ainsi que l'estomac en soit plutost déchargé. Car les soupirs,

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latter, the movement of the spirits that takes away the appetite has ever since remained joined to the passion of sadness. We also see that the movements accompanying the other passions are not entirely alike in all people, and this may be attributed to a similar cause.

As for wonder, it has its origin in the brain, and so the temperament of the blood alone cannot cause it, as it often can cause joy or sadness. Nevertheless, through the impression it makes in the brain, wonder can act on the body as much as any of the other passions, or in a way even more, because the surprise it contains causes the quickest movements of all.

One can move one's hand or foot IV 410 almost at the very instant one thinks of moving them, because the idea of this movement, formed in the brain, sends the spirits into the muscles that serve for it. In the same way, the idea of a pleasant thing that takes the mind by surprise at once sends the spirits into the nerves that open the orifices of the heart. And wonder does nothing more here than increase, by its surprise, the force of the movement that causes joy. The orifices of the heart are thus suddenly dilated, and the blood that enters the heart through the vena cava and leaves it through the arterial vein suddenly swells the lungs.[7]

The same outward signs that usually accompany the passions can also sometimes be produced by other causes. Thus redness of the face does not always come from shame; it can also come from the heat of a fire, or from exercise. And the laugh called sardonic is nothing but a convulsion of the nerves of the face. So too one may sometimes sigh from habit or from illness. But that does not prevent sighs from being outward signs of sadness and desire when it is these passions that cause them.

I had never heard or observed that sighs were sometimes also caused by a full stomach. But when that happens, I believe it is a movement nature uses to make the juice of food pass more quickly through the heart, so that the stomach is relieved of it sooner. For sighs, by agitating the

7 In the anatomy of the time, the "arterial vein" is the pulmonary artery, and the "venous artery" (mentioned below) is the pulmonary vein.

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agitant le poumon, font que le sang qu'il contient descend plus viste par l'artere veneuse dans le costé [IV 411] gauche du cœur, & ainsi que le nouueau sang, composé du suc des viandes, qui vient de l'estomac par le foye & par le cœur iusqu'au poumon, y peut aisement estre receu.

[AT IV 411] Pour les remedes contre les excez des passions, i'auoüe bien qu'ils sont difficiles à pratiquer, & mesme qu'ils ne peuuent suffire pour empescher les desordres qui arriuent dans le corps, mais seulement pour faire que l'ame ne soit point troublée, & qu'elle puisse retenir son iugement libre. A quoy ie ne iuge pas qu'il soit besoin d'auoir vne connoissance exacte de la verité de chaque chose, ny mesme d'auoir preueu en particulier tous les accidens qui peuuent suruenir, ce qui seroit sans doute impossible ; mais c'est assez d'en auoir imaginé en general de plus fascheux que ne sont ceux qui arriuent, & de s'estre preparé à les souffrir.

Ie ne croy pas aussi qu'on peche gueres par excez en desirant les choses necessaires à la vie ; ce n'est que des mauuaises ou superfluës que les desirs ont besoin d'estre reglez. Car ceux qui ne tendent qu'au bien sont, ce me semble, d'autant meilleurs qu'ils sont plus grands ; & quoy que l'aye voulu flater mon défaut, en mettant vne ie ne sçay quelle langueur entre les passions excusables, i'estime neantmoins beaucoup plus la diligence de ceux qui se portent tousiours auec ardeur à faire les choses qu'ils croyent estre en quelque façon de leur deuoir, encore qu'ils n'en esperent pas beaucoup de fruit.

le mene vne vie si retirée, & l'ay tousiours esté si [IV 412] éloigné du maniment des affaires, que ie ne serois pas moins impertinent que ce Philosophe qui vouloit enseigner le deuoir d'vn Capitaine en la presence d'Hannibal, si i'entreprenois d'écrire icy les maximes qu'on doit obseruer en la vie ciuile.

[AT IV 412] Et ie ne doute point que celle que propose vostre Altesse ne soit la meilleure de toutes, à sçauoir qu'il vaut mieux se regler en cela sur l'experience que sur la raison, pource qu'on a rarement à traiter auec des personnes parfaitement raisonnables, ainsi que tous les hommes deuroient estre, afin qu'on pust iuger ce qu'ils seront, par la seule consideration de ce qu'ils deuroient faire ; &

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lungs, make the blood they contain flow down more quickly through the venous artery into the left [IV 411] side of the heart. The new blood, made up of the juice of food, which comes from the stomach through the liver and the heart to the lungs, can then easily be received there.

As for the remedies against excesses of the passions, I readily admit that they are difficult to put into practice. I also admit that they cannot suffice to prevent the disorders that occur in the body, but only to keep the soul from being troubled and to let it keep its judgment free. For that, I do not think one needs exact knowledge of the truth of each thing, nor even to have foreseen in detail all the accidents that may occur, which would no doubt be impossible. It is enough to have imagined, in general, accidents more distressing than those that actually happen, and to have prepared oneself to bear them.

Nor do I think one sins much by excess in desiring the things necessary to life; it is only desires for bad or superfluous things that need to be regulated. For desires that aim only at the good are, it seems to me, the better the greater they are. And although I tried to flatter my own failing by placing a certain languor among the excusable passions, I nevertheless think much more highly of the diligence of those who always set about with ardor doing the things they believe to be in some way their duty, even when they expect little fruit from them.

I lead so retired a life, and have always been so [IV 412] far removed from the handling of affairs, that if I undertook to set down here the maxims one should observe in civil life, I would be no less impertinent than the philosopher who tried to teach the duties of a general in the presence of Hannibal.[8]

And I have no doubt that the maxim Your Highness proposes is the best of all: namely, that in this matter it is better to be guided by experience than by reason. For we rarely deal with perfectly reasonable people, as all men ought to be, so that we could judge what they will do simply by considering what they ought to do. And often the best

8 The Peripatetic Phormio lectured on generalship before Hannibal at Ephesus, and Hannibal was unimpressed (Cicero, *On the Orator* II.75).

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souuent les meilleurs conseils ne sont pas les plus heureux. C'est pourquoy on est contraint de hazarder, & de se mettre au pouuoir de la fortune, laquelle ie souhaite aussi obeïssante à vos desirs que ie suis, &c.

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counsels are not the most successful. That is why one is forced to take chances and put oneself in the power of fortune—which I wish may be as obedient to your desires as I am, etc.

DESCARTES TO ELISABETH, MAY 1646

Descartes retracts his indulgence toward irresolution and praises promptness in affairs already begun.

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AT IV 414 **DESCARTES** Madame,

L'occasion que i'ay de donner cette lettre à Monsieur de Beclin, qui m'est tres-intime amy, & à qui ie me fie autant qu'à moy-mesme, est cause que ie prens la liberté de m'y confesser d'vne faute tres-signalée que i'ay commise dans le Traité des passions, en ce que, pour flater ma negligence, i'y ay mis, au nombre des émotions de l'ame qui sont excusables, vne ie ne sçay quelle langueur qui nous empesche quelquefois de mettre en execution les choses qui ont esté approuuées par nostre iugement.

Et ce qui m'a donné le plus de scrupule en cecy, est que ie me souuiens que vostre Altesse a particulierement remarqué cét endroit, comme témoignant n'en pas desaprouuer la pratique en vn suiet où ie ne puis voir qu'elle soit vtile. I'auoüe bien qu'on a grande raison de prendre du temps pour deliberer, auant que d'entreprendre les choses qui sont d'importance ; mais lors qu'vne affaire est commencée, & qu'on est d'accord du principal, ie ne voy pas qu'on ait aucun profit de chercher des delais en disputant pour les conditions.

Car si l'affaire, nonobstant cela, reussit, tous les petits auantages [IV 415] qu'on aura peut-estre acquis par ce moyen, ne seruent pas tant que peut nuire le degoust que causent ordinairement ces delais ; & si elle ne reussit pas, tout cela ne sert qu'à faire sçauoir au monde qu'on a eu des desseins qui ont manqué. Outre qu'il arriue bien plus souuent, lors que l'affaire qu'on entreprend est fort bonne, que, pendant qu'on en differe l'execution, elle s'échape, que non pas lors qu'elle est mauuaise. C'est pourquoy ie me persuade que la resolution & la promptitude sont des vertus tres necessaires pour les affaires déia commencées.

AT IV 415 Et l'on n'a pas suiet de craindre ce qu'on ignore ; car souuent les choses qu'on a le plus apprehendées, auant que de les connoistre, se trouuent meilleures que celles qu'on a desirées. Ainsi le meilleur est en cela de se fier à la prouidence diuine, & de se laisser conduire par elle. Ie m'assure que vostre Altesse entend fort bien ma pensée,

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DESCARTES Madame,

I have the opportunity to give this letter to Monsieur de Beclin, who is a very close friend of mine and whom I trust as much as myself. This is why I take the liberty of confessing in it a very notable fault I committed in the treatise on the passions. There, to flatter my negligence, I placed among the excusable emotions of the soul a certain languor that sometimes prevents us from carrying out the things our judgment has approved.[9]

What has troubled my conscience most about this is that I remember Your Highness particularly noticed that passage, as though she did not disapprove of the practice in a matter where I cannot see that it is of any use. I readily admit that one has good reason to take time to deliberate before undertaking things of importance. But once an affair has begun and the main points are agreed, I do not see that there is any profit in seeking delays by haggling over the terms.

For if the affair succeeds despite this, all the small advantages [IV 415] one may have gained by this means do less good than the distaste such delays usually cause can do harm. And if it does not succeed, all this serves only to let the world know that one had plans that failed. Besides, when the affair one undertakes is a very good one, it far more often slips away while its execution is postponed than when it is a bad one. That is why I am convinced that resolution and promptness are very necessary virtues in affairs already begun.

And there is no reason to fear what we do not know; for often the things we most dreaded before knowing them turn out better than those we desired. So the best course here is to trust in divine Providence and let oneself be guided by it. I am sure Your Highness understands my thought very

9 Beclin, a friend of Descartes who carried this letter by hand; little else is known of him.

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encore que ie l'explique fort mal, & qu'elle pardonne au zele extréme qui m'oblige d'écrire cecy ; car ie suis, autant que ie puis estre, &c.	well, even though I explain it very badly, and that she will pardon the extreme zeal that obliges me to write this; for I am, as much as I can be, etc.

ELISABETH TO DESCARTES, JULY 1646

Before leaving for Germany, Elisabeth asks to see him once more and to keep writing.

FRENCH	ENGLISH
AT IV 448 **ELISABETH** Monsieur Descartes,	**ELISABETH** Monsieur Descartes,
Puisque vostre voyage est arresté pour le 3me/13 de ce mois, il faut que ie vous represente la promesse que vous m'auez faite de quitter vostre agreable solitude, pour me donner le bonheur de vous voir, auant que mon partement d'icy m'en fasse perdre l'esperance pour 6 ou 7 mois, qui est le terme le plus esloigné que le congé de la Reine ma mere, de M. mon frere, & le sentiment des amis de nostre maison ont prescrit a mon absence.	Since your journey is fixed for the 3/13 of this month, I must remind you of the promise you made me: to leave your pleasant solitude and give me the happiness of seeing you before my departure from here takes that hope away from me for six or seven months. That is the longest term that the leave granted by the Queen my mother and my brother, and the opinion of our family's friends, have set for my absence.[10]
Mais il me seroit encore trop long, si ie ne m'asseurois que vous y continuerez la charité de me faire profiter de vos Meditations par vos lettres, puisque, sans leur assistance, les froideurs du nord & le calibre des gens auec qui ie pourrois conuerser, esteindroit ce petit rayon de sens commun que ie tiens de la nature, & dont ie reconnois l'vsage par vostre methode. On me promet en Allemagne assez de loisir & de tranquillité pour la pouuoir estudier, & IV 449 ie n'y amene de plus grands tresors, dou ie pretens tirer plus de satisfaction, que vos escrits. I'espere que vous me permettrez d'emporter celuy des passions, encore qu'il n'a esté capable de calmer ceux que nostre dernier malheur auoit excité.	But even that term would seem too long to me if I were not sure that you will continue the kindness of letting me profit from your meditations through your letters. Without their help, the cold of the north and the caliber of the people I might converse with would put out the small ray of common sense I have from nature, whose proper use I have learned through your method. I am promised enough leisure and tranquility in Germany to be able to study it, and IV 449 I am taking with me no greater treasures, nor any from which I expect more satisfaction, than your writings. I hope you will allow me to take the one on the passions, even though it was not able to calm those that our latest misfortune had stirred up.[11]
AT IV 449 Il faloit que vostre presence y aportoit la cure, que vos maximes ni mon raisonnement n'auoient pu appliquer. Les preparations de mon voyage & les affaires de mon frere Philippe, ioint a vne complaisance de bienseance pour les plaisirs de ma tante, m'ont empesché iusqu'icy de vous rendre les remercimens que ie vous deuois pour l'vtilité de cette visite ; ie vous prie de les receuoir à cette heure de	It must have been your presence that brought the cure, which neither your maxims nor my reasoning had been able to apply. The preparations for my journey and my brother Philip's affairs, together with the courtesy I owed to my aunt's pleasures, have so far prevented me from giving you the thanks I owed you for the benefit of that visit. I beg you to accept them now from
Vostre tres affectionnée amie a vous seruir, Élisabeth. M. Descartes,	Your most affectionate friend, always at your service, Elisabeth. Monsieur Descartes,

10 Her mother was Elizabeth Stuart, the exiled "Winter Queen" of Bohemia; her brother was Charles Louis, the Elector Palatine, Elisabeth's eldest surviving brother.

11 In June 1646 her brother Prince Philip killed a French officer, Jacques de l'Espinay, in a street fight at The Hague and had to flee.

FRENCH

Ie suis obligée d'enuoyer celle cy par le messager, parce que sa promtitude m'est plus necessaire, a cette heure, que sa seureté.

ENGLISH

I am obliged to send this by the messenger, because his speed matters more to me at present than his reliability.

DESCARTES TO ELISABETH, SEPTEMBER 1646

Descartes gives his judgment of Machiavelli's Prince, rejecting its maxims for usurpers.

FRENCH

AT IV 486 **DESCARTES** Madame,

I'ay lû le liure dont vostre Altesse m'a commandé de luy écrire mon opinion, & i'y trouue plusieurs preceptes qui me semblent fort bons ; comme entr'autres au 19 & 20 chapitres : *Qu'vn Prince doit tousiours éuiter la haine & le mépris de ses suiets, & que l'amour du peuple vaut mieux que les forteresses*. Mais il y en a aussi plusieurs autres que ie ne sçaurois aprouuer.

Et ie croy que ce en quoy l'Auteur a le plus manqué, est qu'il n'a pas mis assez de distinction entre les Princes qui ont acquis vn Estat par des voyes iustes, & ceux qui l'ont vsurpé par des moyens illegitimes ; & qu'il a donné à tous, generalement, les preceptes qui ne sont propres qu'à ces derniers. Car comme, en bastissant vne maison dont les fondemens sont si mauuais qu'ils ne sçauroient soutenir des murailles hautes & épaisses, on est obligé de les faire foibles & basses, ainsi ceux qui ont commencé à s'établir par des crimes sont ordinairement contrains de continuer à commettre des crimes, & ne se pourroient maintenir s'ils vouloient estre vertueux.

C'est au regard de tels Princes qu'il a pû dire, au chapitre 3 : *Qu'ils ne sçauroient manquer d'estre haïs de plusieurs ; & qu'ils ont souuent plus d'auantage à faire beaucoup de mal qu'à en faire moins, pource que les legeres offenses sufisent pour donner la volonté de se vanger, & que les grandes en ostent le pouuoir*. Puis, au chapitre 15 : *Que, s'ils vouloient estre gens de bien, il seroit impossible qu'ils ne se ruinassent parmy le grand nombre de méchans qu'on trouue par tout*. Et au chapitre 19 : IV 487 *Qu'on peut estre hay pour de bonnes actions aussi bien que pour de mauuaises*.

AT IV 487 Sur lesquels fondemens il appuye des preceptes tres tyranniques, comme de vouloir *qu'on ruine tout vn païs, afin d'en demeurer le maistre ; qu'on exerce de grandes cruautez, pouruû que ce soit promtement & tout à la fois ; qu'on tasche de paroistre homme de bien, mais qu'on ne le soit pas*

ENGLISH

DESCARTES Madame,

I have read the book on which Your Highness commanded me to write her my opinion, and I find in it several precepts that seem to me very good—among others, in chapters 19 and 20: *That a prince must always avoid the hatred and contempt of his subjects, and that the love of the people is worth more than fortresses*. But there are also several others that I cannot approve.[12]

And I think the author's chief failing is that he did not distinguish sufficiently between princes who have acquired a state by just means and those who have usurped it by illegitimate ones. He gave to all, in general, precepts suited only to the latter. For when building a house whose foundations are so poor that they cannot bear high, thick walls, one is obliged to make the walls weak and low. In the same way, those who began by establishing themselves through crimes are usually forced to go on committing crimes, and could not maintain themselves if they wished to be virtuous.

It is with regard to such princes that he could say, in chapter 3: *That they cannot fail to be hated by many; and that they often gain more by doing a great deal of harm than by doing less, because slight injuries are enough to give the will to take revenge, while great ones take away the power to do so*. Then, in chapter 15: *That if they wished to be good men, they could not avoid being ruined among the great number of wicked people found everywhere*. And in chapter 19: IV 487 *That one can be hated for good actions as well as for bad ones*.

On these foundations he rests some thoroughly tyrannical precepts: for instance, that *one should ruin a whole country in order to remain its master; that one should commit great cruelties, provided it is done quickly and all at once; that one should try to ap-*

12 The book is Machiavelli's *The Prince* (written 1513, published 1532).

FRENCH

veritablement ; qu'on ne tienne sa parole qu'aussi long-temps qu'elle sera vtile ; qu'on dissimule, qu'on trahisse ; & enfin que, pour regner, on se dépoüille de toute humanité, & qu'on deuienne le plus farouche de tous les animaux

Mais c'est vn tres mauuais suiet pour faire des liures, que d'entreprendre d'y donner de tels preceptes, qui, au bout du conte, ne sçauroient assurer ceux ausquels il les donne ; car, comme il auoüe luy-mesme, *ils ne se peuuent garder du premier qui voudra negliger sa vie pour se vanger d'eux*.

Au lieu que, pour instruire vn bon Prince, quoyque nouuellement entré dans vn Estat, il me semble qu'on luy doit proposer des maximes toutes contraires, & supposer que les moyens dont il s'est seruy pour s'établir ont esté iustes ; comme, en effet, ie croy qu'ils le sont presque tous, lors que les Princes qui les pratiquent les estiment tels ; car la iustice entre les Souuerains a d'autres limites qu'entre les particuliers, & il semble qu'en ces rencontres Dieu donne le droit à ceux ausquels il donne la force. Mais les plus iustes actions deuiennent iniustes, quand ceux qui les font les pensent telles.

On doit aussi distinguer entre les suiets, les amis IV 488 ou alliez, & les ennemis. Car, au regard de ces derniers, on a quasi permission de tout faire, pouruû qu'on en tire quelque auantage pour soy ou pour ses suiets ; & ie ne desaprouue pas, en cette occasion, qu'on acouple le renard auec le lion, & qu'on ioigne l'artifice à la force. Mesme ie comprens, sous le nom d'ennemis, tous ceux qui ne sont point amis ou alliez, pource qu'on a droit de leur faire la guerre, quand on y trouue son auantage, & que, commençans à deuenir suspects & redoutables, on a lieu de s'en défier.

AT IV 488 Mais i'excepte vne espece de tromperie, qui est si directement contraire à la societé, que ie ne croy pas qu'il soit iamais permis de s'en seruir, bien que nostre Auteur l'aprouue en diuers endroits, & qu'elle ne soit que trop en pratique : c'est de feindre d'estre amy de ceux qu'on veut perdre, afin de les pouuoir mieux surprendre. L'amitié est vne chose trop sainte pour en abuser de la sorte ; & celuy qui aura pû feindre d'aimer quelqu'vn, pour le trahir, merite que ceux qu'il voudra par aprés aimer veritablement, n'en croyent rien & le haïssent.

ENGLISH

pear a good man, but not really be one; that one should keep one's word only as long as it is useful; that one should dissemble and betray; and finally that, in order to reign, one should strip oneself of all humanity and become the fiercest of all animals.

But it is a very poor subject for a book to undertake to give such precepts, which in the end cannot make safe those to whom he gives them; for, as he himself admits, *they cannot guard themselves against the first man who is willing to disregard his own life to take revenge on them*.

Whereas, to instruct a good prince, even one newly come into a state, it seems to me that one should propose entirely contrary maxims, and suppose that the means he used to establish himself were just. And in fact I believe they almost all are, when the princes who use them consider them so. For justice between sovereigns has different limits from justice between private persons, and it seems that in these cases God gives the right to those to whom he gives the strength. But the most just actions become unjust when those who perform them think them so.

One must also distinguish between subjects, friends IV 488 or allies, and enemies. For with regard to the last, one is permitted almost anything, provided some advantage is gained for oneself or one's subjects; and in this case I do not disapprove of coupling the fox with the lion and joining cunning to force. I even include under the name of enemies all those who are not friends or allies. For one has the right to make war on them when one finds it to one's advantage, and when they begin to become suspect and formidable, one has reason to distrust them.[13]

But I make an exception for one kind of deceit, which is so directly contrary to society that I do not think it is ever permissible to use it, although our author approves it in several places and it is all too common in practice. That is, pretending to be the friend of those one wishes to destroy, the better to take them by surprise. Friendship is too holy a thing to be abused in this way. Anyone who has been able to feign love for someone in order to betray him deserves that those he later wishes to

13 An allusion to *The Prince*, chapter 18, where the prince is told to imitate both the fox and the lion.

FRENCH

Pour ce qui regarde les alliez, vn Prince leur doit tenir exactement sa parole, mesme lors que cela luy est preiudiciable ; car il ne le sçauroit estre tant, que la reputation de ne manquer point à faire ce qu'il a promis, luy est vtile, & il ne peut acquerir cette reputation que par de telles occasions, où il y va pour luy de quelque perte ; mais en celles qui le ruineroient tout à fait, le droit des gens le dispense de sa promesse. Il doit aussi vser de beaucoup de circonspection, auant que de promettre, afin de pouuoir tousiours garder sa [IV 489] foy.

AT IV 489 Et bien qu'il soit bon d'auoir amitié auec la pluspart de ses voisins, ie croy neantmoins que le meilleur est de n'auoir point d'étroites alliances, qu'auec ceux qui sont moins puissans. Car, quelque fidelité qu'on se propose d'auoir, on ne doit pas attendre la pareille des autres, mais faire son conte qu'on en sera trompé, toutes les fois qu'ils y trouueront leur auantage ; & ceux qui sont plus puissans l'y peuuent trouuer, quand ils veulent, mais non pas ceux qui le sont moins.

Pour ce qui est des suiets, il y en a de deux sortes : à sçauoir les grands & le peuple. Ie comprens, sous le nom de grands, tous ceux qui peuuent former des partis contre le Prince, de la fidelité desquels il doit estre tres assuré ; ou, s'il ne l'est pas, tous les politiques sont d'accord qu'il doit employer tous ses soins à les abaisser, & qu'en tant qu'ils sont enclins à broüiller l'Estat, il ne les doit considerer que comme ennemis.

Mais, pour ses autres suiets, il doit sur tout éuiter leur haine & leur mépris ; ce que ie croy qu'il peut tousiours faire, pouruû qu'il obserue exactement la iustice à leur mode (c'est à dire suiuant les loix ausquelles ils sont accoutumez), sans estre trop rigoureux aux punitions, ny trop indulgent aux graces, & qu'il ne se remette pas de tout à ses Ministres, mais que, leur laissant seulement la charge des condamnations plus odieuses, il témoigne auoir luy-mesme le soin de tout le reste ;

puis aussi, qu'il retienne tellement sa dignité, qu'il ne quitte rien des honneurs & des deferances que le peuple croit luy estre deuës, mais qu'il n'en demande point dauantage, & qu'il ne fasse paroistre en public que ses plus serieuses actions, ou celles qui [IV 490] peuuent estre aprouuées de tous, reseruant à prendre ses plaisirs en particulier, sans que ce soit iamais au dépens de personne ; & enfin qu'il soit immuable & inflexible, non

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love truly should not believe a word of it, and should hate him.

As for allies, a prince must keep his word to them exactly, even when it is to his disadvantage. For it can never be so much to his disadvantage as the reputation of never failing to do what he has promised is to his advantage; and he can acquire that reputation only on occasions of this kind, where he stands to lose something. But in cases that would ruin him entirely, the law of nations releases him from his promise. He must also be very circumspect before promising, so that he can always keep his [IV 489] word.

And although it is good to be on friendly terms with most of one's neighbors, I think it best nevertheless to have close alliances only with those who are less powerful. For whatever fidelity one intends to show, one must not expect the same from others, but reckon on being deceived whenever they find it to their advantage. Those who are more powerful can find it so whenever they wish, but those who are less powerful cannot.

As for subjects, there are two kinds: the great and the people. Under the name of the great I include all those who can form factions against the prince. He must be very sure of their loyalty; or, if he is not, all political writers agree that he must devote all his efforts to bringing them down, and that insofar as they are inclined to disturb the state, he must regard them only as enemies.

But as for his other subjects, he must above all avoid their hatred and contempt. I believe he can always do so provided he observes justice exactly in their fashion (that is, according to the laws they are used to), without being too harsh in punishments or too indulgent in pardons. He must not leave everything to his ministers, but, leaving them only the task of the more odious condemnations, show that he himself takes care of all the rest;

and also that he maintain his dignity so well that he gives up none of the honors and deference the people believe are due to him, but asks for no more. He should display in public only his most serious actions, or those that [IV 490] can be approved by all, keeping his pleasures for private, without their ever being at anyone's expense. And finally he should be immovable and inflexible—not in the

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pas aux premiers desseins qu'il aura formez en soy-mesme, car d'autant qu'il ne peut auoir l'œil par tout, il est necessaire qu'il demande conseil, & entende les raisons de plusieurs, auant que de se resoudre ; mais qu'il soit inflexible touchant les choses qu'il aura témoigné auoir resoluës, encore mesme qu'elles luy fussent nuisibles ; car mal-aisement le peuuent-elles estre tant que seroit la reputation d'estre leger & variable.

AT IV 490 Ainsi ie desaprouue la maxime du chapitre 15 : *Que, le monde estant fort corrompu, il est impossible qu'on ne se ruine, si l'on veut estre tousiours homme de bien ; & qu'vn Prince, pour se maintenir, doit apprendre à estre méchant, lors que l'occasion le requiert* ; si ce n'est peut-estre que, par vn homme de bien, il entende vn homme superstitieux & simple, qui n'ose donner bataille au iour du Sabath, & dont la conscience ne puisse estre en repos, s'il ne change la religion de son peuple. Mais, pensant qu'vn homme de bien est celuy qui fait tout ce que luy dicte la vraye raison, il est certain que le meilleur est de tascher à l'estre tousiours.

le ne croy pas aussi ce qui est au chapitre 19 : *Qu'on peut autant estre hay pour les bonnes actions, que pour les mauuaises*, sinon en tant que l'enuie est vne espece de haine ; mais cela n'est pas le sens de l'Auteur.

Et les Princes n'ont pas coutume d'estre enuiez par le commun de leurs suiets ; ils le sont seulement par les grans, ou par leurs voisins, ausquels les mesmes vertus IV 491 qui leur donnent de l'enuie, leur donnent aussi de la crainte ; c'est pourquoy iamais on ne doit s'abstenir de bien faire, pour éuiter cette sorte de haine ; & il n'y en a point qui leur puisse nuire, que celle qui vient de l'iniustice ou de l'arrogance que le peuple iuge estre en eux.

AT IV 491 Car on voit mesme que ceux qui ont esté condamnez à la mort, n'ont point coutume de haïr leurs iuges, quand ils pensent l'auoir meritée ; & on soufre aussi auec patience les maux qu'on n'a point meritez, quand on croit que le Prince, de qui on les reçoit, est en quelque façon contraint de les faire, & qu'il en a du deplaisir ; pource qu'on estime qu'il est iuste qu'il prefere l'vtilité publique à celle des particuliers.

Il y a seulement de la difficulté, lors qu'on est obligé de satisfaire à deux partis qui iugent differemment de ce qui est iuste, comme lors que les Empereurs Romains auoient à contenter les Citoyens & les Soldats ; auquel cas il est raisonnable d'accorder quelque chose aux vns & aux autres, & on ne doit pas entreprendre de faire venir tout

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first plans he has formed within himself, for since he cannot have his eye everywhere, he must ask advice and hear the reasons of many before deciding; but inflexible concerning the things he has shown he has resolved upon, even if they should be harmful to him. For they can hardly be as harmful as the reputation of being fickle and changeable.

Thus I disapprove of the maxim in chapter 15: *That since the world is very corrupt, one cannot avoid ruin if one always wishes to be a good man; and that a prince, to maintain himself, must learn to be wicked when the occasion requires it*. Unless perhaps by a good man he means a superstitious and simple-minded man, who dares not give battle on the Sabbath day, and whose conscience cannot rest unless he changes the religion of his people. But if we take a good man to be one who does everything that true reason dictates to him, it is certain that the best course is to try always to be one.

Nor do I believe what is in chapter 19: *That one can be hated as much for good actions as for bad ones*, except insofar as envy is a kind of hatred; but that is not the author's meaning.

And princes are not usually envied by the common run of their subjects. They are envied only by the great, or by their neighbors, in whom the same virtues IV 491 that arouse envy also arouse fear. That is why one must never refrain from doing good in order to avoid this sort of hatred. And there is no hatred that can harm princes except the kind that comes from the injustice or arrogance the people judge to be in them.

For we see that even those who have been condemned to death do not usually hate their judges, when they think they deserved it. People also bear with patience evils they did not deserve, when they believe that the prince from whom they receive them is in some way forced to inflict them and regrets doing so; for they consider it just that he should prefer the public good to that of private persons.

The only difficulty arises when one is obliged to satisfy two parties who judge differently of what is just, as when the Roman emperors had to please both the citizens and the soldiers. In that case it is reasonable to grant something to each. One should not try to bring all at once to reason those who are

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d'vn coup à la raison ceux qui ne sont pas acoutumez de l'entendre ; mais il faut tascher peu à peu, soit par des écrits publics, soit par les voix des Predicateurs, soit par tels autres moyens, à la leur faire conceuoir.

Car enfin le peuple soufre tout ce qu'on luy peut persuader estre iuste, & s'offense de tout ce qu'il imagine d'estre iniuste ; & l'arrogance des Princes, c'est à dire l'vsurpation de quelque autorité, de quelques droits, ou de quelques honneurs qu'il croit ne leur estre point dûs, ne luy est odieuse, que pource qu'il la considere comme vne espece d'iniustice.

AT IV 492 Au reste, ie ne suis pas aussi de l'opinion de cét Auteur, en ce qu'il dit en sa Preface : *Que, comme il faut estre dans la plaine, pour mieux voir la figure des montagnes, lors qu'on en veut tirer le crayon, ainsi on doit estre de condition priuée, pour bien connoistre l'office d'vn Prince*. Car le crayon ne represente que les choses qui se voyent de loin ; mais les principaux motifs des actions des Princes sont souuent des circonstances si particulieres, que, si ce n'est qu'on soit Prince soy-mesme, ou bien qu'on ait esté fort longtemps participant de leurs secrets, on ne les sçauroit imaginer.

C'est pourquoy ie meriterois d'estre mocqué, si ie pensois pouuoir enseigner quelque chose à vostre Altesse en cette matiere ; aussi n'est-ce pas mon dessein, mais seulement de faire que mes lettres luy donnent quelque sorte de diuertissement, qui soit different de ceux que ie m'imagine qu'elle a en son voyage, lequel ie luy souhaite parfaitement heureux : comme sans doute il le sera, si vostre Altesse se resout de pratiquer ces maximes qui enseignent que la felicité d'vn chacun depend de luy-mesme, & qu'il faut tellement se tenir hors de l'empire de la fortune, que, bien qu'on ne perde pas les occasions de retenir les auantages qu'elle peut donner, on ne pense pas toutesfois estre malheureux, lors qu'elle les refuse ; & pource qu'en toutes les affaires du monde il y a quantité de raisons pour & contre, qu'on s'arreste principalement à considerer celles qui seruent à faire qu'on approuue les choses qu'on voit arriuer.

Tout ce que l'estime le plus inéuitable sont les maladies du corps, desquelles ie prie IV 493 Dieu qu'il vous preserue ; & ie suis auec toute la deuotion que ie puis auoir, &c..

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not used to listening to it; rather, one must try little by little to make them grasp it, whether by public writings, by the voices of preachers, or by other such means.

For in the end the people will bear anything they can be persuaded is just, and take offense at anything they imagine to be unjust. The arrogance of princes—that is, their usurpation of some authority, rights or honors which the people believe are not due to them—is odious to the people only because they regard it as a kind of injustice.

For the rest, I also do not share the author's opinion when he says in his preface: *That just as one must be down in the plain to see better the shape of the mountains when one wants to draw them, so one must be of private station to know well the office of a prince*. For a drawing represents only things seen from afar. But the chief motives of princes' actions are often such particular circumstances that, unless one is a prince oneself, or has long shared their secrets, one could not imagine them.

That is why I would deserve to be laughed at if I thought I could teach Your Highness anything on this subject. Nor is that my intention; I wish only that my letters might give her some kind of diversion different from those I imagine she has on her journey, which I wish may be perfectly happy. And no doubt it will be, if Your Highness resolves to practice those maxims which teach that each person's happiness depends on himself. They teach that one must keep oneself so far outside the dominion of fortune that, although one does not miss opportunities to retain the advantages it can give, one does not think oneself unhappy when it refuses them. And they teach that, since in all the affairs of the world there are many reasons for and against, one should dwell chiefly on those that help one approve of the things one sees happen.

The things I regard as most unavoidable are the illnesses of the body, from which I pray IV 493 God to preserve you; and I am, with all the devotion I can have, etc.

ELISABETH TO DESCARTES, 10 OCTOBER 1646

From Berlin, Elisabeth partly defends Machiavelli and describes a miraculous spring.

FRENCH

AT IV 519 **ELISABETH** Monsieur Descartes.

Vous auez raison de croire que le diuertissement que vos lettres m'aportent, est different de celuy que i'ay eu au voyage, puisqu'il me donne vne satisfaction plus grande & plus durable ; encore que i'aye trouuée en celuy cy toute celle que me peuuent donner l'amitié & les caresses de mes proches, ie les considere comme choses qui pourroient changer, au lieu que les verités que celle la m'apprend IV 520 , laissent des impressions en mon esprit, qui contribueront touiours au contentement de ma vie.

AT IV 520 I'ay mille regrets de n'auoir point amené le liure, que vous auez pris la peine d'examiner pour m'en dire vostre Sentiment, par terre, me laissant persuader que le bagage que i'enuoirois par mer a Hambourg, seroit icy plutost que nous ; & il n'y est pas encore, quoy que nous y sommes arriués le 7/17 Septembre du passé. C'est pourquoy ie ne me saurois representer des maximes de cet auteur qu'autant qu'vne tres mauuaise memoire me peut fournir d'vn liure que ie n'ay point regardé de 6 ans.

Mais il me souuient que i'en approuuois alors quelques vnes, non pour estre bonnes de soy, mais parce qu'elles causent moins de mal que ceux dont se seruent vne quantité d'ambitieux imprudens, que ie cognois, qui ne tendent qu'a brouiller, & laisser le reste a la fortune ; & celles de cet auteur tendent toutes a l'establissement.

Il me semble aussi que, pour enseigner le gouuernement d'vn Estat, il se propose l'Estat le plus difficile a gouuerner, où le prince est vn nouuel vsurpateur, au moins en l'opinion du peuple ; & en ce cas, l'opinion qu'il aura luy mesme de la iustice de sa cause, pourroit seruir au repos de sa conscience, mais non a celuy de ses affaires, où les loix contrarient son autorité, où les grands la contreminent & où le peuple la maudit.

Et lorsque l'Estat est ainsi disposé, les grandes violences font moins de mal que les petites, parce que celles cy offensent aussi bien que celles la, & donnent suiet a vne longue guerre ; celles la en ostent le courage & les moyens aux grands qui la pourront entre- IV 521 prendre. De mesme, lorsque les violences viennent promtement & tout a la fois, elles faschent moins qu'elles n'estonnent, &

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ELISABETH Monsieur Descartes.

You are right to believe that the diversion your letters bring me is different from the one I have had on the journey, since it gives me greater and more lasting satisfaction. On the journey I have found all the satisfaction that the friendship and affection of my relatives can give me; yet I regard these as things that could change, whereas the truths that your letters teach me IV 520 leave impressions on my mind that will always contribute to the contentment of my life.

I deeply regret not having brought by land the book you took the trouble to examine so as to give me your opinion of it. I let myself be persuaded that the baggage I was sending by sea to Hamburg would get here before us; and it is not here yet, although we arrived on 7/17 September last. That is why I can recall this author's maxims only as far as a very bad memory can supply them from a book I have not looked at for six years.

But I remember that at the time I approved some of them—not because they are good in themselves, but because they cause less harm than the maxims followed by a number of reckless ambitious people I know, who aim only at stirring up trouble and leaving the rest to fortune; whereas this author's maxims all aim at establishing a stable rule.

It also seems to me that, in order to teach the government of a state, he takes as his case the state that is most difficult to govern: one where the prince is a new usurper, at least in the people's opinion. In that case, the prince's own opinion of the justice of his cause might give rest to his conscience, but not to his affairs, where the laws oppose his authority, the great undermine it, and the people curse it.

And when the state is in such a condition, great acts of violence do less harm than small ones. The small ones offend just as much as the great, and give occasion for a long war; the great ones take away the courage and the means from the great men who might undertake IV 521 such a war. Likewise, when the violence comes quickly and all at

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sont aussi plus suportables au peuple, qu'vne longue suite de miseres que les guerres ciuiles apportent.	once, it stuns more than it angers, and it is also easier for the people to bear than the long train of miseries that civil wars bring.
AT IV 521 Il me semble qu'il y aioute encore, ou bien l'enseigne, par l'exemple du neueu du pape Alexandre, qu'il propose comme vn politique parfait, que le Prince doit employer a ces grandes cruautés quelque Ministre qu'il puisse par apres sacrifier a la haine du peuple ; & quoy qu'il paroisse iniuste au Prince de faire perir vn homme qui luy auroit obei, ie trouue que des personnes si barbares & desnaturés, qui se veulent employer a seruir de bourreau a tout vn peuple, pour quelque consideration que ce soit, ne meritent point de meilleur traitement ; & pour moy, ie prefererois la condition du plus pauure paisan d'Hollande, a celle du Ministre qui voudroit obeir a pareils ordres, ou a celle du Prince qui seroit contraint de les donner.	It seems to me that he also adds—or rather teaches, through the example of Pope Alexander's nephew, whom he presents as a perfect statesman—that the prince should use for these great cruelties some minister whom he can afterward sacrifice to the people's hatred. And although it may seem unjust for the prince to put to death a man who has obeyed him, I find that people so barbarous and unnatural as to be willing to serve as executioner of a whole people, for whatever consideration, deserve no better treatment. For my part, I would prefer the condition of the poorest peasant in Holland to that of a minister willing to obey such orders, or to that of a prince forced to give them.[14]
Lorsque le mesme auteur parle des alliez, il les suppose, pareillement, aussi mechans qu'ils peuuent estre, & les affaires en telle extremité, qu'il faut perdre toute vne republique, ou rompre sa parole a ceux qui ne la gardent qu'aussi long tems qu'elle leur est vtile.	When the same author speaks of allies, he likewise supposes them to be as wicked as they can be, and affairs to be in such an extremity that one must either lose an entire state or break one's word to those who keep theirs only as long as it is useful to them.
Mais, s'il a tort de faire des maximes generales de ce qui ne se doit pratiquer qu'en fort peu d'occasions, il pesche en cela esgalement auec presque tous les Sts Peres & les anciens philosophes, qui en font de mesme ; & ie crois que cela vient du plaisir qu'ils prennent a dire des paradoxes, qu'ils peuuent apres expliquer a leurs escoliers.	But if he is wrong to make general maxims out of what should be practiced only on very few occasions, he sins in this no more than almost all the Church Fathers and the ancient philosophers, who do the same. And I think this comes from the pleasure they take in uttering paradoxes, which they can then explain to their pupils.
Lorsque cet homme icy dit qu'on se ruine, si on veut touiours estre homme de bien, ie croy qu'il n'entend point que, pour IV 522 estre homme de bien, il faut suiure les loix de la superstition, mais cette loy commune, qu'il faut faire a chacun, comme on voudroit auoir fait a soy : ce que les princes ne sauroient presque iamais obseruer a vn particulier de leurs suiets, qu'il faut perdre toutes les fois que l'vtilité publique le requiert. Et puisque, deuant vous, personne n'a dit que la vertu ne consiste qu'a suiure la droite raison, mais luy ont prescrit quelques loix ou regles plus particulieres, il ne faut point s'estonner qu'ils ont manqué a la bien definir.	When this man says that one is ruined if one always wishes to be a good man, I do not think he means that, to IV 522 be a good man, one must follow the laws of superstition. He means rather that common law: that we must do to each person as we would wish done to ourselves. This is something princes can almost never observe toward an individual subject, whom they must destroy whenever the public good requires it. And since, before you, no one has said that virtue consists solely in following right reason, but others have prescribed for it some more particular laws or rules, we should not be surprised that they failed to define it well.

14 Cesare Borgia, in fact the son of Pope Alexander VI; in *The Prince*, chapter 7, he has his harsh governor Remirro de Orco executed to appease the people.

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AT IV 522 Ie trouue que la regle, que vous obseruez en sa preface, est fausse, parce qu'il n'a point cognu de personne clairuoyante en tout ce qu'elle se propose, comme vous estes, par consequent qui, de priuée & retirée hors de l'embarras du monde, seroit neanmoins capable d'enseigner aux princes comme ils doiuent gouuerner, comme il paroist a ce que vous en escrites.

I find the rule you point out in his preface false, because he never knew anyone as clear-sighted as you are in everything they undertake—someone who, living privately and withdrawn from the bustle of the world, would nonetheless be capable of teaching princes how they ought to govern, as is evident from what you write about it.

Pour moy, qui n'en ay que le titre, ie n'estudie qu'a me seruir de la regle que vous mettez a la fin de vostre lettre, en taschant de me rendre les choses presentes les plus agreables que ie puis. Icy ie n'y rencontre point beaucoup de difficulté, estant en vne maison où i'ay esté cherie depuis mon enfance & où tout le monde conspire a me faire des caresses. Encore que ceux la me detournent quelques fois d'occupations plus vtiles, ie supporte aisement cette incommodité, par le plaisir qu'il y a d'estre IV 523 aimé de ses proches.

As for me, who am a princess in title only, my one study is to apply the rule you give at the end of your letter, trying to make present things as pleasant for myself as I can. Here I do not find much difficulty in that, being in a house where I have been cherished since childhood and where everyone conspires to show me affection. Although this sometimes distracts me from more useful occupations, I easily bear the inconvenience, for the pleasure of being IV 523 loved by one's relatives.

AT IV 523 Voila, Monsieur, la raison que ie n'ay eu plutost le loisir de vous rendre conte de l'heureux succes de nostre voyage, comme il s'est passé sans incommodité aucune, auec la promtitude que ie vous ay dit cy dessus, & de la fonteine miraculeuse dont vous me parlastes a La Haye.

That, Sir, is why I have not had the leisure sooner to give you an account of the happy outcome of our journey—how it passed without any discomfort, with the speed I mentioned above—and of the miraculous spring you spoke to me about at The Hague.[15]

Ie n'en ay esté qu'vne petite lieue esloignée, a Cheuningen, où nous auons rencontré toute la famille de ceans qui en venoit. M. l'Electeur m'y vouloit mener pour la voir ; mais puisque le reste de nostre compagnie opinoit pour vn autre diuertissement, ie n'osois point leur contredire, & me satisfaisois d'en voir & gouter l'eau, dont il a diuerses sources de different goust ; mais on ne se sert principalement que de deux, dont la premiere est claire, salée, & vne forte purge ; l'autre, vn peu blanchastre, gouste comme de l'eau meslée auec du lait, & est, a ce qu'on dit, rafraischissante. On parle de quantité de guerisons miraculeuses qu'elles font ; mais ie n'en ay pu apprendre de personne digne de foy.

I was only a short league away from it, at Cheuningen, where we met the whole family of this house on their way back from it. The Elector wanted to take me there to see it; but since the rest of our company favored another amusement, I did not dare contradict them, and contented myself with seeing and tasting its water. It has several springs with different tastes, but only two are chiefly used. The first is clear, salty, and a strong purge; the other, slightly whitish, tastes like water mixed with milk and is said to be cooling. People speak of many miraculous cures they bring about, but I have not been able to learn of any from a trustworthy person.[16]

Ils disent bien que ce lieu est rempli de pauures, qui publient auoir eslé nés sourds, aueugles, boiteux ou bossus, & trouué leur guerison en cette fontaine. Mais puisque ce sont des gens mercenaires, & qu'ils rencontrent vne nation assez credule aux miracles, ie ne crois pas que cela doiue persuader les personnes raisonnables. De toute la cour de M. l'Electeur mon

They do say that the place is full of poor people—deaf, blind, lame, and people with curved spines—who proclaim that they were born so and found their cure at this spring. But since these are mercenary people, and they are dealing with a nation rather credulous about miracles, I do not think this should persuade reasonable people. Of the

15 The spring at Hornhausen, near Halberstadt, discovered in 1646 and famous for reported cures.
16 Here the Elector is Frederick William of Brandenburg, Elisabeth's cousin, at whose court in Berlin she was staying—not her brother Charles Louis.

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cousin, il n'y a eu que son grand Escuyer, qui s'en est bien trouué.

Il a eu vne blesseure sous l'œil droit, dont il a perdu la veue d'vn costé, par le moyen d'vne petite peau, qui lui est venue dessus cet œil ; & l'eau salée de cette fontaine, estant appliquée sur l'œil, a dissipé ladite peau, tellement qu'il peut, a [IV 524] cette heure, discerner les personnes en fermant l'œil gauche. Outre qu'estant homme de complexion forte & de mauuaise diete, vne bonne purge ne luy pouuoit nuire, comme elle a fait a plusieurs autres.

AT IV 524 I'ay examiné le chiffre que vous m'auez enuoyé, & le trouue fort bon, mais trop prolixe pour escrire tout vn sens ; & si on n'escrit que peu de paroles, on les trouueroit par la quantité des lettres. Il vaudroit mieux faire vne clef des paroles par l'alphabet, & puis marquer quelque distinction entre les nombres qui signifient des lettres & celles qui signifient des paroles.

I'ai icy si peu de loisir a escrire, que ie suis contrainte de vous enuoyer ce brouillon, où vous pouvez remarquer, a la difference de la plume, toutes les fois que i'ay esté interrompue. Mais i'aime mieux paroistre deuant vous auec toutes mes fautes, que de vous donner suiet de croire que i'ay vn vice si esloigné de mon naturel, comme celuy doublier mes amis en l'absence, principalement vne personne que ie ne saurois cesser d'affectionner, sans cesser aussi d'estre raisonnable, comme vous, Monsieur, a qui ie seray toute ma vie,

Vostre tres affectionnée amie a vous seruir, Élisabeth. Monsieur Descartes, De Berlin, ce 30me de Septembre.

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whole court of the Elector my cousin, only his Master of the Horse has benefited from it.

He had a wound under his right eye, which cost him the sight on that side because of a small film that grew over the eye. The salt water of this spring, applied to the eye, dispersed the film, so that he can [IV 524] now make out people when he closes his left eye. Besides, since he is a man of strong constitution and poor diet, a good purge could do him no harm, though it did harm to several others.

I have examined the cipher you sent me and find it very good, but too long-winded for writing out a whole message; and if one writes only a few words, they would be discovered from the number of letters. It would be better to make a key of words in alphabetical order, and then mark some distinction between the numbers that stand for letters and those that stand for words.

I have so little leisure for writing here that I am forced to send you this rough draft, in which you can tell from the change of pen every time I was interrupted. But I would rather appear before you with all my faults than give you reason to believe I have a vice so foreign to my nature as forgetting my friends when they are absent—above all a person whom I could not stop caring for without also ceasing to be reasonable, such as you, Sir, to whom I shall be all my life,

Your most affectionate friend, always at your service, Elisabeth. Monsieur Descartes, Berlin, 30 September.

DESCARTES TO ELISABETH, NOVEMBER 1646

Descartes argues that inner joy favors good fortune and warns against the spring's waters.

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AT IV 528 **DESCARTES** Madame,

I'ay receu vne tres-grande faueur de vostre Altesse, en ce qu'elle a voulu que i'aprisse par ses lettres le succez de son voyage, & qu'elle est arriuée heureusement en vn lieu où, estant grandement estimée & cherie de ses proches, il me semble qu'elle a autant de biens qu'on en peut souhaiter auec raison en cette vie. Car, sçachant la condition des choses humaines, ce seroit trop importuner la fortune, que d'attendre d'elle tant de graces, qu'on ne pust pas, mesme en imaginant, trouuer aucun suiet de

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DESCARTES Madame,

Your Highness has done me a very great favor in wishing me to learn from her letters of the success of her journey, and that she has arrived safely in a place where she is greatly esteemed and cherished by her relatives. There, it seems to me, she has as many goods as one can reasonably wish for in this life. For, knowing the condition of human things, it would be asking too much of fortune to expect so many favors from it that one could not, even in

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fascherie. Lors qu'il n'y a point d'obiets presens qui offensent les [IV 529] sens, ny aucune indisposition dans le corps qui l'incommode, vn esprit qui suit la vraye raison peut facilement se contenter.

[AT IV 529] Et il n'est pas besoin, pour cela, qu'il oublie ny qu'il neglige les choses éloignées ; c'est assez qu'il tasche à n'auoir aucune passion pour celles qui luy peuuent déplaire : ce qui ne repugne point à la charité, pource qu'on peut souuent mieux trouuer des remedes aux maux qu'on examine sans passion, qu'à ceux pour lesquels on est affligé.

Mais, comme la santé du corps & la presence des obiets agreables aydent beaucoup à l'esprit, pour chasser hors de soy toutes les passions qui participent de la tristesse, & donner entrée à celles qui participent de la ioye, ainsi, reciproquement, lors que l'esprit est plein de ioye, cela sert beaucoup à faire que le corps se porte mieux, & que les obiets presens paroissent plus agreables.

Et mesme aussi i'ose croire que la ioye interieure a quelque secrette force pour se rendre la fortune plus fauorable. Ie ne voudrois pas écrire cecy à des personnes qui auroient l'esprit foible, de peur de les induire à quelque superstition ; mais, au regard de vostre Altesse, i'ay seulement peur qu'elle se moque de me voir deuenir trop credule. Toutesfois i'ay vne infinité d'experiences, & auec cela l'autorité de Socrate, pour confirmer mon opinion.

Les experiences sont que i'ay souuent remarqué que les choses que i'ay faites auec vn cœur gay, & sans aucune repugnance interieure, ont coutume de me succeder heureusement, iusques là mesme que, dans les ieux de hazard, où il n'y a que la fortune seule qui regne, ie [IV 530] l'ay tousiours éprouuée plus fauorable, ayant d'ailleurs des suiets de ioye, que lors que i'en auois de tristesse. Et ce qu'on nomme communement le genie de Socrate, n'a sans doute esté autre chose, sinon qu'il auoit accoutumé de suiure ses inclinations interieures, & pensoit que l'euenement de ce qu'il entreprenoit seroit heureux, lors qu'il auoit quelque secret sentiment de gayeté, &, au contraire, qu'il seroit malheureux, lors qu'il estoit triste.

[AT IV 530] Il est vray pourtant que ce seroit estre superstitieux, de croire autant à cela, qu'on dit qu'il faisoit ; car Platon raporte de luy que mesme il demeuroit dans le logis, toutes les fois que son genie ne luy conseilloit point d'en

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imagination, find any cause for vexation. When there are no present objects offending the [IV 529] senses, and no indisposition troubling the body, a mind that follows true reason can easily be content.

And for that it need not forget or neglect distant things; it is enough that it try to have no passion for those that might displease it. This is not contrary to charity, because we can often find remedies more readily for evils we examine without passion than for those that distress us.

But health of body and the presence of agreeable objects greatly help the mind to drive out all the passions that partake of sadness and to admit those that partake of joy. And in the same way, conversely, when the mind is full of joy, this does much to make the body healthier and present objects seem more agreeable.

I even venture to believe that inner joy has some secret power to make fortune more favorable. I would not write this to people of weak mind, for fear of leading them into some superstition; but as for Your Highness, my only fear is that she will laugh at me for becoming too credulous. Nevertheless I have countless experiences, and with them the authority of Socrates, to confirm my opinion.

The experiences are these. I have often noticed that the things I have done with a cheerful heart and without any inner reluctance usually turn out well for me—so much so that even in games of chance, where fortune alone rules, I [IV 530] have always found it more favorable when I had other reasons for joy than when I had reasons for sadness. And what is commonly called the genius of Socrates was no doubt nothing other than this: he was accustomed to follow his inner inclinations, and thought that what he undertook would turn out well when he had some secret feeling of cheerfulness, and, on the contrary, that it would turn out badly when he was sad.[17]

It is true, however, that it would be superstitious to believe in this as much as he is said to have done; for Plato reports that he would even stay at home whenever his genius did not advise him to

17 Socrates' *daimonion,* the inner "divine sign" he said guided him (Plato, *Apology* and *Phaedrus*).

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sortir. Mais, touchant les actions importantes de la vie, lors qu'elles se rencontrent si douteuses, que la prudence ne peut enseigner ce qu'on doit faire, il me semble qu'on a grande raison de suiure le conseil de son genie, & qu'il est vtile d'auoir vne forte persuasion que les choses que nous entreprenons sans repugnance, & auec la liberté qui accompagne d'ordinaire la ioye, ne manqueront pas de nous bien reüssir.

Ainsi i'ose icy exhorter vostre Altesse, puis qu'elle se rencontre en vn lieu où les obiets presens ne luy donnent que de la satisfaction, qu'il luy plaise aussi contribuer du sien, pour tascher à se rendre contente ; ce qu'elle peut, ce me semble, aisement, en n'arrestant son esprit qu'aux choses presentes, & ne pensant iamais aux affaires, qu'aux heures où le courier est prest de partir.

Et i'estime que c'est vn bonheur que les liures de vostre Altesse n'ont pû luy estre IV 531 apportez sitost qu'elle les attendoit ; car leur lecture n'est pas si propre à entretenir la gayeté, qu'à faire venir la tristesse, principalement celle du liure de ce Docteur des Princes, qui, ne representant que les difficultez qu'ils ont à se maintenir, & les cruautez ou perfidies qu'il leur conseille, fait que les particuliers qui le lisent, ont moins de suiet d'enuier leur condition, que de la plaindre.

AT IV 531 Vostre Altesse a parfaitement bien remarqué les fautes, & les miennes ; car il est vray que c'est le dessein qu'il a eu de louer Cesar Borgia, qui luy a fait établir des maximes generales, pour iustifier des actions particulieres qui peuuent difficilement estre excusées ; & i'ay lù depuis ses discours sur Tite-Liue, où ie n'ay rien remarqué de mauuais. Et son principal precepte, qui est d'extirper entierement ses ennemis, ou bien de se les rendre amis, sans suiure iamais la voye du milieu, est sans doute tousiours le plus sur ; mais, lors qu'on n'a aucun suiet de craindre, ce n'est pas le plus genereux.

Vostre Altesse a aussi fort bien remarqué le secret de la fontaine miraculeuse, en ce qu'il y a plusieurs pauures qui en publient les vertus, & qui sont peut-estre gagez par ceux qui en esperent du profit. Car il est certain qu'il n'y a point de remede qui puisse seruir à tous les maux ; mais, plusieurs ayant vsé de celuy-là, ceux qui s'en sont bien trouuez, en disent IV 532 du bien, & on ne parle point des autres.

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go out. But as for the important actions of life, when they are so doubtful that prudence cannot teach us what to do, it seems to me that we have good reason to follow the counsel of our genius. And it is useful to be strongly convinced that the things we undertake without reluctance, and with the freedom that usually accompanies joy, will not fail to turn out well for us.

So I venture here to urge Your Highness, since she finds herself in a place where present objects give her nothing but satisfaction, to be pleased to contribute her own share as well in trying to make herself content. She can do so easily, it seems to me, by fixing her mind only on present things, and never thinking about affairs except at the hours when the courier is ready to leave.

And I consider it a stroke of luck that Your Highness's books could not be IV 531 brought to her as soon as she expected. For reading them is less suited to sustaining cheerfulness than to bringing on sadness—especially that book by the Doctor of Princes. By representing only the difficulties princes have in maintaining themselves, and the cruelties or perfidies he advises them to commit, he gives the private persons who read him less reason to envy the princes' condition than to pity it.

Your Highness has noted his faults perfectly well, and mine too. For it is true that it was his intention to praise Cesare Borgia that led him to lay down general maxims to justify particular actions that can hardly be excused. Since then I have read his discourses on Livy, in which I noticed nothing bad. And his principal precept—to wipe out one's enemies entirely or else make them one's friends, without ever taking the middle way—is no doubt always the safest; but when one has no reason to fear, it is not the most generous.[18]

Your Highness has also seen very clearly the secret of the miraculous spring: there are many poor people who proclaim its virtues and who are perhaps paid by those who hope to profit from it. For it is certain that there is no remedy that can serve for all ills. But when many have used this

18 Machiavelli's *Discourses on the First Ten Books of Titus Livy* (1531).

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one, those who have done well by it speak [IV 532] well of it, and nothing is said of the others.

[AT IV 532] Quoy qu'il en soit, la qualité de purger, qui est en l'vne de ces fontaines, & la couleur blanche auec la douceur & la qualité rafraichissante de l'autre, donnent ocasion de iuger qu'elles passent par des mines d'Antimoine ou de Mercure, qui sont deux mauuaises drogues, principalement le Mercure. C'est pourquoy ie ne voudrois pas conseiller à personne d'en boire. Le vitriol & le fer des eaux de Spa sont bien moins à craindre ; & pource que l'vn & l'autre diminuë la rate & fait éuacuer la melancolie, ie les estime.

Be that as it may, the purgative quality of one of these springs, and the white color, sweetness and cooling quality of the other, give reason to judge that they pass through mines of antimony or mercury. These are two harmful drugs, especially mercury, which is why I would not advise anyone to drink from them. The vitriol and iron in the waters of Spa are much less to be feared; and because both reduce the spleen and purge melancholy, I think well of them.

Car vostre Altesse me permettra, s'il luy plaist, de finir cette lettre par où ie l'ay commencée, & de luy souhaiter principalement de la satisfaction d'esprit & de la ioye, comme estant non seulement le fruit qu'on attend de tous les autres biens, mais aussi souuent vn moyen qui augmente les graces qu'on a pour les acquerir ; & bien que ie ne sois pas capable de contribuer à aucune chose qui regarde vostre seruice, sinon seulement par mes souhaits, i'ose pourtant assurer que ie suis plus parfaitement qu'aucun autre qui soit au monde, &c.

For Your Highness will allow me, if she pleases, to end this letter where I began it, and to wish her above all satisfaction of mind and joy. Joy is not only the fruit we expect from all other goods, but also often a means that increases the favors we have for acquiring them. And although I am not able to contribute to anything that concerns your service, except by my wishes, I nonetheless venture to assure you that I am, more perfectly than anyone else in the world, etc.

ELISABETH TO DESCARTES, 29 NOVEMBER 1646

Elisabeth doubts that joy brings luck and describes the physicians and learned men of Berlin.

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[AT IV 578] **ELISABETH** Monsieur Descartes,

ELISABETH Monsieur Descartes,

Ie ne suis pas tant accoutumée aux faueurs de la fortune, pour en attendre d'extraordinaire ; il me suffit, lors qu'elle ne m'enuoye pas bien souuent des accidens, qui donneroient suiet de tristesse au plus grand philosophe du monde.

I am not so accustomed to fortune's favors as to expect extraordinary ones from it. It is enough for me when it does not very often send me accidents that would give cause for sadness to the greatest philosopher in the world.

Et puisqu'il ne m'en est point arriué de semblables, depuis mon seiour icy, que les obiets presents me, sont tous agreables, & que l'air du pays ne s'accorde pas mal auec ma complexion, ie me trouue en estat de pouuoir pratiquer vos lessons au regard de la gayeté, encore que ie n'en espere point les effets, dans la conduite de mes affaires, que vous auez experimenté aux ieux de hasard, parce que le bonheur que vous y auez rencontré, au tems que vous estiez d'ailleurs disposé à la ioye, procedoit, apparemment, de ce que vous teniez alors plus librement toutes les parties qui font que l'on gaigne ordinairement.

And since nothing of that kind has happened to me during my stay here, since present objects are all agreeable to me, and since the air of the country agrees well enough with my constitution, I find myself in a position to practice your lessons on cheerfulness. Even so, I do not expect it to have the effects on the conduct of my affairs that you experienced at games of chance. For the good luck you met with there, at times when you were otherwise disposed to joy, probably came from your then attending more freely to all the things that usually make one win.

Mais, si i'auois suiet de disposer de ma personne, ie ne me reposerois pas si facilement en vn estat hazardeux,

But if I were free to dispose of my own person, I would not rest as easily in a precarious situation,

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estant en vn lieu où i'ay trouué suiet de contentement, que dans celuy d'où ie viens. Et pour les interests de nostre maison, il y a longtems que ie les abandonne à la destinée, voyant que la prudence mesme., si elle n est secourue d'autres moyens qui nous restent, y perdroit sa peine. Il faudroit vn genie plus fort que celuy de Socrate, pour y travailler auec succes ; car, puisqu'il ne luy a fait éuiter l'emprisonnement ni la mort, il n'a pas suiet de s'en vanter beaucoup.

I'ay aussi obserué que les choses où ie suiuois [IV 579] mes propres mouuemens, me sont mieux succedées que ceux où ie me laissois conduire par le conseil de plus sages que ie ne suis. Mais ie ne l'attribue pas tant à la felicité de mon genie, qu'à ce qu'ayant plus d'affection, pour ce qui me touche, que nul autre, i'ay aussi mieux examiné les voyes, qui me pouroient nuire ou auantager, que ceux sur le iugement desquels ie me reposois.

AT IV 579 Si vous voulez que i'en donne encore quelque part à la qualité occulte de mon imagination, ie crois que vous le faites, pour m'accommoder à l'humeur des gens de ce pais-cy, & particulierement des doctes, qui sont encore plus pedants & superstitieux, qu'aucun de ceux que i'ai connus en Hollande ; & cela vient de ce que tout le peuple y est si pauure, que personne n'y estudie ou raisonne, que pour viure.

I'ay eu toutes les peines du monde à m'exemter les mains des medecins, pour ne patir de leur ignorance, sans auoir esté malade, seulement que le changement d'air & de diete m'a donné, au lieu de la galle, quelques apostemes aux doits. D'où ces messieurs iugerent, qu'il y auoit encore de la mauuaise matiere cachée, qui estoit trop grossiere pour s'euacuer par la, à laquelle il falloit opposer des purges & la saignée ; mais me sentant, autrement, si bien disposée, que i'engraisse à veue d'œil, i'ay fait valoir l'opiniastreté, où la raison m'estoit inutile, & n'ay rien pris iusqu'à cette heure.

I'apprehende d'autant [IV 580] plus les medecines d'icy, parce que tout le monde s'y sert d'extraits par la chimie, dont les effets sont promts & dangereux.

AT IV 580 Ceux qui ont recherché les ingrediens de la fonteine de Hornhausen, croient que la source salée ne contient que du sel ordinaire ; & pour l'autre, ils ne s'y accordent point. Ils attribuent aussi (principalement les lutteriens) leur effet plus au miracle qu'à la composition de l'eau.

ENGLISH

now that I am in a place where I have found cause for contentment, as I did in the one I have come from. As for the interests of our house, I have long left them to destiny, seeing that prudence itself, unless it were helped by means other than those we have left, would waste its effort there. It would take a stronger genius than that of Socrates to work at it with success; for since his did not save him from imprisonment or death, it has little to boast of.

I have also observed that the things in which I followed [IV 579] my own impulses have turned out better for me than those in which I let myself be guided by the advice of people wiser than I am. But I attribute this not so much to the good fortune of my genius as to the fact that, caring more than anyone else about what concerns me, I also examined better than those on whose judgment I relied the paths that might harm or help me.

If you want me to give some share of it also to the occult quality of my imagination, I believe you say so to fit me to the temper of the people of this country, and particularly of the learned, who are even more pedantic and superstitious than any I knew in Holland. This comes from the fact that the whole population here is so poor that no one studies or reasons except to make a living.

I had all the trouble in the world keeping out of the doctors' hands, so as not to suffer from their ignorance without having been ill—except that the change of air and diet gave me, instead of the itch, some abscesses on my fingers. From this these gentlemen judged that there was still some bad matter hidden in me, too coarse to be evacuated that way, which had to be countered with purges and bleeding. But since I otherwise feel so well that I am visibly putting on weight, I resorted to stubbornness where reason was of no use to me, and have taken nothing up to now.

I dread the medicines here all [IV 580] the more because everyone uses chemical extracts, whose effects are quick and dangerous.

Those who have investigated the ingredients of the Hornhausen spring believe that the salt spring contains nothing but ordinary salt; as for the other, they do not agree at all. They also attribute the springs' effects (the Lutherans especially) more to a miracle than to the composition of the water. For

FRENCH	ENGLISH
Pour moi, ie prendray le parti le plus seur, selon vostre auis, & ne m'en seruiray point.	my part, I shall take the safest course, as you advise, and not use it at all.
I'espere aussi n'estre iamais en estat de suiure les preceptes du docteur des princes, puisque la violence & le soupson sont choses contraires à mon naturel. Quoy que ie ne blasme aux tirans que le premier dessein d'vsurper vn pays & la premiere entreprise ; car apres, la voye qui sert a les establir, quelque rude qu'elle soit, fait touiours moins de mal au public qu'vne souueraineté contestée parles armes.	I also hope never to be in a position to follow the precepts of the doctor of princes, since violence and suspicion are contrary to my nature. Though what I blame in tyrants is only the first design of usurping a country and the first undertaking. For afterward, the means that serve to establish them, however harsh, always do less harm to the public than a sovereignty contested by arms.
Cette estude aussi ne m'occupe point assez pour me donner du chagrin, puisque i'emploie le peu de tems qui me reste des lettres que i'ay à escrire, & des complaisances qu'il me faut auoir pour mes proches, à relire vos œuures, où ie profite plus en vne heure, pour cultiuer ma raison, que ie ne ferois toute ma vie aux autres lectures. Mais il n'y a personne icy d'assez raisonnable pour les comprendre, quoy que ie sois engagée de promesse à ce vieux duc de Brunswick, qui est à Wolfenbuttel, de les luy [IV 581] faire auoir, pour orner sa bibliotheque. Ie ne crois point qu'ils luy seruiront pour orner sa ceruelle catherreuse, desia toute occupée du pedantisme.	Nor does this study occupy me enough to cause me any distress. The little time left to me after the letters I have to write and the attentions I must pay my relatives, I spend rereading your works, from which I gain more in an hour for the cultivation of my reason than I would in a whole lifetime of other reading. But there is no one here reasonable enough to understand them, although I am bound by a promise to that old Duke of Brunswick at Wolfenbüttel to get them [IV 581] for him, to adorn his library. I do not think they will serve to adorn his catarrhal brain, already wholly taken up with pedantry.[19]
AT IV 581 Ie me laisse aller icy au plaisir de vous entretenir, sans songer que ie ne puis, sans pecher contre le genre humain, trauailler à vous faire perdre le tems (que vous employez pour son vtilité) en la lecture des fadaises de	Here I let myself be carried away by the pleasure of conversing with you, without considering that I cannot, without sinning against the human race, make you waste the time (which you employ for its benefit) in reading the trifles of
Vostre tres affectionnée amie à vous seruir, Élisabeth. Ce 29/19 Nouembre. M. Descartes.	Your most affectionate friend, always at your service, Elisabeth. 29/19 November. Monsieur Descartes.

DESCARTES TO ELISABETH, DECEMBER 1646

Descartes advises on her minor ailment and reports that Regius's book has appeared.

FRENCH	ENGLISH
AT IV 589 **DESCARTES** Madame,	**DESCARTES** Madame,
Ie n'ay iamais trouué de si bonnes nouuelles en aucune des lettres que l'ay eu cy-deuant l'honneur de receuoir de vostre Altesse, que i'ay fait en ces dernieres du vingt-neufuiéme Nouembre. Car elles me font iuger que vous auez maintenant plus de santé & plus de ioye, que ie ne vous en ay veu auparauant ; & ie croy qu'aprés la vertu, laquelle ne vous a iamais manqué, ce sont les deux principaux biens qu'on puisse auoir en cette vie.	I have never found such good news in any of the letters I have previously had the honor of receiving from Your Highness as I found in this last one of 29 November. For it leads me to judge that you now have more health and more joy than I have ever seen you have before. And I believe that, after virtue, which you have never lacked, these are the two chief goods one can have in this life.

19 Duke August the Younger of Brunswick-Lüneburg (1579–1666), founder of the great library at Wolfenbüttel.

FRENCH

Ie ne mets point en compte ce petit mal, pour lequel les medecins ont pretendu que vous leur donneriez de l'employ ; car, encore qu'il soit quelquefois vn peu incommode, ie suis d'vn païs où il est si ordinaire à ceux qui sont ieunes, & qui d'ailleurs se portent fort bien, que ie ne le considere pas tant comme vn mal, que comme vne marque de santé, & vn preseruatif contre les autres maladies. Et la pratique a bien enseigné à nos medecins des remedes certains pour le guerir, mais ils ne conseillent pas qu'on tasche à s'en défaire en vne autre saison qu'au printems, pource qu'alors, les pores estant plus ouuerts, on peut mieux en oster la cause.

Ainsi vostre Altesse a tres-grande raison de ne vouloir pas vser de remedes pour ce suiet, principalement à l'entrée de l'hyuer, qui est le temps le plus dangereux ; & si cette incommodité dure IV 590 iusqu'au printems, alors il sera aisé de la chasser auec quelques legers purgatifs, ou bouillons rafraichissans. ou il n'entre rien que des herbes qui soient connuës en la cuisine, & en s'abstenant de manger des viandes où il y ait trop de sel ou d'épiceries.

AT IV 590 La seignée y pourroit aussi beaucoup seruir ; mais, pource que c'est vn remede où il y a quelque danger, & dont l'vsage frequent abrege la vie, ie ne luy conseille point de s'en seruir, si ce n'est qu'elle y soit acoutumée ; car, lors qu'on s'est fait saigner en mesme saison trois ou quatre années de suite, on est presque obligé, par aprés, de faire tous les ans de mesme.

Vostre Altesse fait aussi fort bien de ne vouloir point vser des remedes de la Chymie ; on a beau auoir vne longue experience de leur vertu, le moindre petit changement qu'on fait en leur preparation, lors mesme qu'on pense mieux faire, peut entierement changer leurs qualitez, & faire qu'au lieu de medecines ce soient des poisons.

Il en est quasi de mesme de la Science, entre les mains de ceux qui la veulent debiter sans la bien sçauoir ; car, en pensant corriger ou adiouter quelque chose à ce qu'ils ont appris, ils la conuertissent en erreur. Il me semble que i'en voy la preuue dans le liure de Regius, qui est enfin venu au iour. I'en marquerois icy quelques points, si ie pensois qu'il l'eust enuoyé à vostre Altesse ; mais il y a si loin d'icy à B(erlin), que ie iuge qu'il aura attendu vostre retour pour vous l'offrir ; & ie l'attendray aussi, pour vous en dire mon sentiment.

ENGLISH

I do not count that little complaint for which the physicians claimed you would give them employment. For although it is sometimes a little troublesome, I come from a country where it is so common among those who are young, and otherwise in very good health, that I regard it not so much as an illness as a sign of health and a safeguard against other diseases. Experience has indeed taught our physicians sure remedies for curing it; but they do not advise trying to get rid of it in any season other than spring, because then, the pores being more open, the cause can be better removed.

So Your Highness is quite right not to want to use remedies for it, especially at the onset of winter, which is the most dangerous time. And if this complaint lasts IV 590 until spring, it will then be easy to drive it away with a few mild purgatives, or cooling broths containing nothing but herbs known in the kitchen, and by abstaining from foods with too much salt or spice.

Bleeding might also be very useful. But because it is a remedy that carries some danger, and whose frequent use shortens life, I do not advise Your Highness to use it unless she is accustomed to it; for when one has been bled in the same season three or four years in a row, one is almost obliged afterward to do the same every year.

Your Highness is also quite right not to want to use chemical remedies. However long one's experience of their power, the slightest change made in their preparation, even when one thinks one is improving it, can entirely change their qualities and turn them from medicines into poisons.

Much the same is true of knowledge in the hands of those who want to peddle it without knowing it well; for in thinking to correct it or add something to what they have learned, they turn it into error. I seem to see the proof of this in Regius's book, which has at last come out. I would point out a few things in it here if I thought he had sent it to Your Highness. But it is so far from here to Berlin that I judge he will have waited for your return to present it to you; and I shall wait for it too, before telling you my opinion of it.[20]

20 His *Fundamenta physices* ("Foundations of Physics," 1646).

FRENCH

Ie ne m'étonne pas de ce que vostre Altesse ne [IV 591] trouue aucuns doctes au païs où elle est, qui ne soient entierement preoccupez des opinions de l'Ecole ; car ie voy que, dans Paris mesme & en tout le reste de l'Europe, il y en a si peu d'autres, que, si ie l'eusse sceu auparauant, ie n'eusse peut-estre iamais rien fait imprimer.

[AT IV 591] Toutesfois i'ay cette consolation que, bien que ie sois asseuré que plusieurs n'ont pas manqué de volonté pour m'attaquer, il n'y a toutesfois encore eu personne qui soit entré en lice ; & mesme ie reçois des complimens des Peres Iesuites, que i'ay tousiours crû estre ceux qui se sentiroient les plus interessez en la publication d'vne nouuelle Philosophie, & qui me le pardonneroient le moins, s'ils pensoient y pouuoir blasmer quelque chose auec raison.

Ie mets au nombre des obligations que i'ay à vostre Altesse, la promesse qu'elle a faite à Monsieur le Duc de B(runswick), qui est à Wolfenbuttel, de luy faire auoir mes écrits : car ie m'assure qu'auant que vous eussiez esté en ces quartiers-là, ie n'auois point l'honneur d'y estre connu. Il est vray que ie n'affecte pas fort de l'estre de plusieurs, mais ma principale ambition est de pouuoir témoigner que ie suis auec vne entiere deuotion, &c.

ENGLISH

I am not surprised that Your Highness [IV 591] finds no learned men in the country where she is who are not wholly prepossessed by the opinions of the Schools. For I see that even in Paris, and in all the rest of Europe, there are so few others that, had I known it beforehand, I might never have had anything printed.

Still, I have this consolation: although I am sure that many have not lacked the will to attack me, no one has yet entered the lists. I even receive compliments from the Jesuit Fathers, whom I have always believed would feel the most concerned by the publication of a new philosophy, and would be the least likely to forgive me for it if they thought they could rightly fault anything in it.

I count among my obligations to Your Highness the promise she made to the Duke of Brunswick at Wolfenbüttel to get him my writings; for I am sure that, before you had been in those parts, I did not have the honor of being known there. It is true that I do not much seek to be known by many; but my chief ambition is to be able to show that I am, with complete devotion, etc.

1647

Exile in Germany
From Berlin and Crossen, Elisabeth follows Descartes' quarrels at Leiden; he tells her of his new correspondence with Queen Christina.

ELISABETH TO DESCARTES, 21 FEBRUARY 1647

FRENCH

AT IV 618 **ELISABETH** Monsieur Descartes,

I'estime la ioye & la santé autant que vous le faites, quoy que i'y prefere vostre amitié aussi bien que la vertu, puisque c'est principalement de celle-là que ie tiens l'vne & l'autre, ioint à la satisfaction d'esprit qui surpasse encore la ioye, m'ayant enseigné le moyen d'en auoir. Ie ne pouuois non plus manquer en la resolution que l'auois prise de n'vser point de remede pour la petite incommodité qui me restoit, puisqu'elle a rencontré vostre approbation.

Ie suis à cette heure si bien guerie de ces apostemes, que ie ne crois pas auoir besoin de prendre des medicamens pour purger le sang au printems, m'ayant assez dechargé par là de mauuaises humeurs, & exemtée, à ce que ie crois, des fluxions que le froid & les poëles m'auroient donné autrement.

Ma sœur Henriette a eslé si malade que nous l'auons pensé perdre. C'est ce qui m'a empesché de respondre plutost à votre derniere, m'obligeant d'estre tousiours aupres d'elle. Depuis qu'elle se porte mieux, nous auons esté obligés de suiure la Reine Mere de Suede, tous les iours en IV 619 trainau, & les soirs aux festins & aux bals, qui sont des diuertissements tres-incommodes a ceux qui s'en peuuent donner de meilleurs, mais qui incommodent moins, lorsqu'on le fait pour & auec des personnes desquels on n'a point suiet de se méfier. C'est pourquoy i'ay plus de complaisance icy que ie n'auois à La Haye.

AT IV 619 Ie serois toutefois plus aise de pouuoir employer mon tems à la lecture du liure de Regius & de vos sentiments là-dessus. Si ie ne retourne à La Haye l'esté qui vient, comme ie n'en puis respondre, quoy que ie n'ay point

ENGLISH

ELISABETH Monsieur Descartes,

I value joy and health as much as you do, though I prefer your friendship to them, as I do virtue; for it is chiefly from your friendship that I have both, together with the contentment of mind that surpasses even joy, since you taught me the means of having it. Nor could I have been wrong in the resolution I had taken not to use any remedy for the small complaint that remained, since it has met with your approval.

I am now so thoroughly cured of those abscesses that I do not think I need to take medicines to purge the blood in spring. They have rid me well enough of bad humors, and spared me, I believe, the catarrhs that the cold and the stoves would otherwise have given me.

My sister Henriette has been so ill that we thought we would lose her. That is what kept me from answering your last letter sooner, since it obliged me to be constantly at her side. Since she has been better, we have had to accompany the Queen Mother of Sweden, every day in IV 619 sleighs, and in the evenings at banquets and balls. These are very tiresome diversions for those who can give themselves better ones, but they are less tiresome when one takes part in them for and with people one has no reason to distrust. That is why I am more accommodating here than I was at The Hague.[1]

I would nevertheless be happier to spend my time reading Regius's book and your views on it. I may not return to The Hague next summer; I cannot answer for it, though I have not changed my resol-

1 Henriette Marie (1626–1651), Elisabeth's younger sister. The Queen Mother is Maria Eleonora of Brandenburg, widow of Gustavus Adolphus and mother of Queen Christina.

FRENCH

change de resolution, parce que cela depend en partie de la volonté d'autruy & des affaires publiques, ie tascheray de me faire venir celuy-là par les vaisseaux qui vont d'Amsterdam a Hambourg, & espere que vous me ferez la faueur de m'enuoyer ceux ci par l'ordinaire.

Toutes les fois que ie lis vos escrits, ie ne saurois m'imaginer que vous pouuez, en effet, vous repentir de les auoir fait imprimer, puisqu'il est impossible qu'enfin ils ne soient receus & apportent de l'vtilité au public.

I'ay rencontré depuis peu icy vn seul homme qui en auoit veu quelque chose. C'est vn docteur en medecine, nommé Weis, fort sauant aussi. Il m'a dit que Bacon luy a premierement rendu suspecte la philosophie d'Aristote, & que vostre methode la luy a fait entierement reietter, & l'a conuaincu de la circulation du sang, qui détruit tous les anciens principes de leur medecine ; c'est pourquoy il auoüe d'y auoir consenti à regret.

Ie luy ay presté a cette [IV 620] heure vos Principes, desquels il m'a promis de me dire ses obiections : s'il en trouue, & qu'ils en meritent la peine, ie vous les enuoiray, afin que vous puissez iuger de la capacité de celuy que ie trouue estre le plus raisonnable entre les doctes de ce lieu, puisqu'il est capable de gouster vostre raisonnement ; mais ie m'asseure que personne ne le sauroit estre, de vous estimer à vn plus haut point que fait

AT IV 620 Vostre tres-affectionnée amie à vous seruir, Élisabeth.
Monsieur Descartes.

ENGLISH

ution, because it depends partly on the will of others and on public affairs. In that case I shall try to have his book sent to me by the ships that go from Amsterdam to Hamburg, and I hope you will do me the favor of sending me your views by the regular post.

Every time I read your writings, I cannot imagine that you can really regret having had them printed, since it is impossible that they should not in the end be accepted and bring benefit to the public.

I have recently met here a single man who had seen something of them. He is a doctor of medicine named Weis, and very learned too. He told me that Bacon first made him suspicious of Aristotle's philosophy, and that your method made him reject it entirely and convinced him of the circulation of the blood, which destroys all the ancient principles of their medicine; which is why he admits that he accepted it reluctantly.[2]

I have [IV 620] now lent him your *Principles*, on which he has promised to give me his objections. If he finds any, and they are worth the trouble, I shall send them to you, so that you can judge the ability of the man I find the most reasonable among the learned of this place, since he is capable of appreciating your reasoning. But I am sure that no one could be reasonable enough to esteem you more highly than does

Your most affectionate friend, always at your service, Elisabeth. Monsieur Descartes.

DESCARTES TO ELISABETH, MARCH 1647

Descartes plans a journey to France and complains that Regius has copied and distorted his work.

FRENCH

AT IV 624 **DESCARTES** Madame,

La satisfaction que l'aprens que vostre Altesse reçoit au lieu où elle est, fait que ie n'ose souhaiter son retour, bien que i'aye beaucoup de peine à m'en empescher, principalement à cette heure que ie me trouue à la Haye. Et pour ce que ie remarque, par vostre lettre du 21 Feurier, qu'on ne vous doit point attendre icy auant la fin de l'esté, ie me propose de faire vn voyage en France pour mes affaires particulieres, auec dessein de reuenir vers l'hyuer ; & ie ne partiray point de deux mois, afin que ie

ENGLISH

DESCARTES Madame,

The satisfaction that I learn Your Highness enjoys where she is makes me not dare to wish for her return, although I find it very hard to keep from doing so, especially now that I am at The Hague. And since I note from your letter of 21 February that you are not to be expected here before the end of summer, I intend to make a journey to France on my private affairs, planning to return toward

2 Francis Bacon (1561–1626), English philosopher and critic of Aristotelian science.

FRENCH

puisse auparauant auoir l'honneur de receuoir les commandemens de vostre Altesse, lesquels auront tousiours plus de pouuoir sur moy qu'aucune autre chose qui soit au monde.

Ie louë Dieu de ce que vous auez maintenant vne [IV 625] parfaite santé ; mais ie vous supplie de me pardonner, si i'ose contredire à vostre opinion, touchant ce qui est de ne point vser de remedes, pour ce que le mal que vous auiez aux mains est passé ; car il est à craindre, aussi bien pour vostre Altesse que pour Madame vostre sœur, que les humeurs qui se purgeoient en cette façon ayent esté arrestées par le froid de la saison, & qu'au printemps elles ne ramenent le mesme mal, ou vous mettent en danger de quelqu'autre maladie, si vous n'y remediez par vne bonne diete, n'vsant que de viandes & de breuuages qui rafraichissent le sang, & qui purgent sans aucun effort.

[AT IV 625] Car, pour les drogues, soit des Apoticaires, soit des Empyriques, ie les ay en si mauuaise estime, que ie n'oserois iamais conseiller à personne de s'en seruir.

Ie ne sçay ce que ie puis auoir écrit à vostre Altesse, touchant le liure de Regius, qui vous donne occasion de vouloir sçauoir ce que i'y ay obserué ; peut-estre que ie n'en ay pas dit mon opinion, afin de ne pas preuenir vostre iugement, en cas que vous eussiez déia le liure ; mais, puis que l'aprens que vous ne l'auez point encore, ie vous diray icy ingenuëment, que ie n'estime pas qu'il merite que vostre Altesse se donne la peine de le lire.

Il ne contient rien, touchant la Physique, sinon mes assertions mises en mauuais ordre & sans leurs vrayes preuues, en sorte qu'elles paroissent paradoxes, & que ce qui est mis au commencement ne peut estre prouué que par ce qui est vers la fin.

Il n'y a inseré presque rien du tout qui soit [IV 626] de luy, & peu de choses de ce que ie n'ay point fait imprimer ;

[AT IV 626] mais il n'a pas laissé de manquer à ce qu'il me deuoit, en ce que, faisant profession d'amitié auec moy, & sçachant bien que ie ne desirois point que ce que i'auois écrit, touchant la description de l'animal, fust diuulgué, iusques-là que ie n'auois pas voulu luy monstrer, & m'en estois excusé sur ce qu'il ne se pourroit empescher d'en parler à ses disciples, s'il l'auoit vû, il n'a pas laissé de s'en aproprier plusieurs choses, & ayant trouué moyen d'en auoir copie, sans mon sceu, il en a particulierement transcrit tout l'endroit où ie parle du mouuement des

ENGLISH

winter. I shall not leave for two months, so that I may first have the honor of receiving Your Highness's commands, which will always have more power over me than anything else in the world.

I praise God that you now have [IV 625] perfect health. But I beg you to forgive me if I dare to contradict your opinion about not using remedies because the trouble you had in your hands has passed. For it is to be feared, for Your Highness as well as for your sister, that the humors which were purging themselves in that way have been checked by the cold of the season, and that in spring they may bring back the same trouble, or put you in danger of some other illness, unless you remedy it with a good diet, taking only foods and drinks that cool the blood and purge without any strain.

For as for drugs, whether from apothecaries or from empirical healers, I have so poor an opinion of them that I would never dare advise anyone to use them.

I do not know what I may have written to Your Highness about Regius's book that gives you occasion to want to know what I observed in it. Perhaps I did not state my opinion of it, so as not to forestall your judgment in case you already had the book. But since I learn that you do not have it yet, I shall tell you candidly here that I do not think it deserves Your Highness's taking the trouble to read it.

As regards physics, it contains nothing but my assertions put in bad order and without their true proofs, so that they look like paradoxes, and what is put at the beginning can be proved only by what comes near the end.

He has put in almost nothing at all that is [IV 626] his own, and few things from what I have not had printed;

but he has nonetheless failed in what he owed me. He professed friendship with me, and knew full well that I did not wish what I had written on the description of the animal to be divulged—so much so that I had refused to show it to him, excusing myself on the ground that, if he had seen it, he could not help speaking of it to his students. Yet he appropriated many things from it. Having found a way to get a copy of it without my knowledge, he transcribed in particular the whole passage where

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muscles, & où ie considere, par exemple, deux des muscles qui meuuent l'œil, de quoy il a deux ou trois pages, qu'il a repetées deux fois, de mot à mot, en son liure, tant cela luy a plû.

Et toutesfois, il n'a pas entendu ce qu'il écriuoit ; car il en a obmis le principal, qui est que les esprits animaux qui coulent du cerueau dans les muscles, ne peuuent retourner par les mesmes conduits par où ils viennent, sans laquelle obseruation tout ce qu'il écrit ne vaut rien ; & pource qu'il n'auoit pas ma figure, il en a fait vne qui monstre clairement son ignorance. On m'a dit qu'il a encore à present vn autre liure de Medecine sous la presse, où ie m'attens qu'il aura mis tout le reste de mon écrit, selon qu'il aura pû le digerer.

Il en eust sans doute pris beaucoup d'autres choses ; mais i'ay sceu qu'il n'en auoit eu vne copie, que lors que son liure s'acheuoit d'imprimer. IV 627 Mais, comme il suit aueuglement ce qu'il croit estre de mes opinions, en tout ce qui regarde la Physique ou la Medecine, encore mesme qu'il ne les entende pas ; ainsi il y contredit aueuglement, en tout ce qui regarde la Metaphysique, de quoy ie l'auois prié de n'en rien écrire, pour ce que cela ne sert point à son suiet, & que i'estois assuré qu'il ne pouuoit en rien écrire qui ne fust mal.

AT IV 627 Mais ie n'ay rien obtenu de luy, sinon que, n'ayant pas dessein de me satisfaire en cela, il ne s'est plus soucié de me desobliger aussi en autre chose.

Ie ne lairray pas de porter demain à Mademoiselle la P. S. vn exemplaire de son liure, dont le titre est *Henrici Regij fundamenta Physices*, auec vn autre petit liure de mon bon amy Monsieur de Hogelande, qui a fait tout le contraire de Regius, en ce que Regius n'a rien écrit qui ne soit pris de moy, & qui ne soit auec cela contre moy, au lieu que l'autre n'a rien écrit qui soit proprement de moy (car ie ne croy pas mesme qu'il ait iamais bien lû mes écrits), & toutesfois il n'a rien qui ne soit pour moy, en ce qu'il a suiuy les IV 628 mesmes principes. Ie prieray Mad. L.

AT IV 628

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I speak of the movement of the muscles, and where I consider, for example, two of the muscles that move the eye. Of this he has two or three pages, which he has repeated twice, word for word, in his book, so much did it please him.[3]

And yet he did not understand what he was writing; for he left out the main point, which is that the animal spirits that flow from the brain into the muscles cannot return through the same channels by which they came. Without that observation, everything he writes is worthless. And because he did not have my figure, he made one of his own that plainly shows his ignorance. I am told that he now has another book, on medicine, in the press, in which I expect he will have put all the rest of my writing, as far as he has been able to digest it.

He would no doubt have taken many other things from it; but I have learned that he got a copy only when his book was nearly finished printing. IV 627 But just as he blindly follows what he believes to be my opinions in everything concerning physics or medicine, even when he does not understand them, so he blindly contradicts them in everything concerning metaphysics—a subject on which I had begged him to write nothing, because it does not serve his purpose, and because I was sure he could write nothing on it that would not be bad.

But I obtained nothing from him, except that, having no intention of satisfying me in this, he no longer cared about disobliging me in other matters as well.

I shall nonetheless take to Princess Sophie tomorrow a copy of his book, whose title is *Henrici Regij fundamenta Physices*, together with another small book by my good friend Monsieur van Hogelande, who has done the exact opposite of Regius. Regius has written nothing that is not taken from me and is not, at the same time, against me; whereas the other has written nothing that is properly mine (for I do not even think he has ever read my writings carefully), and yet there is nothing in it that is not for me, in that he has followed the IV 628 same principles. I shall ask Madame L.[4]

3 Descartes' unpublished writings on the animal body, related to his *Treatise on Man*.
4 Sophie (1630–1714), Elisabeth's youngest sister, later Electress of Hanover. Cornelis van Hogelande was a Catholic physician at Leiden, author of *Cogitationes* (1646).

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de faire ioindre ces deux liures, qui ne sont pas gros, auec les premiers paquets qu'il luy plaira enuoyer par Hambourg, à quoy ie ioindray la version Françoise de mes Meditations, si ie les puis auoir auant que de partir d'icy, car il y a desia assez long-temps qu'on m'a mandé que l'impression en est acheuée. Ie suis, &c.

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to have these two books, which are not large, put in with the first packets she is pleased to send by way of Hamburg. I shall add to them the French version of my *Meditations*, if I can get it before leaving here, for I was told some time ago that the printing was finished. I am, etc.

ELISABETH TO DESCARTES, 11 APRIL 1647

Elisabeth regrets his absence, condemns Regius's ingratitude and plans a stay at Crossen.

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ELISABETH Monsieur Descartes,

Ie n'ay point regretté mon absence de La Haye, que depuis que vous me mandez y auoir esté, & que ie me sens priuée de la satisfaction que ie soulois auoir en vostre conuersation, pendant le seiour que vous y faisiez ; il me sembloit que i'en partois toutes les fois plus raisonnable, & encore que le repos que ie trouue icy, parmy des personnes qui m'affectionnent & m'estiment beaucoup plus que ie ne [IV 629] le merite, surpasse tous les biens que ie puisse auoir ailleurs, il n'approche point de celuy-là, que ie ne me saurois neantmoins promettre en quelques mois, ni en predire le nombre, puisque ie ne vois point que Madame l'Electrice, ma Tante, soit en humeur de permettre mon retour, & que ie n'ay point suiet de l'en presser, auant que M.

[AT IV 629] son fils soit auprés d'elle, ce qui, selon qu'il demande luy mesme, ne sera qu'au mois de septembre ; & peut-estre que ses affaires l'obligeront de venir plutost ou de s'arrester plus longtemps. Ainsi ie puis esperer, mais non pas m'asseurer que l'auray le bonheur de vous reuoir au temps que vous auez proposé vostre retour de France. Ie souhaite que vous puissiez rencontrer en ce voyage le succes que vous y demandez, & que, si ie n'auois experimenté la constance de vos resolutions, ie craindrois encore que vos amis ne vous obligeront d'y demeurer.

Ie vous supplie cependant de donner vne addresse à ma sœur Sophie, afin que ie puisse auoir quelquefois de vos nouuelles, qui ne laisseront pas de m'estre agreables, combien qu'elles seront longtemps en chemin.

Apres Pasques, nous irons à Crossen, qui est le domaine de Madame ma Tante, sur les frontieres de Silesie, pour y demeurer trois semaines ou vn mois, où la solitude [IV 630] me donnera plus de loisir pour la lecture, & ie l'employeray tout aux liures que vous auez eu la bonté de

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ELISABETH Monsieur Descartes,

I had not regretted my absence from The Hague until you wrote that you had been there, and I felt myself deprived of the satisfaction I used to have in your conversation while you stayed there. It seemed to me that I came away more reasonable each time. And although the peace I find here, among people who are fond of me and esteem me far more than I [IV 629] deserve, surpasses all the goods I could have elsewhere, it does not come close to that one. Yet I cannot promise myself that within a few months, nor predict how many, since I do not see that Madame the Electress, my aunt, is inclined to allow my return, and I have no reason to press her until the Elector,[5]

her son, is with her, which, as he himself requests, will not be before September; and perhaps his affairs will oblige him to come sooner or to stay away longer. So I may hope, but cannot be sure, that I shall have the happiness of seeing you again at the time you have proposed for your return from France. I wish you the success you seek on this journey; and had I not experienced the constancy of your resolutions, I would still fear that your friends would make you stay there.

Meanwhile I beg you to give an address to my sister Sophie, so that I may sometimes have news of you, which will be no less welcome to me for spending a long time on the road.

After Easter we shall go to Crossen, my aunt's estate on the borders of Silesia, to stay three weeks or a month. There the solitude [IV 630] will give me more leisure for reading, and I shall devote it all to

5 Elisabeth Charlotte of the Palatinate (1597–1660), Dowager Electress of Brandenburg and sister of Elisabeth's father; her son was Frederick William, Elector of Brandenburg.

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m'enuoyer, pour lesquels ie vous prie de receuoir icy mes remercimens. I'ay eu plus d'enuie de voir le liure de Regius, pour ce que ie say qu'il y a mis du vostre, que pour ce qui y est du sien.	the books you have been kind enough to send me, for which I ask you to accept my thanks here. I was more eager to see Regius's book because I know he has put some of your work in it than for what is his own.[6]
AT IV 630 Puisqu'outre qu'il va vn peu vite, il s'est serui de l'assistance du docteur Ionson, à ce que luy mesme m'a dit, qui est capable de l'embrouiller encore dauantage, ayant l'esprit assez confus de soy, & il ne luy donne point la patience de comprendre les choses qu'il a leu ou entendu. Mais quoy que i excuserois toutes les autres fautes dudit Regius, ie ne saurois lui pardonner l'ingratitude dont il vse enuers vous, & le tiens tout à fait lasche, puisque vostre conuersation ne luy a pu donner d'autres sentiments.	For besides going rather fast, he has made use of the help of Doctor Jonson, as he himself told me—a man capable of muddling him still further, having a rather confused mind of his own, and one who does not give him the patience to understand the things he has read or heard. But though I would excuse all the other faults of the said Regius, I cannot forgive him the ingratitude he shows toward you, and I consider him thoroughly contemptible, since your conversation could not give him better sentiments.
Monsieur Hogelant aura asseurement bien reussi en ce qu'il a fait imprimer, puisqu'il y a suiui vos principes, que ie ne saurois icy faire entendre a pas vn des doctes de Berlin, tant ils sont preoccupés de l'escole. Et celuy que ie nommois en ma derniere ne m'a point veu, depuis que ie luy ay presté vostre physique, qui est vn signe asseuré que tout le monde se porte fort bien icy, puisqu'il est vn des medecins de la maison.	Monsieur Hogelande will surely have done well in what he has had printed, since he has followed your principles in it—principles I cannot get a single one of the learned men of Berlin to understand, so prepossessed are they by the Schools. And the man I named in my last letter has not seen me since I lent him your physics, which is a sure sign that everyone here is in very good health, since he is one of the household physicians.
Lorsque ie vous disois ne me point vouloir seruir de remedes pour les apostemes que i'ay eu en l'automne, ientendois de ceux qui viennent de l'apotiquaire, puisque les herbes rafraichissantes & qui purgent le sang me seruent d'aliment au printems, n'ayant d'ordinaire d'appetit en IV 631 cette saison pour autre chose. Ie pretens aussi me faire seigner en peu de iours, puisque i'en ay pris vne mauuaise coutume, que ie ne saurois changer a cette heure sans en estre incommodée du mal de teste. I'aurois peur de vous en donner par ce fascheux recit de moy mesme, si vostre soin de ma santé ne m'y auoit porté.	When I told you I did not want to use remedies for the abscesses I had in the autumn, I meant those that come from the apothecary; for cooling herbs that purge the blood are my food in spring, as I usually have no appetite for IV 631 anything else in that season. I also intend to be bled in a few days, since I have fallen into a bad habit of it that I cannot change now without suffering headaches. I would be afraid of giving you one with this tedious account of myself, had your care for my health not led me to it.
AT IV 631 Il me donneroit encore beaucoup de vanité, si i'en pouuois trouuer d'autre cause que l'extreme bonté que vous auez pour	That care would also make me very vain, if I could find any other cause for it than the extreme kindness you have for
Vostre tres-affectionnée amie à vous seruir, Élisabeth. De Berlin, le 11/1 d'Auril.	Your most affectionate friend, always at your service, Elisabeth. Berlin, 11/1 April.

6 Now Krosno Odrzańskie, in western Poland, on the Oder.

DESCARTES TO ELISABETH, 10 MAY 1647

Descartes reports the Leiden theologians' charges of blasphemy and considers leaving Holland.

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AT V 15 **DESCARTES** Encore que ie pourray trouuer des occasions qui me conuieront à demeurer en France, lors que i'y seray, il n'y en aura toutesfois aucune qui ait la force de m'empescher que ie ne reuienne auant l'hyuer, pouruû que la vie & la santé me demeurent, puis que la lettre que i'ay eu l'honneur de receuoir de vostre Altesse me fait esperer que vous retournerez à la Haye vers la fin de l'esté.

Mais ie puis dire que c'est la principale raison qui me fait preferer la demeure de ce païs à celle des autres ; car, pour le repos que i'y estois cy-deuant venu chercher, ie preuoy que d'oresnauant ie ne l'y pourray auoir si entier que ie desirerois, à cause que, V 16 n'ayant pas encore tiré toute la satisfaction que ie deuois auoir des iniures que i'ay receuës à Vtrech, ie voy qu'elles en attirent d'autres, & qu'il y a vne troupe de Theologiens, gens d'école, qui semblent auoir fait vne ligue ensemble pour tascher à m'oprimer par calomnies ; en sorte que, pendant qu'ils machinent tout ce qu'ils peuuent pour tascher de me nuire, si ie ne veillois aussi pour me défendre, il leur seroit aysé de me faire quelques affronts.

AT V 16 La preuue de cecy est que, depuis trois ou quatre mois, vn certain Regent du College des Théologiens de Leyde, nommé Reuius, a fait disputer quatre diuerses Theses contre moy, pour peruertir le sens de mes Meditations, & faire croire que i'y ay mis des choses fort absurdes, & contraires à la gloire de Dieu : comme, qu'il faut douter qu'il y ait vn Dieu ; & mesme, que ie veux qu'on nie absolument pour quelque temps qu'il y en ait vn, & choses semblables.

Mais, pource que cet homme n'est pas habile, & que mesme la pluspart de ses écoliers se mocquoient de ses médisances, les amis que i'ay à Leyde ne daignoient pas seulement m'auertir de ce qu'il faisoit, iusques à ce que d'autres Theses ont aussi eslé faites par Triglandius, leur premier professeur en Théologie, où il a mis ces mots †††.

Sur quoy mes amis ont iugé, mesme ceux qui sont aussi Théologiens, que l'intention de ces gens-là, en

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DESCARTES Although I may find occasions inviting me to stay in France once I am there, none of them will have the power to keep me from returning before winter, provided life and health remain to me, since the letter I have had the honor of receiving from Your Highness gives me hope that you will return to The Hague toward the end of summer.

But I can say that this is the chief reason that makes me prefer living in this country to living anywhere else. For as for the peace I came here to seek in the past, I foresee that from now on I shall not be able to have it as complete as I would wish. V 16 Not having yet obtained all the satisfaction I ought to have had for the injuries I received at Utrecht, I see that they draw others after them, and that there is a band of theologians, men of the Schools, who seem to have formed a league to try to crush me with slanders. So, while they plot everything they can to harm me, if I were not also on guard to defend myself, it would be easy for them to subject me to some affronts.[7]

The proof of this is that, over the last three or four months, a certain Regent of the Theological College at Leiden, named Revius, has had four different sets of theses disputed against me, in order to pervert the meaning of my *Meditations* and make people believe that I put very absurd things in them, contrary to the glory of God: for instance, that one must doubt whether there is a God, and even that I want people to deny absolutely, for a time, that there is one, and similar things.[8]

But because this man is not able, and most of his students even mocked his slanders, my friends in Leiden did not so much as deign to warn me of what he was doing—until other theses were also produced by Triglandius, their first professor of theology, in which he put these words †††.[9]

On which my friends, even those who are themselves theologians, judged that these people's in-

7 The quarrel of 1642–1645 with the theologian Voetius and the Utrecht authorities.
8 Jacobus Revius (1586–1658), Calvinist theologian and regent of the States' College at Leiden.
9 Jacobus Triglandius (1583–1654), Leiden theologian. The daggers mark a quotation omitted in the source; the next sentence shows it charged Descartes with blasphemy.

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m'accusant d'vn si grand crime comme est [V 17] le blaspheme, n'estoit pas moindre que de tascher à faire condamner mes opinions comme tres-pernicieuses, premierement, par quelque Synode où ils seroient les plus forts, & ensuite, de tascher aussi à me faire faire des affronts par les Magistrats, qui croyent en eux ; & que, pour obuier à cela, il estoit besoin que ie m'oposasse à leurs desseins ce qui est cause que, depuis huit iours, i'ay écrit vne longue lettre aux Curateurs de l'Academie de Leyde, pour demander iustice contre les calomnies de ces deux Theologiens.

AT V 17 Ie ne sçay point encore la réponse que i'en auray ; mais, selon que ie connois l'humeur des personnes de ce païs, & combien ils reuerent, non pas la probité & la vertu, mais la barbe, la voix & le sourcil des Theologiens, en sorte que ceux qui sont les plus effrontez, & qui sçauent crier le plus haut, ont icy le plus de pouuoir (comme ordinairement en tous les états populaires), encore qu'ils ayent le moins de raison, ie n'en attens que quelques emplastres, qui, n'ostant point la cause du mal, ne seruiront qu'à le rendre plus long & plus importun ; au lieu que, de mon costé, ie pense estre obligé de faire mon mieux, pour tirer vne entiere satisfaction de ces iniures, & aussì, par mesme occasion de celles d'Vtrecht ; & en cas que ie ne puisse obtenir iustice, comme ie preuoy qu'il sera tres mal-aysé que ie l'obtienne), de me retirer tout à fait de ces Prouinces.

Mais, pource que toutes choses se font icy fort lentement, ie m'assure qu'il se passera plus d'vn an, auant que cela arriue.

Ie ne prendrois pas la liberté d'entretenir vostre [V 18] Altesse de ces petites choses, si la faueur qu'elle me fait de vouloir lire les liures de Monsieur Hoguelande & de Regius, à cause de ce qu'ils ont mis qui me regarde, ne me faisoit croire que vous n'aurez pas des-agreable de sçauoir de moy-mesme ce qui me touche ; outre que l'obeïssance & le respect, que ie vous dois, m'oblige à vous rendre conte de mes actions.

AT V 18 Ie loüe Dieu de ce que ce Docteur, à qui vostre Altesse a presté le liure de mes Principes. a esté longtemps sans vous retourner voir, puis que c'est vne marque qu'il n'y a point du tout de malades à la cour de Madame l'Electrice, & il semble qu'on a vn degré de santé plus parfait, quand elle est generale au lieu où l'on demeure, que lors qu'on est enuironné de malades. Ce medecin aura eu d'autant plus de loisir de lire le liure qu'il a plù à vostre Altesse de

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tention, in accusing me of so great a crime as [V 17] blasphemy, was nothing less than to try to have my opinions condemned as highly pernicious—first by some synod where they would be the strongest, and then to try to have the magistrates, who trust them, subject me to affronts as well—and that, to prevent this, I needed to oppose their designs. That is why, a week ago, I wrote a long letter to the Curators of the University of Leiden, asking for justice against the slanders of these two theologians.

I do not yet know what answer I shall get. But I know the temper of the people of this country, and how much they revere—not probity and virtue, but the beards, the voices and the frowns of theologians—so that those who are most brazen and can shout the loudest have the most power here (as usually happens in all popular states), even though they have the least reason. So I expect nothing from it but a few plasters, which, not removing the cause of the trouble, will only serve to make it longer and more irksome. Whereas I, for my part, think I am obliged to do my best to obtain full satisfaction for these injuries, and at the same time for those of Utrecht; and, if I cannot obtain justice (as I foresee it will be very hard for me to do), to withdraw altogether from these Provinces.

But because everything is done very slowly here, I am sure more than a year will pass before that happens.

I would not take the liberty of entertaining Your [V 18] Highness with these small matters, if the favor you do me in wishing to read the books of Monsieur Hogelande and of Regius, because of what they have put in them that concerns me, did not lead me to believe that you will not be displeased to learn from me myself what touches me. Besides, the obedience and respect I owe you oblige me to give you an account of my actions.

I praise God that this doctor, to whom Your Highness lent my *Principles*, went a long time without coming back to see you, since that is a sign that there are no sick people at all at the court of Madame the Electress. And it seems that one enjoys a more perfect degree of health when health is general in the place where one lives than when one is surrounded by the sick. This physician will have had all the more leisure to read the book Your

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luy prester, & vous en aura pù mieux dire depuis son iugement.

Pendant que i'écris cecy, ie reçois des lettres de la Haye & de Leyde, qui m'aprennent que l'assemblée des Curateurs a esté differée, en sorte qu'on ne leur a point encore donné mes lettres ; & ie voy qu'on fait d'vne broüillerie vne grande affaire. On dit que les Theologiens en veulent estre iuges, c'est à dire me mettre icy en vne inquisition plus seuere que ne fut iamais celle d'Espagne, & me rendre l'aduersaire de leur Religion. Sur quoy on voudroit que l'employasse [V 19] le credit de Monsieur l'Ambassadeur de France, & l'autorité de Monsieur le Prince d'Orange, non pas pour obtenir iustice, mais pour interceder & empescher que mes ennemis ne passent outre.

AT V 19 Ie croy pourtant que ie ne suiuray point cét auis ; ie demanderay seulement iustice ; & si ie ne la puis obtenir, il me semble que le meilleur sera que ie me prepare tout doucement à la retraite. Mais, quoy que ie pense ou que ie fasse, & en quelque lieu du monde que i'aille, il n'y aura iamais rien qui me soit plus cher que d'obeïr à vos commandemens, & de témoigner auec combien de zele ie suis, &c.

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Highness was pleased to lend him, and will since have been better able to give you his judgment of it.

As I write this, I receive letters from The Hague and Leiden telling me that the meeting of the Curators has been postponed, so that my letters have not yet been given to them; and I see that a squabble is being turned into a great affair. It is said that the theologians want to be its judges—that is, to put me here under an inquisition more severe than that of Spain ever was, and to make me out to be the adversary of their religion. On which people would like me to use [V 19] the credit of the French Ambassador and the authority of the Prince of Orange, not to obtain justice, but to intercede and prevent my enemies from going further.[10]

I believe, however, that I shall not follow this advice. I shall ask only for justice; and if I cannot obtain it, it seems to me that the best course will be to prepare quietly for retreat. But whatever I think or do, and wherever in the world I go, nothing will ever be dearer to me than obeying your commands and showing with what zeal I am, etc.

ELISABETH TO DESCARTES, MAY 1647

Elisabeth urges him not to leave Holland and describes the country around Crossen.

FRENCH

AT V 46 **ELISABETH** Monsieur Descartes,

Il y a trois semaines qu'on m'a enuoyé le corollaire impertinent du professeur Triglandius, y aioutant que ceux qui ont disputé pour vous ne furent point vaincus par raison, mais contraints de se taire par le tumulte qui s'excita en l'Academie, & que le professeur Stuard (homme de grande lecture, mais d'vn iugement fort mediocre),, faisoit dessein de refuter vos Meditations Metaphysiques.

Ie croyois bien que cela vous donneroit la même peine qu'a fait la calomnie de l'écolier de Voetius, mais non pas resolution de quitter l'Hollande, comme vous le témoignez en vostre lettre du 10e de ce mois, puisqu'il est indigne de vous de ceder la place à vos ennemis, & que cela paroitroit comme vne espece de bannissement, qui vous apporteroit plus de preiudice que tout ce que

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ELISABETH Monsieur Descartes,

Three weeks ago I was sent Professor Triglandius's impertinent corollary, with the addition that those who argued for you were not defeated by reason but forced into silence by the uproar that broke out in the University, and that Professor Stuart (a man of wide reading but very mediocre judgment) was planning to refute your *Meditations*.[11]

I did think this would cause you the same distress as the slander by Voetius's student, but not a resolution to leave Holland, as you indicate in your letter of the 10th of this month. For it is unworthy of you to yield the field to your enemies, and it would look like a kind of banishment, which would do you more harm than anything the gen-

10 William II of Orange, stadtholder since the death of his father Frederick Henry in March 1647.
11 Adam Stuart (1591–1654), Scottish-born professor of philosophy at Leiden.

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	Messieurs les V 47 theologiens peuuent faire contre vous, puisque la calomnie n'est point considerable en vn lieu où ceux qui gouuernent ne s'en peuuent exemter eux-mesmes, ni punir ceux qui les font.	tlemen V 47 theologians can do against you. Slander counts for nothing in a place where those who govern cannot escape it themselves, nor punish those who commit it.
AT V 47	Le peuple y paie cette grande contribution pour la seule liberté de la langue, & celle des theologiens estant priuilegiée partout ne sauroit receuoir de la restreinte en vn estat populaire. C'est pourquoi il me semble que vous auez raison d'estre content, si vous obtenez ce que vos amis en Holande vous conseillent de demander, encore que vous ne deuiez point suiure leur auis en la demande, la resolution que vous y auez prise estant mieux seante à vn homme libre & asseuré de son fait.	The people there pay those heavy taxes solely for freedom of speech; and the theologians' freedom, being privileged everywhere, could hardly be restrained in a popular state. That is why it seems to me that you are right to be content if you obtain what your friends in Holland advise you to ask for, even though you should not follow their advice in making the request; the resolution you have taken on that point is more fitting for a free man, sure of his cause.
	Mais, si vous continuez celle de quitter le pays, ie relascherois aussi celle que i'auois prise d'y retourner, si les interêts de ma maison ne m'y rappellent, & attendray plutost icy que l'issue des traités de Munster ou quelque autre conioncture me ramene en ma patrie.	But if you persist in your resolution to leave the country, I would also give up mine to return there, unless the interests of my house call me back; and I would rather wait here until the outcome of the Münster treaties, or some other turn of events, brings me back to my homeland.[12]
	Le douaire de Madame l'Electrice est en vne situation qui ne reuient pas mal à ma complexion, de deux degre plus proche du soleil que Berlin, entouré de la riuiere de l'Oder. & la terre y est extremement fertile. Le peuple s'y est desia mieux remis de la guerre que celui-cy, encore que les armées y ayent esté plus longtemps & fait plus de dommage par le feu. Il y a maintenant en quelques villages vne si grande quantité de ces mouches qu'on nomme cousins, que plusieurs hommes & animaux en sont étouffés ou deuenus sourds & aueugles. Ils y viennent en forme de nue & s'en vont de mesme.	Madame the Electress's dower estate is in a situation that suits my constitution well: two degrees nearer the sun than Berlin, surrounded by the river Oder, and the soil there is extremely fertile. The people there have already recovered from the war better than those here, even though the armies were there longer and did more damage by fire. There is now in some villages such a quantity of those flies called gnats that many men and animals have been suffocated by them or made deaf and blind. They come in the form of a cloud and go away in the same way.
	Les habitants croient que cela V 48 prouient de sortilege ; mais ie l'attribue au debordement extraordinaire de la riuiere de l'Oder, qui a esté cette année iusqu'à la fin d'auril, & il y faisoit desia grand chaud.	The inhabitants believe that this V 48 comes from witchcraft; but I attribute it to the extraordinary flooding of the river Oder, which lasted this year until the end of April, when it was already very hot.
AT V 48	I'ay receu, passé deux iours, les liures de M. Hogeland & de Roy ; mais les depesches m'ont empesché d'y lire autre chose que le commencement du premier, où i'estimerois fort les preuues de l'exislence de Dieu, si vous ne m'auiez accoutumée de les demander des principes de nostre connoissance.	Two days ago I received the books of Monsieur Hogelande and of Le Roy; but dispatches have kept me from reading anything except the beginning of the first. There I would greatly admire the proofs of the existence of God, had you not accustomed me to ask for them from the principles of our knowledge.[13]

12 The peace negotiations at Münster, part of the Peace of Westphalia (1648) that ended the Thirty Years War; the restoration of the Palatinate to Elisabeth's family was at stake.
13 Le Roy is the French form of Regius's name (Hendrik de Roy).

FRENCH

ENGLISH

Mais les comparaisons, par lesquelles il montre comment l'ame est vnie au corps & contrainte de s'accommoder à sa forme, d'auoir part au bien & au mal qui luy arriue, ne me satisfont pas encore ; puisque la matiere subtile, qu'il suppose estre enueloppée en vne plus grossiere par la chaleur du feu ou de la fermentation, est neanmoins corporelle & reçoit sa pression ou son mouuement par la quantité & la superficie de ses petites parties, ce que l'ame, qui est immaterielle, ne sauroit faire.

But the comparisons by which he shows how the soul is united to the body, and constrained to adapt itself to its form and to share in the good and evil that befall it, do not yet satisfy me. For the subtle matter, which he supposes to be enveloped in a coarser one by the heat of fire or of fermentation, is nonetheless corporeal, and receives its pressure or motion through the quantity and surface of its small parts—which the soul, being immaterial, cannot do.

Mon frere Philippe, qui m'a fait tenir les dits liures, me mande qu'il y en a deux autres en chemin ; & puisque ie n'en ay point fait venir, ie crois que ce seront vos Meditations & vos Principes de philosophie en françois. I'ay principalement de l'impatience pour le dernier, puisque vous y auez aiouté quelque chose qui n'est point au latin, ce que ie pense sera au 4me liure, puisque les trois autres paroissent aussi clairs qu'il est possible de les rendre.

My brother Philip, who forwarded those books to me, writes that two more are on the way; and since I have not sent for any, I think they will be your *Meditations* and your *Principles of Philosophy* in French. I am especially impatient for the latter, since you have added something to it that is not in the Latin. I think that will be in the fourth book, since the other three seem as clear as it is possible to make them.

AT V 49 Le medecin dont ie vous ay parlé autrefois, m'a dit qu'il auoit quelques obiections touchant les mineraux, mais qu'il n'oseroit vous les enuoyer, auant qu'auoir encore vne fois examiné vos principes. Mais la pratique l'empesche beaucoup. Le peuple d'icy a vne croyance extraordinaire en sa profession ; & n'estoit la grande saleté de la commune & de la noblesse, ie crois qu'il en auroit moins besoin que peuple du monde, puisque l'air y est fort pur. I'y ay aussi plus de santé que ie n'auois en Hollande. Mais ie ne voudrois pas y auoir tousiours esté, puisqu'il n'y a rien que mes liures pour m'empescher de deuenir stupide au dernier point.

The physician I spoke to you about before told me he had some objections concerning minerals, but that he would not dare send them to you before examining your principles once more. But his practice hinders him a great deal. The people here have an extraordinary faith in his profession; and were it not for the great filthiness of the common people and the nobility, I think they would need it less than any people in the world, since the air here is very pure. I am also healthier here than I was in Holland. But I would not want to have always been here, since there is nothing but my books to keep me from becoming utterly stupid.

I'y aurois vne satisfaction entiere, si ie pouuois vous témoigner l'estime que ie fais de la bonté que vous continuez d'auoir pour

I would be entirely satisfied here if I could show you the esteem I have for the kindness you continue to have for

Vostre tres affectionnée amie à vous seruir, Élisabeth. Monsieur Descartes.

Your most affectionate friend, always at your service, Elisabeth. Monsieur Descartes.

DESCARTES TO ELISABETH, 6 JUNE 1647

About to leave for France, Descartes reports his new contact with Queen Christina through Chanut.

FRENCH

ENGLISH

AT V 59 **DESCARTES** Madame,

DESCARTES Madame,

Passant par la Haye pour aller en France, puis que ie ne puis y auoir l'honneur de receuoir vos commandemens, & vous faire la reuerence, il me semble que ie suis obligé de tracer ces lignes, afin d'assurer vostre Altesse que mon

Passing through The Hague on my way to France, since I cannot have the honor of receiving your commands there and paying you my respects, I think I am obliged to write these lines, to assure

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	zele & ma deuotion ne changeront point, encore que ie change de terre. I'ay receu depuis deux iours vne lettre de Suede de Monsieur le Resident de France qui est là, où il me propose vne question de la part de la Reyne, à laquelle il m'a fait connoistre en luy monstrant ma réponse à vne autre lettre qu'il m'auoit cy-deuant enuoyée.	Your Highness that my zeal and devotion will not change, even though I change country. Two days ago I received a letter from Sweden from the French Resident there, in which he puts a question to me on the Queen's behalf. He has made me known to her by showing her my reply to another letter he had sent me earlier.[14]
	Et la façon dont il décrit cette Reyne, auec les discours qu'il raporte d'elle, me la font tellement estimer, qu'il me semble que vous seriez dignes de la conuersation l'vne de l'autre ; & qu'il y en a si peu au reste du monde qui en soient V 60 dignes, qu'il ne seroit pas mal-aisé à vostre Altesse de lier vne fort étroite amitié auec elle, & qu'outre le contentement d'esprit que vous en auriez, cela pourroit estre à desirer pour diuerses considerations.	The way he describes this Queen, and the remarks of hers that he reports, make me esteem her so highly that it seems to me you would each be worthy of the other's conversation. There are so few others in the world V 60 worthy of it that it would not be hard for Your Highness to form a very close friendship with her; and besides the contentment of mind you would have from it, this might be desirable for various reasons.
AT V 60	I'auois écrit cy-deuant à ce mien amy Resident en Suede, en répondant à vne lettre où il parloit d'elle, que ie ne trouuois pas incroyable ce qu'il m'en disoit, à cause que l'honneur que i'auois de connoistre vostre Altesse, m'auoit appris combien les personnes de grande naissance pouuoient surpasser les autres, &c. Mais ie ne me souuiens pas si c'est en la lettre qu'il lui a fait voir, ou bien en vne autre precedente ; & pour ce qu'il est vraysemblable qu'il luy fera voir doresnauant les lettres qu'il receura de moy, ie tascheray tousiours d'y mettre quelque chose qui luy donne suiet de souhaitter l'amitié de vostre Altesse, si ce n'est que vous me le deffendiez.	I had written earlier to this friend of mine, the Resident in Sweden, in reply to a letter in which he spoke of her, that I did not find incredible what he told me of her, because the honor I had of knowing Your Highness had taught me how far people of high birth could surpass others, etc. But I do not remember whether that was in the letter he showed her or in another, earlier one. And since it is likely that from now on he will show her the letters he receives from me, I shall always try to put something in them that gives her reason to wish for Your Highness's friendship, unless you forbid me to.
	On a fait taire les Theologiens qui me vouloient nuire, mais en les flatant, & en se gardant de les offenser le plus qu'on a pû, ce qu'on attribuë maintenant au tems ; mais i'ay peur que ce tems durera tousiours, & qu'on leur lairra prendre tant de pouuoir, qu'ils seront insupportables.	The theologians who wanted to harm me have been silenced, but by flattering them and taking as much care as possible not to offend them, which is now put down to the times. But I fear these times will last forever, and that they will be allowed to take so much power that they will become unbearable.
	On acheue l'impression de mes Principes en François ; & pource que c'est l'Epistre qu'on imprimera la derniere, i'en enuoye icy la copie à vostre Altesse, afin que, s'il y a quelque chose qui ne lui agrée pas, & qu'elle iuge deuoir estre mis autrement, il luy plaise me faire la faueur d'en auertir celuy qui sera toute sa vie, &c.	The printing of my *Principles* in French is nearly finished; and since the dedicatory letter is to be printed last, I send a copy of it here to Your Highness, so that, if there is anything in it she dislikes and judges ought to be put otherwise, she may do me the favor of informing the one who will be, all his life, etc.[15]

14 Pierre Chanut (1601–1662), French Resident at Stockholm; the Queen is Christina of Sweden (1626–1689).
15 The French *Principles* (1647) kept the Latin edition's dedication to Elisabeth.

DESCARTES TO ELISABETH, 20 NOVEMBER 1647

Descartes tells of sending Christina his letters to Elisabeth on the supreme good and his treatise on the passions.

FRENCH

AT V 89 **DESCARTES** Madame,

Puisque l'ay déia pris la liberté d'auertir vostre Altesse de la correspondance que i'ay commencé d'auoir en Suede, ie pense estre obligé de continuer, & de luy dire que i'ay receu depuis peu des lettres de l'amy que i'ay en ce païs-là, par lesquelles il m'aprend que, la Reine ayant esté à Vpsale, où est l'Academie du païs, elle auoit voulu entendre vne harangue du Professeur en l'eloquence, qu'il estime pour le plus habile & le plus raisonnable de cette Academie, & qu'elle luy auoit donné pour son suiet à discourir du Souuerain Bien de cette vie ; mais qu'apres auoir ouy cette harangue, elle auoit dit que ces gens-là ne faisoient qu'efleurer les matieres, & qu'il en faudroit sçauoir mon opinion.

A quoy il luy auoit répondu qu'il sçauoit que l'estois fort retenu à ecrire de telles matieres ; mais que, s'il plaisoit à sa Maiesté qu'il me la demandast de sa part, il ne croyoit pas que ie manquasse V 90 à tascher de luy satisfaire. Sur quoy elle luy auoit tres-expressement donné charge de me la demander, & luy auoit fait promettre qu'il m'en écriroit au prochain ordinaire ; en sorte qu'il me conseille d'y répondre, & d'adresser ma lettre à la Reyne, à laquelle il la presentera, & dit qu'il est caution qu'elle sera bien receuë.

AT V 90 I'ay crû ne deuoir pas negliger cette occasion, & considerant que, lors qu'il m'a écrit cela, il ne pouuoit encore auoir receu la lettre où ie parlois de celles que i'ay eu l'honneur d'écrire à vostre Altesse touchant la mesme matiere, i'ay pensé que le dessein que i auois eu en cela estoit failly, & qu'il le falloit prendre d'vn autre biais ; c'est pourquoy i'ay écrit vne lettre à la Reyne, où, apres auoir mis briéuement mon opinion, l'adioute que l'obmets beaucoup de choses, parce que, me representant le nombre des affaires qui se rencontrent en la conduite d'vn grand Royaume, & dont sa Maiesté prend elle-mesme les soins, ie n'ose luy demander plus longue audiance ; mais que l'enuoye à Monsieur Chanut quelques écrits, où i'ay mis mes sentimens plus au long touchant la mesme matiere, afin que, s'il luy plaist de les voir, il puisse les luy presenter.

ENGLISH

DESCARTES Madame,

Since I have already taken the liberty of informing Your Highness of the correspondence I have begun in Sweden, I think I am obliged to continue, and to tell her that I have recently received letters from my friend in that country. From them I learn that the Queen, while at Uppsala, where the country's university is, wished to hear an oration by the Professor of Eloquence, whom he regards as the ablest and most reasonable in that university, and gave him as his subject the supreme good of this life. But after hearing the oration, she said that these people only skimmed the surface of such subjects, and that one would need to know my opinion.[16]

To which he replied that he knew I was very reserved about writing on such subjects, but that if Her Majesty wished him to ask me for it on her behalf, he did not believe I would fail V 90 to try to satisfy her. Whereupon she very expressly charged him to ask me for it, and made him promise to write to me by the next post. So he advises me to reply and to address my letter to the Queen, to whom he will present it, and he says he guarantees it will be well received.

I thought I should not neglect this opportunity. Considering that, when he wrote this to me, he could not yet have received the letter in which I spoke of those I have had the honor of writing to Your Highness on the same subject, I thought that my plan in that regard had failed, and that it had to be approached from another angle. That is why I have written a letter to the Queen in which, after briefly setting out my opinion, I add that I omit many things. For, picturing to myself the number of affairs that arise in the government of a great kingdom, which Her Majesty attends to herself, I dare not ask her for a longer audience. But I add that I am sending Monsieur Chanut some writings in which I have set out my views on the same sub-

16 Johann Freinshemius (1608–1660), German classical scholar, then professor at Uppsala and later Queen Christina's librarian and historiographer.

FRENCH

ENGLISH

ject at greater length, so that, if she is pleased to see them, he can present them to her.

Ces écrits que i'enuoye à Monsieur Chanut, sont les lettres que i'ay eu l'honneur d'écrire à vostre Altesse touchant le liure de Seneque de *vita beata*, iusques à [V 91] la moitié de la sixiéme, où, apres auoir defiy les Passions en general, ie mets que ie trouue de la difficulté à les dénombrer.

These writings that I am sending Monsieur Chanut are the letters I have had the honor of writing to Your Highness about Seneca's book *On the Happy Life*, up to [V 91] the middle of the sixth, where, after defining the passions in general, I say that I find it difficult to enumerate them.

AT V 91 En suite dequoy, ie luy enuoye aussi le petit Traitté des Passions, lequel l'ay eu assez de peine à faire transcrire sur vn broüillon fort confus que i'en auois gardé ; & ie luy mande que ie ne le prie point de presenter d'abord ces écrits à la Reyne, pource que i'aurois peur de ne pas garder assez le respect que ie dois à sa Maiesté, si ie luy enuoyois des lettres que i'ay faites pour vne autre, plutost que de luy écrire à elle-mesme ce que ie pourray iuger luy estre agreable ;

After those, I am also sending him the little treatise on the passions, which I had considerable trouble having copied out from a very confused rough draft of it that I had kept. And I tell him that I do not ask him to present these writings to the Queen straight away, because I would fear failing in the respect I owe Her Majesty if I sent her letters I wrote for someone else, rather than writing to her herself whatever I may judge will please her;

mais que, s'il trouue bon de luy en parler, disant que c'est à luy que ie les ay enuoyées, & qu'apres cela elle desire de les voir, ie seray libre de ce scrupule ; & que ie me suis persuadé qu'il luy sera peut-estre plus agreable de voir ce qui a esté ainsi écrit à vne autre, que s'il luy estoit adressé, pource qu'elle pourra s'assurer dauantage que ie n'ay rien changé ou déguisé en sa consideration.

but that, if he sees fit to speak to her of them, saying that it is to him I sent them, and she then wishes to see them, I shall be free of this scruple. And I tell him that I am persuaded she may find it more agreeable to see what was thus written to another than if it were addressed to her, because she can be more assured that I have changed or disguised nothing out of consideration for her.

Ie n'ay pas iugé à propos d'y mettre rien de plus de vostre Altesse, ny mesme d'en exprimer le nom, lequel toutesfois il ne pourra ignorer à cause de mes lettres precedentes. Mais considerant que, nonobstant qu'il soit homme tres-vertueux & grand estimateur des personnes de merite, en sorte que ie ne doute point qu'il n'honore vostre Altesse autant qu'il doit, il ne m'en a toutesfois parlé que rarement en ses lettres, [V 92] bien que ie luy en aye écrit quelque chose en toutes les miennes, i'ay pensé qu'il faisoit peut-estre scrupule d'en parler à la Reyne, pource qu'il ne sçait pas si cela plairoit ou déplairoit à ceux qui l'ont enuoyé.

I did not think it appropriate to add anything more about Your Highness, nor even to mention your name, although he cannot fail to know it from my earlier letters. He is a most virtuous man and a great admirer of people of merit, so I have no doubt that he honors Your Highness as much as he ought. Yet he has spoken of you only rarely in his letters, [V 92] even though I have written something about you in every one of mine. So I thought that perhaps he had scruples about speaking of you to the Queen, because he does not know whether it would please or displease those who sent him.

AT V 92 Mais, si i'ay d'oresnauant occasion de luy écrire à elle-mesme, ie n'auray pas besoin d'interprete ; & le but que i'ay eu cette fois, en luy enuoyant ces écrits, est de tascher à faire qu'elle s'occupe dauantage à ces pensées, & que, si elles luy plaisent, ainsi qu'on me fait esperer, elle ait occasion d'en conferer auec vostre Altesse. De laquelle ie seray toute ma vie, &c.

But if from now on I have occasion to write to her directly, I will have no need of an interpreter. My aim this time, in sending these writings, is to try to get her to occupy herself more with these thoughts, and, if they please her, as I am led to hope, to give her occasion to discuss them with Your Highness. Whose servant I shall be all my life, etc.

ELISABETH TO DESCARTES, 5 DECEMBER 1647

Elisabeth thanks him for the French Meditations and urges him to write the Treatise on Erudition.

FRENCH

AT V 96 **ELISABETH** Monsieur Descartes,

Puisque i'ay receu, il y a quelques iours, la traduction françoise de vos Meditations Metaphysiques, que vous m'auez enuoyé, ie suis obligé de vous en rendre grace par ces lignes, encore ie ne saurois exprimer mon sentiment de reconnoissance de vos bontés, sans en demander vne nouuelle pour excuser l'incommodité que ie vous donne a lire & répondre mes lettres qui vous détournent si souuent de meditations vtiles, pour des suiets qui, sans la partialité d'amy, ne vous sauroient estre considerables ; mais i'ay receu tant de preuues de celle que vous auez pour moi, que i'y presume assez pour ne faire difficulté de vous dire auec quelle satisfaction i'ay leu la traduction susdite, puisqu'elle rend vos pensées d'autant plus miennes V 97 que ie les vois bien exprimées en vne langue dont ie me sers ordinairement, encore que ie crois les auoir comprises auparauant.

AT V 97 Mon admiration s'augmente toutes les fois que ie relis les obiections qu'on vous a fait, comment il est possible que des personnes, qui ont employé tant d'années à la meditation & à l'étude, ne sauroient comprendre des choses si simples & si claires, que la pluspart, en disputant du vray & du faux, semblent ne pas connoître comment il les faut discerner, & que le sieur Gasendus, qui est en la plus grande reputation pour son sauoir, a fait, apres l'Anglois, des obiections moins raisonnables que tous les autres.

Cela vous montre combien le monde a besoin du Traité de l'Erudition, que vous auez autrefois voulu faire. Ie say que vous estes trop charitable pour refuser vne chose si vtile au public, & que, pour cela, ie n'ay pas besoin de vous faire souuenir de la parole que vous en auez donnée à

Vostre tres-affectionnée amye à vous seruir, Élisabeth. Ce 5/25 de 10/9bre. Monsieur Descartes.

ENGLISH

ELISABETH Monsieur Descartes,

A few days ago I received the French translation of your *Metaphysical Meditations*, which you sent me, and so I am bound to thank you for it in these lines. Yet I cannot express my gratitude for your kindnesses without asking for a new one: that you excuse the trouble I give you in reading and answering my letters. They so often divert you from useful meditations toward subjects that could not seem worth your attention, were it not for a friend's partiality. But I have received so many proofs of your partiality toward me that I rely on it enough not to hesitate to tell you with what satisfaction I read this translation. It makes your thoughts all the more mine V 97 now that I see them well expressed in a language I ordinarily use, although I believe I had understood them before.[17]

My astonishment grows every time I reread the objections that were made to you. How is it possible that people who have spent so many years in meditation and study cannot understand things so simple and so clear? That most of them, while disputing about the true and the false, seem not to know how the two are to be told apart? And that Gassendi, who has the greatest reputation for learning, should have made objections less reasonable than all the others, the Englishman's excepted?[18]

This shows you how much the world needs the Treatise on Erudition that you once meant to write. I know you are too charitable to refuse something so useful to the public, and so I have no need to remind you of the promise you made about it to[19]

Your most affectionate friend, always at your service, Elisabeth. 5 December/25 November. Monsieur Descartes.

17 The French translation of the *Meditations* by the Duc de Luynes, with Clerselier's French version of the Objections and Replies, appeared in Paris in 1647.

18 Pierre Gassendi (1592–1655), French philosopher, wrote the Fifth Objections to the *Meditations*; "the Englishman" is Thomas Hobbes, author of the Third Objections.

19 A projected work on the reform of learning, which Descartes never wrote.

1648–1649

The last letters
The Fronde, the execution of Charles I and the Peace of Westphalia; Descartes leaves for Sweden.

DESCARTES TO ELISABETH, 31 JANUARY 1648

FRENCH

AT V 111 **DESCARTES** Madame,

I'ay receu les lettres de vostre Altesse du 23 Décembre presque aussi-tost que les précédentes, & i'auoüe que ie suis en peine touchant ce que ie dois répondre à ces précédentes, à cause que vostre Altesse y témoigne vouloir que i'écriue le Traité de l'Erudition, dont i'ay eu autrefois l'honneur de luy parler. Et il n'y a rien que ie souhaite auec plus de zèle, que d'obéir à vos commandemens ; mais ie diray icy les raisons qui sont cause que i'auois laissé le dessein de V 112 ce Traité, & si elles ne satisfont à vostre Altesse, ie ne manqueray pas de le reprendre.

AT V 112 La première est que ie n'y sçaurois mettre toutes les veritez qui y deuroient estre, sans animer trop contre moy les gens de l'Escole, & que ie ne me trouue point en telle condition que ie puisse entièrement mépriser leur haine. La seconde est que i'ay déjà touché quelque chose de ce que i'auois enuie d'y mettre, dans vne Préface qui est au-deuant de la traduction Françoise de mes Principes, laquelle ie pense que vostre Altesse a maintenant receuë. La troisiéme est que i'ay maintenant vn autre écrit entre les mains, que i'espere pouuoir estre plus agréable à vostre Altesse : c'est la description des fonctions de l'animal & de l'homme.

Car ce que i'en auois brouillé, il y a douze ou treize ans, qui a esté vû par vostre Altesse, estant venu entre les mains de plusieurs qui l'ont mal transcrit, i'ay crû estre obligé de le mettre plus au net, c'est à dire, de le refaire. Et mesme ie me suis auanturé (mais depuis huit ou dix iours seulement) d'y vouloir expliquer la façon dont se forme l'animal dés le commencement de son origine. Ie dis l'animal en general ; car, pour l'homme en particulier, ie ne l'oserois entreprendre, faute d'auoir assez d'expérience pour cet effet.

ENGLISH

DESCARTES Madame,

I received Your Highness's letter of 23 December almost as soon as the previous one. I confess I am at a loss as to how to answer that previous one, because in it Your Highness indicates that you wish me to write the Treatise on Erudition, of which I once had the honor of speaking to you. There is nothing I desire more zealously than to obey your commands. But I will set out here the reasons that led me to abandon the plan of V 112 this treatise, and if they do not satisfy Your Highness, I shall not fail to take it up again.

The first is that I could not put into it all the truths that ought to be there without stirring up the scholastic philosophers too much against me, and I am not in a position to despise their hatred entirely. The second is that I have already touched on some of what I wanted to put in it, in a Preface placed at the front of the French translation of my *Principles*, which I think Your Highness has now received. The third is that I now have another piece of writing in hand which I hope may be more pleasing to Your Highness: the description of the functions of the animal and of man.[1]

For the draft I had sketched of it twelve or thirteen years ago, which Your Highness has seen, came into the hands of several people who copied it badly, and so I thought I was obliged to put it into cleaner form, that is, to redo it. I have even ventured (but only within the last eight or ten days) to try to explain in it how the animal is formed from the very beginning of its origin. I say the animal in general; for as for man in particular, I would not

1 The unfinished *Description of the Human Body* (1647–48), a reworking of the *Treatise on Man* that Descartes had drafted in the early 1630s.

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dare undertake it, since I lack enough experiments for that purpose.

Au reste, ie considere ce qui me reste de cet hyuer, comme le temps le plus tranquille que i'auray peut-estre V 113 de ma vie ; ce qui est cause que i'ayme mieux l'employer à cette étude, qu'à vne autre qui ne requert pas tant d'attention. La raison qui me fait craindre d'auoir cy-apres moins de loisir, est que ie suis obligé de retourner en France l'esté prochain, & d'y passer l'hyuer qui vient ; mes affaires domestiques & plusieurs raisons m'y contraignent. On m'y a fait aussi l'honneur de m'y offrir pension de la part du Roy, sans que ie l'aye demandée ; ce qui ne sera point capable de m'attacher, mais il peut arriuer en vn an beaucoup de choses.

For the rest, I regard what remains of this winter as the most peaceful time I shall perhaps V 113 have in my life, which is why I prefer to spend it on this study rather than on another that does not require so much attention. The reason I fear having less leisure hereafter is that I am obliged to return to France next summer and to spend the following winter there; my domestic affairs and several other reasons compel me to. I have also been done the honor there of being offered a pension on the King's behalf, without my having asked for it. This will not be enough to tie me there, but many things can happen in a year.

AT V 113 Il ne sçauroit toutesfois rien arriuer qui puisse m'empescher de préférer le bon-heur de viure au lieu où seroit vostre Altesse, à l'occasion s'en presentoit, à celuy d'estre en ma propre patrie, ou en quelque autre lieu que ce puisse estre.

Yet nothing could happen that would keep me from preferring the good fortune of living wherever Your Highness might be, if the opportunity arose, to that of being in my own country, or in any other place whatever.

Ie n'atens encore de long-temps réponse à la lettre touchant le Souuerain Bien, pour ce quelle a demeuré prés d'vn mois à Amsterdam, par la faute de celuy à qui ie l'auois enuoyée pour l'adresser ; mais, si-tost que i'en auray quelques nouuelles, ie ne manqueray pas de le faire sçauoir à vostre Altesse. Elle ne contenoit aucune chose de nouueau qui meritast de vous estre enuoyée. I'ay receu, depuis, quelques lettres de ce pays-la, par lesquelles on me mande que les miennes V 114 sont attenduës, & selon qu'on m'écrit de cette Princesse, elle doit estre extrêmement portée à la vertu, & capable de bien iuger des choses.

I do not expect a reply for a long while yet to the letter concerning the supreme good, because it lay nearly a month in Amsterdam through the fault of the man to whom I had sent it to be forwarded. But as soon as I have any news of it, I shall not fail to let Your Highness know. It contained nothing new that deserved to be sent to you. Since then I have received some letters from that country, telling me that my letters V 114 are awaited; and from what they write me about this Princess, she must be extremely inclined to virtue and capable of judging things well.[2]

AT V 114 On me mande qu'on luy presentera la version de mes Principes, & on m'assure qu'elle en lira la première partie auec satisfaction, & qu'elle seroit bien capable du reste, si les affaires ne luy en ostoient le loisir.

I am told that the translation of my *Principles* will be presented to her, and I am assured that she will read the first part with satisfaction, and that she would be quite capable of the rest if her affairs did not deprive her of the leisure.

I'enuoye auec cette lettre vn liuret de peu d'importance, & ie ne l'enferme pas en mesme paquet, à cause qu'il ne vaut pas le port ; ce sont les insultes de Monsieur Reg(ius) qui m'ont contraint de l'écrire, & il a esté plutost imprimé que ie ne l'ay sceu ; mesme on y a ioint des vers & vne Préface que ie desaprouue, quoy que les vers soient de Monsieur Hey(danus), mais qui n'a osé y mettre son nom, comme aussi ne le deuoit-il pas. Ie suis, &c.

I am sending with this letter a little book of small importance, which I am not enclosing in the same packet because it is not worth the postage. It was Monsieur Regius's attacks that forced me to write it, and it was printed before I knew it. They have even added some verses and a preface that I disapprove of—although the verses are by Monsieur

2 Descartes' letter to Queen Christina of 20 November 1647, sent through Chanut together with copies of his letters to Elisabeth on Seneca.

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Heydanus, who did not dare to put his name to them, as indeed he should not have. I am, etc.[3]

ELISABETH TO DESCARTES, 30 JUNE 1648

In veiled terms, Elisabeth reports a plan for her to travel to Sweden.

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AT V 195 **ELISABETH** Monsieur Descartes,

L'enflure que i'ay eu au bras droit, par la faute d'vn chirurgien qui m'a coupé partie d'vn nerf en me seignant, m'a empesché de respondre plutost à vostre lettre du 7 de may, qui me represente vn nouuel effet de vostre parfaite generosité, au regret que vous auez de quitter l'Hollande pour y pouuoir esperer de m'y faire iouir de l'vtilité de vostre conuersation, qui veritablement est le plus grand bien que i'y attendois & l'vnique suiet qui m'a fait songer aux moyens d'y retourner, à quoy l'accommodement des affaires d'Angleterre m'auroit autant serui que le desespoir d'en voir en celles d'Allemagne.

ELISABETH Monsieur Descartes,

A swelling in my right arm, caused by a surgeon who cut part of a nerve while bleeding me, has kept me from answering sooner your letter of 7 May. It shows me a new effect of your perfect generosity, in the regret you feel at leaving Holland, where you could hope to let me enjoy the benefit of your conversation. That is truly the greatest good I expected there, and the only reason that made me think of ways of returning. A settlement of affairs in England would have helped me to do so as much as despair of seeing one in the affairs of Germany.

Cependant on parle du voyage que vous auez proposé autrefois, & la Mere de la personne à qui vostre ami a donné vos lettres, a reçu ordre de le faire reussir sans qu'on sache en son pais que cela vient de plus loin que de son propre mouuement. On a mal choisi la bonne femme pour menager vn secret, elle qui n'en eut iamais.

Meanwhile there is talk of the journey you once proposed. The Mother of the person to whom your friend gave your letters has received orders to bring it about, without anyone in her country knowing that the idea comes from further off than her own initiative. They chose the good lady badly for keeping a secret—she who never kept one.[4]

Toutesfois elle fait le reste de sa commission auec beaucoup de passion, & voudroit qu'vn tiers y volast ; ce qu'il n'est point en dessein de faire, mais il l'a remis à la volonté de ses parens, qui sera sans doute pour le voyage, & s'ils enuoyent l'argent qui y est necessaire, il est resolu de l'entreprendre, puisque en cette conioncture il aura moyen peut estre d'y rendre seruice à ceux à qui il le doit, & qu'il pourra retourner auec la bonne femme sus mentionnée, qui ne pretend pas d'y demeurer non plus.

Still, she carries out the rest of her commission with great eagerness, and would like a third person to rush there. He has no intention of doing so, but he has left it to the wishes of his relatives, which will doubtless favor the journey; and if they send the money needed for it, he is resolved to undertake it. For in this conjuncture he may perhaps have the means of doing some service there to those to whom he owes it, and he could come back with the good lady mentioned above, who does not intend to stay there either.[5]

Il n'y V 196 a que cecy de changé des raisons qui vous ont esté écrites contre le dit voyage, & la mort de cette femme (qui est assez maladiue), ou qu'elle soit obligée de partir auant que la réponse des parens de l'autre arriue, sont les plus apparentes pour le rompre. I'ay receu, passé

Only this V 196 has changed among the reasons that were written to you against the journey. The death of this woman (who is rather sickly), or her being obliged to leave before the reply from the other's relatives arrives, are the likeliest things to break it

3 The *Comments on a Certain Broadsheet* (1648), Descartes' reply to a broadsheet by Regius; Abraham Heidanus (Heydanus) was a Cartesian minister and later theology professor at Leiden.

4 Elisabeth writes in veiled terms: the journey is to Sweden, the "person" is Queen Christina, her mother is the Queen Mother, Maria Eleonora, and the friend is Chanut.

5 The "third person" is Elisabeth herself, disguised by the masculine pronoun; the "relatives" are her family.

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trois semaines, vne lettre fort obligeante du lieu de question, pleine de bonté & de protestations d'amitié, mais qui ne fait nulle mention de vos lettres, ni de ce qui a esté dit cy dessus ; aussi on ne l'a mandé à la bonne femme que de bouche par vn expres.

AT V 196 Ie ne vous ai pas encore rendu conte de ma lecture de la version françoise de vos Principes de philosophie. Combien qu'il y ait quelque chose dans la preface, sur quoy i'ay besoin de votre explication, ie ne l'aioute pas icy, parce que cela engrossiroit trop ma lettre. Mais ie pretens vous en entretenir vne autre fois, & me promets qu'en changeant de demeure, vous conseruerez tousiours la mesme charité pour

Vostre tres affectionnée amie à vous seruir, Élisabeth. M. Descartes. De Crossen, ce 20me/30 de iuin.

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off. Three weeks ago I received a very obliging letter from the place in question, full of kindness and protestations of friendship, but it makes no mention of your letters, nor of what is said above. Indeed, the good lady was told of it only by word of mouth, through a special messenger.

I have not yet given you an account of my reading of the French version of your *Principles of Philosophy*. Although there is something in the preface on which I need your explanation, I will not add it here, because it would make my letter too long. But I intend to discuss it with you another time, and I trust that, in changing residence, you will always keep the same charity toward

Your most affectionate friend, always at your service, Elisabeth. Monsieur Descartes. From Crossen, 20/30 June.

DESCARTES TO ELISABETH, JUNE OR JULY 1648

From Paris, Descartes describes the first stirrings of the Fronde and reflects on fortune.

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AT V 197 **DESCARTES** Madame,

Encore que ie sçache bien que le lieu & la condition où ie suis ne me sçauroient donner aucune occasion V 198 d'estre vtile au seruice de vostre Altesse, ie ne satisferois pas à mon deuoir, ny à mon zele, si, apres estre arriué en vne nouuelle demeure, ie manquois à vous renouueller les offres de ma tres-humble obeïssance. Ie me suis rencontré icy en vne conioncture d'affaires, que toute la prudence humaine n'eust sçeu preuoir.

AT V 198 Le Parlement, ioint auec les autres Cours souueraines, s'assemble a maintenant tous les iours, pour deliberer touchant quelques ordres qu'ils pretendent deuoir estre mis au maniment des finances, & cela se fait à present auec la permission de la Reine, en sorte qu'il y a de l'apparence que l'affaire tirera de longue ; mais il est malaisé de iuger ce qui en reüssira. On dit qu'ils se proposent de trouuer de l'argent suffisamment pour continuer la guerre, & entretenir de grandes armées, sans pour cela fouler le peuple ; s'ils prennent ce biais, ie me persuade que ce sera le moyen de venir enfin à vne paix generale.

Mais, en attendant que cela soit, i'eusse bien fait de me tenir au païs où la paix est desia ; & si ces orages ne se

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DESCARTES Madame,

I know well that the place and situation I am in can give me no opportunity V 198 of being useful in Your Highness's service. Even so, I would not be fulfilling my duty, nor answering my zeal, if, having arrived at a new residence, I failed to renew to you the offer of my most humble obedience. I have found myself here at a juncture of affairs that no human prudence could have foreseen.

The Parlement, together with the other sovereign courts, now meets every day to deliberate about certain rules that they claim should be imposed on the management of the finances. This is now being done with the Queen's permission, so it seems likely that the affair will drag on; but it is hard to judge what will come of it. It is said that they propose to find enough money to continue the war and maintain large armies without oppressing the people for it. If they take this course, I am persuaded it will be the way to reach a general peace at last.[6]

But until that happens, I would have done well to stay in the country where there is already peace. If these storms do not clear soon, I intend to return

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dissipent bien-tost, ie me propose de retourner vers Egmond dans six semaines ou deux mois, & de m'y arrester iusques à ce que le ciel de France soit plus serain. Cependant, me tenant comme ie fais, vn pied en vn pays, & l'autre en vn autre, ie trouue ma condition tres-heureuse, en ce qu'elle est libre.

Et ie croy que ceux qui sont en grande fortune different dauantage des autres, en ce que les deplaisirs qui leur arriuent, leur sont plus sensibles, que non pas en ce qu'ils iouissent de plus de V 199 plaisirs, à cause que tous les contentemens qu'ils peuuent auoir, leur estant ordinaires, ne les touchent pas tant que les afflictions, qui ne leur viennent que lors qu'ils s'y attendent le moins, & qu'ils n'y font aucunement preparez ; ce qui doit seruir de consolation à ceux que la fortune a accoutumez à ses disgraces. Ie voudrois qu'elle fust aussi obeïssante à tous vos desirs, que ie seray toute ma vie, &c.

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to Egmond in six weeks or two months, and to stay there until the sky over France is clearer. Meanwhile, keeping, as I do, one foot in one country and the other in another, I find my condition very happy, in that it is free.[7]

And I believe that those who enjoy great fortune differ from others more in feeling their misfortunes more keenly than in enjoying more V 199 pleasures. For all the contentments they can have are ordinary to them, and so do not touch them as much as afflictions, which come to them only when they least expect them and are not in the least prepared for them. This should serve as a consolation to those whom fortune has accustomed to her blows. I wish she were as obedient to all your desires as I shall be all my life, etc.

ELISABETH TO DESCARTES, JULY 1648

Elisabeth is glad the troubles in France will send him back and reports delays to her Swedish journey.

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AT V 209 **ELISABETH** Monsieur Descartes,

Vous ne sauriez estre en lieu du monde où la peine que vous prendrez de me mander de vos nouuelles ne soit vtile pour ma satisfaction. Car ie me persuade qu'elles seront tousiours à vostre auantage, & que Dieu est trop iuste pour vous enuoyer de malheurs si grands que vostre prudence n'en sauroit tirer, comme des desordres inopinés en France, qui conseruent vostre liberté en vous obligeant de retourner en Hollande, puisque sans cela la Cour vous l'auroit rauie, quelque soin que vous eussiez pu prendre de vous y opposer ; & pour moy, i'en reçois V 210 le plaisir de pouuoir esperer le bonheur de vous reuoir en Hollande ou ailleurs.

AT V 210 Ie crois que vous aurez reçu la lettre où on vous parle d'vn autre voyage, qui se deuoit faire, si les amis l'approuuoient, le croyant pour leur seruice en cette conioncture ; & depuis ils l'ont demandé, en fournissant les depenses qu'il y falloit. Neantmoins ceux qui sont où cela se doit commencer, ont empeschés de iour en iour les apprets qui y estoient necessaires, émeus à cela par

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ELISABETH Monsieur Descartes,

Wherever in the world you may be, the trouble you take to send me your news will always add to my satisfaction. For I am persuaded that it will always be to your advantage, and that God is too just to send you misfortunes so great that your prudence could not turn them to good account. So it is with the unexpected disorders in France, which preserve your freedom by obliging you to return to Holland; for otherwise the Court would have taken it from you, however much care you might have taken to resist. As for me, I receive V 210 from them the pleasure of being able to hope for the happiness of seeing you again, in Holland or elsewhere.

I think you will have received the letter in which you were told of another journey, which was to be made if the friends approved it, since it was thought to serve them in this conjuncture. They have since asked for it and provided the necessary expenses. Nevertheless, those who are at the place where it was to begin have delayed from day to

6 The Parlement of Paris; its assemblies of summer 1648 opened the Fronde. The Queen is Anne of Austria, regent for the young Louis XIV.

7 The Peace of Münster (January 1648) had ended the war between Spain and the Dutch Republic.

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des raisons si foibles qu'eux mesmes ne les oseroient auouer. Cependant on donne à cette heure si peu de tems pour cela, que la personne de question ne pourra point estre preste.

Et d'vn costé elle aura mauuais gré d'auoir manqué de parole ; de l'autre, ses amis croiront qu'elle n'auoit pas la volonté ou le courage de sacrifier sa santé & son repos pour l'interest d'vne maison, pour laquelle elle voudroit encore abandonner la vie, s'il estoit requis. Cela la fache vn peu, mais ne la sauroit surprendre, puisqu'elle est bien accoutumée de souffrir le blame des fautes d'autruy (mesme en des occasions où elle ne s'en vouloit purger), & de chercher sa satisfaction seulement au tesmoignage que sa conscience luy donne d'auoir fait son deuoir.

Toutesfois cela detourne ses V 211 pensées quelque tems de matiere plus agreable ; & encore que vous ayez raison de dire que ceux qui sont en grande fortune different dauantage des autres en ce que les déplaisirs qui leur arriuent leur sont plus sensibles, que non pas en ce qu'ils iouissent de plus de plaisirs, parce qu'il y en a peu qui donnent de vrays obiets à leur plaisirs ; (mais si c'estoit de faire du bien au public & particulierement aux personnes de merite, vne condition qui en donneroit quantité de moyens, donneroit aussi plus de plaisirs que ne pourroient auoir ceux à qui la fortune refuse cet auantage), ie n'en demanderois iamais de plus grand, que de vous pouuoir tesmoigner en effet l'estime que ie fais de vostre bonté pour

AT V 211 Vostre tres affectionnée amie à vous seruir, Élisabeth.

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day the preparations it required, moved by reasons so weak that they themselves would not dare to admit them. And now so little time is given for it that the person in question will not be able to be ready.

On the one hand, she will be blamed for having broken her word; on the other, her friends will think she lacked the will or the courage to sacrifice her health and her peace for the interest of a house for which she would even give up her life, if it were required. This vexes her a little, but it cannot surprise her, since she is well used to bearing the blame for others' faults (even on occasions when she did not wish to clear herself of it), and to seeking her satisfaction only in the testimony of her conscience that she has done her duty.

Still, this diverts her V 211 thoughts for a time from more agreeable matters. And you are right to say that those who enjoy great fortune differ from others more in feeling their misfortunes more keenly than in enjoying more pleasures, because few of them give their pleasures true objects. (But if the object were to do good to the public, and particularly to people of merit, a condition that offered many means of doing so would also give more pleasures than those to whom fortune refuses this advantage could have.) Yet, even so, I would never ask for a greater advantage than to be able to show you in deed the esteem I have for your kindness toward

Your most affectionate friend, always at your service, Elisabeth.

ELISABETH TO DESCARTES, 23 AUGUST 1648

Elisabeth reports that the Swedish invitation has been withdrawn and describes a strange rash at Crossen.

FRENCH

AT V 225 **ELISABETH** Monsieur Descartes,

Ie vous parlois, en ma derniere, d'vne personne qui, sans auoir failly, estoit en danger de perdre la bonne opinion & peut estre la bienueillance de la plupart de ses amis. Maintenant elle s'en trouue deliuré d'vne fasson assez extraordinaire, puisque cett'autre, à qui elle auoit mandé le tems qu'il lui falloit pour se rendre auprès d'elle, luy répond qu'elle l'auroit bien attendue, si sa fille n'eut changé de resolution, iugeant qu'on trouueroit mauuais qu'elle seroit approchée de si près par gens de differente religion.

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ELISABETH Monsieur Descartes,

In my last letter I told you about a person who, without having done anything wrong, was in danger of losing the good opinion, and perhaps the goodwill, of most of her friends. Now she finds herself released from this danger in a rather extraordinary way. The other lady, to whom she had sent word of the time she needed to join her, replies that she would gladly have waited for her, had her daughter not changed her mind, judging that people would take it ill for her to be ap-

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C'est vn procedé qui, à mon auis, ne répond pas aux louanges que vostre ami donne à celle qui s'en sert, au moins s'il est entierement sien & ne vient pas, comme ie le soupçonne, de l'esprit foible de sa mere, qui a esté accompagnée, depuis que cette affaire est sur le tapis, d'vne sœur qui tient sa subsistance du parti contraire à la maison de la personne susmentionnée. Vostre ami vous en pourroit V 226 éclaircir, si vous trouuez à propos de luy en mander quelque chose. Ou peut estre qu'il vous en écrira de son propre mouuement, puisqu'on dit qu'il gouuerne entierement l'esprit auquel il donne tant de louanges.

AT V 226 Ie ne saurois rien aiouter à cecy, si ce n'est que ie n'estime pas cet accident susdit au nombre des malheurs de la personne à qui il arriue, puisqu'il la retire d'vn voyage où le mal qui luy en reuiendroit (comme la perte de santé & de repos, ioint aux choses facheuses qu'il lui eust fallu souffrir d'vne nation brutale), estoit tres asseuré, & le bien que d'autres en pourroient esperer, fort incertain. Et s'il y a de l'affront dans le procedé, ie trouue qu'il retombera entierement sur ceux qui l'ont fait, puisque c'est vne marque de leur inconstance & legereté d'esprit, & que tous ceux qui en ont connoissance sauent aussi qu'elle n'a point contribué à aucune de ces boutades.

Quant à moy, ie pretens demeurer encore icy iusqu'à ce que i'apprenne l'issue des affaires d'Allemagne & d'Angleterre, qui semblent estre maintenant en vne crise. Nous y auons eu vne plaisante rencontre depuis trois iours, toutefois tres-incommode. En nous promenant sous vn bois de chêne, Mme l'Electrice auec ceux de sa suite, il nous est venu en vn instant comme vne sorte de rougeolle par tout corps, hors au visage, sans fieure ni autre mal qu'vne demangeaison insupportable. Les superstitieux se croyoient ensorcelés ; mais les paisans nous disoient qu'il y auoit parfois vne certaine rosée venimeuse sur les arbres, qui, descendant en poussiere, infecte ainsi les passans.

Et il est à remarquer que tous les differents remedes que chacun s'est imaginé pour vn mal si nouueau, comme les bains, la seignée, les vantouses, les sangsues & la purge n'y ont de V 227 rien serui. Ie vous en fais le recit, parce

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proached so closely by people of a different religion.[8]

In my opinion, this conduct does not match the praise your friend gives to the one who adopts it—at least if it is entirely her own, and does not come, as I suspect, from the weak mind of her mother. Since this affair has been under discussion, the mother has had with her a sister who draws her living from the party opposed to the house of the person mentioned above. Your friend could V 226 clarify this for you, if you see fit to write him something about it. Or perhaps he will write to you of his own accord, since it is said that he has complete influence over the mind he praises so highly.

I can add nothing to this, except that I do not count this incident among the misfortunes of the person to whom it happens. It spares her a journey in which the harm that would come to her (such as the loss of health and peace, together with the unpleasant things she would have had to endure from a rough nation) was quite certain, while the good that others might hope from it was very uncertain. And if there is an affront in this conduct, I find that it will fall back entirely on those who committed it, since it is a mark of their inconstancy and fickleness of mind; and everyone who knows of it also knows that she had no part in any of these whims.

As for me, I intend to stay here until I learn the outcome of affairs in Germany and England, which now seem to be at a crisis. Three days ago we had an amusing, though very unpleasant, adventure here. While we were walking in an oak wood—Madame the Electress, her suite, and I—all of a sudden a kind of measles broke out on us all over the body except the face, with no fever or other trouble besides an unbearable itching. The superstitious believed themselves bewitched; but the peasants told us that there is sometimes a certain poisonous dew on the trees which, falling as dust, affects passers-by in this way.

And it is worth noting that all the different remedies that each of us imagined for so new an illness—baths, bleeding, cupping, leeches and purging—were of V 227 no use at all. I tell you about it because

8 Elisabeth was of the Reformed (Calvinist) faith; Sweden was Lutheran.

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que ie presume que vous y trouuerez de quoy confirmer quelques vnes de vos doctrines.	I presume you will find in it something to confirm some of your doctrines.
AT V 227 le suis parfaitement, M. Descartes, Vostre tres affectionnée amie à vous seruir, Élisabeth. De Krossen, ce 23/13 d'Aoust.	I am entirely, Monsieur Descartes, Your most affectionate friend, always at your service, Elisabeth. From Krossen, 23/13 August.

DESCARTES TO ELISABETH, OCTOBER 1648

Back in Holland, Descartes finds nothing to envy in France and consoles her over the canceled journey.

FRENCH	ENGLISH
AT V 232 **DESCARTES** Madame,	**DESCARTES** Madame,
I'ay eu enfin le bonheur de receuoir les trois lettres que vostre Altesse m'a fait l'honneur de m'écrire, & elles n'ont point passé en de mauuaises mains. Mais la premiere, du 30 Iuin, ayant esté portée à Paris, pendant que i'estois desia en chemin pour reuenir en ce païs, ceux qui l'ont receuë pour moy ont attendu des nouuelles de mon arriuée auant que de me l'enuoyer, & ainsi ie ne l'ay pû auoir qu'auiourd'huy, que i'ay aussi receu la derniere du 23 Aoust, par laquelle i'aprens vn procedé iniurieux que i'admire ; & ie veux croire, auec vostre Altesse, qu'il ne vient pas de la personne à qui on l'attribuë.	I have at last had the good fortune to receive the three letters that Your Highness did me the honor of writing to me, and none of them fell into the wrong hands. But the first, of 30 June, was carried to Paris while I was already on the road back to this country. Those who received it for me waited for news of my arrival before sending it on, so I could not have it until today, when I also received the last one, of 23 August. From it I learn of an insulting piece of conduct that astonishes me, and I am willing to believe, with Your Highness, that it does not come from the person to whom it is attributed.
Quoy qu'il en soit, ie n'estime pas qu'on doiue estre fasché de ne point faire vn voyage, où, comme vostre Altesse remarque fort bien, les incommoditez estoient infaillibles & les auantages fort incertains. Pour moy, graces à Dieu, i'ay acheué celuy qu'on m'auoit obligé de faire en France, & ie ne suis pas marry d'y estre allé, mais ie suis encore plus aise d'en estre reuenu. Ie n'y ay veu personne dont il m'ait semblé que la condition fust digne d'enuie, & ceux qui y paroissent auec le plus d'éclat m'ont semblé estre les plus dignes de pitié.	Be that as it may, I do not think one should be sorry not to make a journey in which, as Your Highness very rightly observes, the drawbacks were certain and the advantages very uncertain. As for me, thank God, I have finished the one I was obliged to make to France. I am not sorry to have gone, but I am gladder still to have come back. I saw no one there whose condition seemed to me worth envying, and those who cut the most brilliant figure there seemed to me the most deserving of pity.
Je n'y pouuois aller en vn tems plus auantageux pour me faire bien reconnoistre la felicité de la vie tranquille & retirée, & la richesse des plus mediocres fortunes. Si vostre Altesse compare sa condition auec celle des Reines & des autres Princesses de l'Europe, elle y trouuera mesme V 233 difference qu'entre ceux qui sont dans le port, où ils se reposent, & ceux qui sont en pleine mer, agitez par les vents d'vne tempeste. Et bien qu'on ait esté ietté dans le port par vn naufrage, pourueu qu'on n'y manque des choses necessaires à la vie, on ne doit pas y estre moins content, que si on y estoit arriué d'autre façon.	I could not have gone at a better time for coming to appreciate fully the happiness of a quiet and retired life, and the wealth of the most modest fortunes. If Your Highness compares her condition with that of the queens and other princesses of Europe, she will find the same V 233 difference as between those who are in port, where they rest, and those who are on the open sea, tossed by the winds of a storm. And even if one has been cast into port by a shipwreck, provided one does not lack the necessities of life there, one ought to be no less content than if one had arrived some other way.

FRENCH

AT V 233 Les fascheuses rencontres qui arriuent aux personnes qui sont dans l'action, & dont la felicité depend toute d'autruy, penetrent iusqu'au fond de leur cœur, au lieu que cette vapeur venimeuse, qui est descenduë des arbres sous lesquels se promenoit paisiblement vostre Altesse, n'aura touché, comme i'espere, que l'exterieur de la peau, laquelle si on eust lauée sur l'heure auec vn peu d'eau de vie, ie croy qu'on en auroit osté tout le mal.

Ie n'ay receu aucunes lettres, depuis cinq mois, de l'amy dont i'auois écrit cy-deuant à vostre Altesse. Et pour ce qu'en sa derniere il me mandoit fort ponctuellement les raisons qui auoient empesché la personne à laquelle il auoit donné mes lettres, de me faire réponse, ie iuge que son silence ne vient que de ce qu'il attend encore cette réponse, ou bien peut-estre qu'il a quelque honte de n'en auoir point à m'enuoyer, ainsi qu'il s'estoit imaginé.

Je me retiens aussi de luy écrire le premier, afin de ne luy sembler point reprocher cela par mes lettres, & ie ne laissois pas de sçauoir souuent de ses nouuelles, lors que i'estois à Paris, V 234 par le moyen de ses proches, qui en receuoient tous les huit iours. Mais lors qu'ils luy auront mandé que ie suis icy, ie ne doute point qu'il ne m'y écriue, & qu'il ne me fasse entendre ce qu'il sçaura du procedé qui touche vostre Altesse, pour ce qu'il sçait que i'y prens beaucoup d'interest. Mais ceux qui n'ont point eu l'honneur de vous voir, & qui n'ont point vne connoissance tres-particuliere de vos vertus, ne sçauroient pas conceuoir qu'on puisse estre si parfaitement que suis, &c.

ENGLISH

The unpleasant events that befall people engaged in active life, whose happiness depends entirely on others, pierce to the bottom of their hearts. That poisonous vapor, by contrast, which came down from the trees under which Your Highness was peacefully walking, will, I hope, have touched only the surface of the skin; and if the skin had been washed at once with a little brandy, I believe all the harm would have been removed.

For five months I have received no letters from the friend I wrote to Your Highness about earlier. In his last letter he told me very precisely the reasons that had prevented the person to whom he had given my letters from answering me. So I judge that his silence comes only from his still waiting for that reply, or perhaps from some embarrassment at having none to send me, as he had imagined he would.

I am also refraining from writing to him first, so as not to seem to reproach him for it in my letters. Even so, I often had news of him while I was in Paris, V 234 through his relatives, who heard from him every week. But when they have told him that I am here, I have no doubt he will write to me and let me know what he has learned about the conduct that concerns Your Highness, since he knows that I take a great interest in it. But those who have not had the honor of seeing you, and have no very particular knowledge of your virtues, could not conceive how perfectly one can be, as I am, etc.

DESCARTES TO ELISABETH, 22 FEBRUARY 1649

Descartes consoles Elisabeth on the execution of Charles I and advises accepting the peace terms.

FRENCH

AT V 281 **DESCARTES** Madame,

Entre plusieurs fascheuses nouuelles que i'ay receuës de diuers endroits en mesme temps, celle qui m'a le plus viuement touché, a esté la maladie de vostre Altesse. Et bien que i'en aye aussi appris la guerison, il ne laisse pas d'en rester encore des marques de tristesse en mon esprit, qui n'en pourront estre si-tost effacées. L'inclination à faire des vers, que vostre Altesse auoit pendant son mal, me fait souuenir de Socrate, que Platon dit auoir eu vne pareille enuie, pendant qu'il estoit en prison.

ENGLISH

DESCARTES Madame,

Among several pieces of bad news that I have received from various quarters at the same time, the one that touched me most keenly was Your Highness's illness. And although I have also learned of your recovery, it has left traces of sadness in my mind that cannot soon be erased. The inclination to write verse that Your Highness felt during your illness reminds me of Socrates, who, Plato says, had a similar desire while he was in prison.[9]

9 In Plato's *Phaedo* (60c–61b), Socrates in prison puts Aesop's fables into verse.

FRENCH

Et ie croy que cette humeur de faire des vers, vient d'vne forte agitation des esprits animaux, qui pourroit entierement troubler l'imagination de ceux qui n'ont pas le cerueau bien rassis, mais qui ne fait qu'échaufer vn peu plus les fermes, & les disposer à la poësie. Et ie prens cét emportement pour vne marque d'vn esprit plus fort & plus releué que le commun.

Si ie ne connoissois le vostre pour tel, ie craindrois que vous ne fussiez extraordinairement affligée d'aprendre V 282 la funeste conclusion des Tragedies d'Angleterre ; mais ie me promets que vostre Altesse, estant acoutumée aux disgraces de la Fortune, & s'estant veuë soy-mesme depuis peu en grand peril de sa vie, ne sera pas si surprise, ny si troublée, d'aprendre la mort d'vn de ses proches, que si elle n'auoit point receu auparauant d'autres afflictions.

AT V 282 Et bien que cette mort si violente semble auoir quelque chose de plus affreux que celle qu'on attend en son lit, toutesfois, à le bien prendre, elle est plus glorieuse, plus heureuse & plus douce, en sorte que ce qui afflige particulierement en cecy le commun des hommes, doit seruir de consolation à V. A. Car c'est beaucoup de gloire de mourir en vne occasion qui fait qu'on est vniuersellement plaint, loüé & regretté de tous ceux qui ont quelque sentiment humain. Et il est certain que, sans cette épreuue, la clemence & les autres vertus du Roy dernier mort n'auroient iamais esté tant remarquées ny tant estimées qu'elles sont & seront à l'auenir par tous ceux qui liront son histoire.

Ie m'assure aussi que sa conscience luy a plus donné de satisfaction, pendant les derniers momens de sa vie, que l'indignation, qui est la seule passion triste qu'on dit auoir remarquée en luy, ne luy a causé de fascherie. Et pour ce qui est de la douleur, ie ne la mets nullement en conte ; car elle est si courte, que, si les meurtriers pouuoient employer la fièvre, ou quelqu'autre des maladies dont la nature a coutume de se seruir pour oster les hommes du monde, on auroit suiet de les estimer, plus cruels qu'ils ne sont, lors qu'ils les tuent d'vn coup de hache.

Mais ie n'ose m'arrester long-temps sur vn suiet si funeste V 283 ; i'adiouste seulement qu'il vaut beaucoup mieux estre entierement deliuré d'vne fausse esperance, que d'y estre inutilement entretenu.

ENGLISH

I believe that this urge to write verse comes from a strong agitation of the animal spirits. It could entirely disturb the imagination of those whose brains are not well settled, but in steady ones it only warms them a little more and disposes them to poetry. And I take this rapture as a mark of a mind stronger and more elevated than the common run.

If I did not know yours to be such, I would fear that you would be extraordinarily afflicted to learn V 282 of the dreadful conclusion of the tragedies in England. But I trust that Your Highness, being accustomed to the blows of Fortune, and having recently found yourself in great danger of your life, will not be as surprised or as troubled to learn of the death of one of your relatives as you would be if you had not suffered other afflictions before.[10]

And although so violent a death seems to have something more dreadful about it than the one we await in our beds, yet, rightly considered, it is more glorious, happier and gentler. So what particularly afflicts ordinary people in this should serve Your Highness as a consolation. For it is a great glory to die on an occasion that makes one universally pitied, praised and mourned by all who have any human feeling. And it is certain that without this trial, the clemency and other virtues of the late King would never have been so much noticed or so much esteemed as they are now, and will be in future by all who read his history.

I am sure, too, that during the last moments of his life his conscience gave him more satisfaction than indignation—the only sad passion he is said to have shown—caused him distress. As for the pain, I do not count it at all. It is so brief that, if murderers could use fever, or one of the other illnesses that nature usually employs to remove men from the world, we would have reason to think them more cruel than they are when they kill with a blow of the axe.

But I dare not dwell long on so grim a subject V 283 ; I add only that it is far better to be entirely freed from a false hope than to be kept in it to no purpose.

10 Charles I of England, Elisabeth's maternal uncle, was beheaded in London on 30 January 1649.

FRENCH

AT V 283 Pendant que i'écris ces lignes, ie reçois des lettres d'vn lieu d'où ie n'en auois point eu depuis sept ou huit mois ; & vne entr'autres, que la personne à qui i'auois enuoyé le traité des Passions, il y a vn an, a écrite de sa main pour m'en remercier. Puisqu'elle se souuient, aprés tant de temps, d'vn homme si peu considerable comme ie suis, il est à croire qu'elle n'oubliera pas de répondre aux lettres de vostre Altesse, bien qu'elle ait tardé quatre mois à le faire.

On me mande qu'elle a donné charge à quelqu'vn des siens d'étudier le liure de mes Principes, afin de luy en faciliter la lecture ; ie ne croy pas neantmoins qu'elle trouue assez de loisir pour s'y apliquer, bien qu'elle semble en auoir la volonté. Elle me remercie, en termes exprés, du traité des Passions ; mais elle ne fait aucune mention des lettres ausquelles il estoit ioint, & l'on ne me mande rien du tout de ce païs-là qui touche vostre Altesse.

Dequoy ie ne puis deuiner autre chose, sinon que, les conditions de la paix d'Allemagne n'estant pas si auantageuses à vostre maison qu'elles auroient pû estre, ceux qui ont contribué à cela sont en doute si vous ne leur en voulez point de V 284 mal, & se retiennent, pour ce suiet, de vous témoigner de l'amitié.

AT V 284 I'ay tousiours esté en peine, depuis la conclusion de cette paix, de n'aprendre point que Monsieur l'Electeur vostre frere l'eust acceptée, & i'aurois pris la liberté d'en écrire plutost mon sentiment à vostre Altesse, si i'auois pû m'imaginer qu'il mist cela en delibération. Mais, pour ce que ie ne sçay point les raisons particulieres qui le peuuent mouuoir, ce seroit temerité à moy d'en faire aucun iugement.

Ie puis seulement dire, en general, que, lors qu'il est question de la restitution d'vn Estat occupé ou disputé par d'autres qui ont les forces en main, il me semble que ceux qui n'ont que l'equité & le droit des gens qui plaide pour eux, ne doiuent iamais faire leur conte d'obtenir toutes leurs pretensions, & qu'ils ont bien plus de suiet de sçauoir gré à ceux qui leur en font rendre quelque partie, tant petite qu'elle soit, que de vouloir du mal à ceux qui leur retiennent le reste.

Et encore qu'on ne puisse trouuer mauuais qu'ils disputent leur droit le plus qu'ils peuuent, pendant que ceux qui ont la force en deliberent, ie croy que, lors que les conclusions sont arrestées, la prudence les oblige à

ENGLISH

As I write these lines, I am receiving letters from a place from which I had had none for seven or eight months. Among them is one written in her own hand by the person to whom I sent *The Passions of the Soul* a year ago, thanking me for it. Since she remembers, after so long, a man of as little account as I am, we may believe that she will not forget to answer Your Highness's letters, although she has taken four months to do so.

I am told that she has instructed one of her people to study my *Principles*, so as to make it easier for her to read. I do not believe, however, that she will find enough leisure to apply herself to it, although she seems to have the will. She thanks me in express terms for *The Passions of the Soul*, but makes no mention of the letters that accompanied it; and I am told nothing whatever from that country that concerns Your Highness.

From this I can guess only one thing: since the terms of the peace in Germany were not as advantageous to your house as they might have been, those who contributed to that are unsure whether you bear them V 284 ill will, and for that reason refrain from showing you friendship.[11]

Ever since this peace was concluded, I have been uneasy at not hearing that the Elector, your brother, had accepted it. I would have taken the liberty of writing my opinion on it to Your Highness sooner, if I could have imagined that he was deliberating about it. But since I do not know the particular reasons that may move him, it would be rash of me to pass any judgment on it.

I can only say, in general, that when it is a question of restoring a State occupied or disputed by others who hold power in their hands, it seems to me that those who have only equity and the law of nations pleading for them should never count on obtaining all their claims. They have much more reason to be grateful to those who get some part of it restored to them, however small, than to bear ill will toward those who keep the rest from them.

And although no one can blame them for arguing their right as far as they can while those who have the power are deliberating, I believe that once the terms are settled, prudence obliges them to show

11 The Peace of Westphalia (October 1648) restored the Lower Palatinate to Elisabeth's brother Charles Louis with a newly created electorate, but left the Upper Palatinate and the old electoral title to Bavaria; Sweden was among the negotiating powers.

FRENCH

témoigner qu'ils en sont contens, encore qu'ils ne le fussent pas ; & à remercier non seulement ceux qui leur font rendre quelque chose, mais aussi ceux qui ne leur ostent pas tout, afin d'acquérir, par ce moyen, l'amitié des vns & des autres, ou du moins d'éuiter leur haine : car cela peut beaucoup seruir, par apres, pour se maintenir.

Outre qu'il reste encore vn long chemin pour venir des promesses iusqu'à l'effet ; & que, si ceux qui ont [V 285] la force s'acordent seuls, il leur est aisé de trouuer des raisons pour partager entr'eux ce que peut-estre ils n'auoient voulu rendre à vn tiers que par ialousie les vns des autres, & pour empescher que celuy qui s'enrichiroit de ses dépouilles ne fust trop puissant. La moindre partie du Palatinat vaut mieux que tout l'Empire des Tartares ou des Moscouites, & apres deux ou trois années de paix, le seiour en sera aussi agreable que celuy d'aucun autre endroit de la terre.

AT V 285 Pour moy, qui ne suis attaché à la demeure d'aucun lieu, ie ne ferois aucune difficulté de changer ces Prouinces, ou mesme la France, pour ce pays-là, si i'y pouuois trouuer vn repos aussi assuré, encore qu'aucune autre raison que la beauté du païs ne m'y fist aller ; mais il n'y a point de seiour au monde, si rude ny si incommode, auquel ie ne m'estimasse heureux de passer le reste de mes iours, si vostre Altesse y estoit, & que ie fusse capable de luy rendre quelque seruice ; pour ce que ie suis entierement, & sans aucune reserue, &c.

ENGLISH

that they are content with them, even if they are not. They should thank not only those who get something restored to them, but also those who do not take everything from them, so as to win the friendship of both, or at least to avoid their hatred; for this can be of great use afterward in maintaining oneself.

Besides, there is still a long road from promises to their fulfillment. If those who have [V 285] the power come to terms among themselves alone, it is easy for them to find reasons to share out among themselves what they had perhaps been willing to give back to a third party only out of jealousy of one another, and to prevent whichever of them was enriched by his spoils from becoming too powerful. The smallest part of the Palatinate is worth more than the whole empire of the Tartars or the Muscovites, and after two or three years of peace, living there will be as pleasant as anywhere else on earth.

As for me, since I am not attached to living in any particular place, I would have no difficulty in exchanging these Provinces, or even France, for that country, if I could find as secure a peace there—even if nothing but the beauty of the country drew me there. But there is no place in the world so harsh or so inconvenient that I would not think myself happy to spend the rest of my days there, if Your Highness were there and I were able to be of some service to you. For I am entirely, and without any reservation, etc.

DESCARTES TO ELISABETH, 31 MARCH 1649

Invited to Sweden, Descartes delays his departure so as to receive her commands.

FRENCH

AT V 330 **DESCARTES** Madame,

Il y a enuiron vn mois que i'ay eu l'honneur d'écrire à vostre Altesse, & de luy mander que i'auois receu quelques lettres de Suede. Je viens d'en receuoir derechef, par lesquelles ie suis conuié, de la part de la Reyne, d'y faire vn voyage à ce printemps, afin de pouuoir reuenir auant l'hyuer. Mais i'ay répondu de telle sorte que, bien que ie ne refuse pas d'y aller, ie croy neantmoins que ie ne partiray point d'icy que vers le milieu de l'esté. I'ay demandé ce delay pour plusieurs considerations, & particulierement afin que ie puisse auoir l'honneur de receuoir les commandemens de V. A. auant que de partir.

ENGLISH

DESCARTES Madame,

About a month ago I had the honor of writing to Your Highness and telling you that I had received some letters from Sweden. I have just received more, in which I am invited, on the Queen's behalf, to make a journey there this spring, so as to be able to return before winter. But I have answered in such a way that, although I do not refuse to go, I believe I shall not leave here until around the middle of summer. I asked for this delay for several reasons, and in particular so that

FRENCH

ENGLISH

I might have the honor of receiving Your Highness's commands before I leave.

I'ay desia si publiquement declaré le zele & la deuotion que i'ay à vostre seruice, qu'on auroit plus de suiet d'auoir mauuaise opinion de moy, si on remarquoit que ie fusse indifferent en ce qui vous touche, que l'on n'aura, si on voit que ie recherche auec soin les occasions de [V 331] m'acquitter de mon deuoir. Ainsi ie suplie tres-humblement V. A. de me faire tant de faueur, que de m'instruire de tout ce en quoy elle iugera que ie luy puis rendre seruice, à elle ou aux siens, & de s'assurer qu'elle a sur moy autant de pouuoir, que si i'auois esté toute ma vie son domestique.

I have already declared so publicly the zeal and devotion I have for your service that people would have more reason to think ill of me if they saw me indifferent to what concerns you than they will have if they see me carefully seeking occasions [V 331] to fulfill my duty. So I most humbly beg Your Highness to do me the favor of telling me everything in which you judge I can be of service to you or to your family, and to be assured that you have as much power over me as if I had been a member of your household all my life.

AT V 331 Ie la supplie aussi de me faire sçauoir ce qu'il luy plaira que ie réponde, s'il arriue qu'on se souuienne des lettres de V. A. touchant le Souuerain Bien, dont i'auois fait mention l'an passé dans les miennes, & qu'on ait la curiosité de les voir. Ie fais mon conte de passer l'hyuer en ce pays-là, & de n'en reuenir que l'année prochaine. Il est à croire que la paix sera pour lors en toute l'Allemagne, & si mes desirs sont accomplis, ie prendray au retour mon chemin par le lieu où vous serez, afin de pouuoir plus particulierement témoigner que ie suis, &c.

I also beg you to let me know what you would like me to answer if it should happen that someone remembers Your Highness's letters concerning the supreme good, which I mentioned in mine last year, and is curious to see them. I expect to spend the winter in that country and not to return until the following year. It is likely that there will then be peace throughout Germany; and if my wishes are fulfilled, I shall travel back by way of the place where you are, so as to be able to show more particularly that I am, etc.

DESCARTES TO ELISABETH, JUNE 1649

Descartes confirms that he will go to Sweden, encouraged by Chanut's praise of the Queen.

FRENCH

ENGLISH

AT V 359 **DESCARTES** Madame,

DESCARTES Madame,

Puisque vostre Altesse desire sçauoir quelle a est ma resolution touchant le voyage de Suede, ie luy diray que ie persiste dans le dessein d'y aller, en cas que la Reine continuë à témoigner qu'elle veut que i'y aille, [V 360] & M. Chanut, nostre Resident) en ce païs-là, estant passé icy, il y a huit iours, pour aller en France, m'a parlé si auantageusement de cette merueilleuse Reine, que le chemin ne me semble plus si long ny si fascheux qu'il faisoit auparauant ; mais ie ne partiray point que ie n'aye receu encore vne fois des nouuelles de ce païs-là, & ie tascheray d'attendre le retour de M.

Since Your Highness wishes to know what I have decided about the journey to Sweden, I will tell you that I am keeping to my plan to go, provided the Queen continues to show that she wants me to. [V 360] Monsieur Chanut, our Resident in that country, passed through here a week ago on his way to France, and he spoke to me so favorably of this marvelous Queen that the journey no longer seems as long or as tiresome as it did before. But I shall not leave until I have once more had news from that country, and I will try to wait for the return of Monsieur

AT V 360 Chanut pour faire le voyage auec luy, pource que i'espere qu'on le renuoyera en Suede. Au reste, ie m'estimerois extremement heureux, si, lors que i'y seray, i'estois capable de rendre quelque seruice à vostre Altesse. Ie ne manqueray pas d'en rechercher auec soin les occasions, & ne craindray point d'écrire ouuertement tout ce que

Chanut so as to make the journey with him, because I hope he will be sent back to Sweden. For the rest, I would consider myself extremely fortunate if, while I am there, I were able to render Your Highness some service. I shall not fail to seek out occasions for it carefully, and I shall not be

FRENCH

i'auray fait ou pensé sur ce suiet, à cause que, ne pouuant auoir aucune intention qui soit préiudiciable à ceux pour qui ie seray obligé d'auoir du respect, & tenant pour maxime que les voyes iustes & honnestes sont les plus vtiles & les plus sures, encore que les lettres que i'écriray fussent vües, i'espere qu'elles ne pourront estre mal interpretées, ny tomber entre les mains de personnes qui soient si iniustes, que de trouuer mauuais que ie m'acquitte de mon deuoir & fasse profession ouuerte d'estre, &c.

ENGLISH

afraid to write openly everything I have done or thought on this subject. For I can have no intention that would be prejudicial to those whom I shall be bound to respect, and I hold as a maxim that just and honest ways are the most useful and the safest. So I hope that even if the letters I write were seen, they could not be misinterpreted, nor fall into the hands of people so unjust as to take it ill that I fulfill my duty and openly profess to be, etc.

DESCARTES TO ELISABETH, 9 OCTOBER 1649

From Stockholm, Descartes gives his first impressions of Queen Christina.

FRENCH

AT V 429 **DESCARTES** Madame,

Estant arriué depuis quatre ou cinq iours à Stocholm, l'vne des premieres choses que i'estime appartenir à mon deuoir est de renouueller les offres de mon tres-humble seruice à vostre Altesse, afin qu'elle puisse connoistre que le changement d'air & de païs ne peut rien changer ny diminuer de ma deuotion & de mon zele. Ie n'ay encore eu l'honneur de voir la Reine que deux fois ; mais il me semble la connoistre déia assez, pour oser dire qu'elle n'a pas moins de merite & a plus de vertu que la renommée luy en attribuë.

Auec la generosité & la maiesté qui éclattent en toutes ses actions, on y voit vne douceur & vne bonté, qui obligent tous ceux qui aiment la vertu & qui ont l'honneur d'aprocher d'elle, d'estre entierement déuoüez à son seruice. Vne des premieres choses qu'elle m'a demandées a esté si ie sçauois de vos nouuelles, & ie n'ay pas feint de luy dire d'abord ce que ie pensois de vostre Altesse ; car, remarquant la force de son V 430 esprit, ie n'ay pas craint que cela luy donnast aucune ialousie, comme ie m'assure aussi que V. A. n'en sçauroit auoir, de ce que ie luy écris librement mes sentimens de cette Reine.

AT V 430 Elle est extremement portée à l'étude des lettres ; mais, pource que ie ne sçache point qu'elle ait encore rien veu de la Philosophie, ie ne puis iuger du goust qu'elle y prendra, ny si elle y pourra employer du temps, ny par consequent si ie seray capable de luy donner quelque satisfaction, & de luy estre vtile en quelque chose. Cette grande ardeur qu'elle a pour la connoissance des lettres, l'incite sur tout maintenant à cultiuer la langue Grecque, & à ramasser beaucoup de liures anciens ; mais peut-estre que cela changera.

ENGLISH

DESCARTES Madame,

I arrived in Stockholm four or five days ago, and one of the first things I consider part of my duty is to renew the offer of my most humble service to Your Highness, so that you may know that a change of air and of country can neither change nor diminish my devotion and my zeal. So far I have had the honor of seeing the Queen only twice; but I seem already to know her well enough to venture to say that she has no less merit, and more virtue, than fame attributes to her.

Along with the generosity and majesty that shine in all her actions, one sees in her a gentleness and a goodness that bind all who love virtue and have the honor of approaching her to devote themselves entirely to her service. One of the first things she asked me was whether I had news of you, and I did not hesitate to tell her straight away what I thought of Your Highness. For, observing the strength of her V 430 mind, I was not afraid that this would make her at all jealous—just as I am sure Your Highness cannot be jealous because I write to you freely what I think of this Queen.

She is extremely devoted to the study of letters. But since, as far as I know, she has not yet seen anything of philosophy, I cannot judge what taste she will have for it, nor whether she will be able to spend time on it, nor, consequently, whether I shall be able to give her some satisfaction and be useful to her in anything. This great ardor she has for learning now leads her above all to cultivate the Greek language and to collect many ancient books; but perhaps that will change.

FRENCH

Et quand il ne changeroit pas, la vertu que ie remarque en cette Princesse, m'obligera tousiours de preferer l'vtilité de son seruice au desir de luy plaire ; en sorte que cela ne m'empeschera pas de luy dire franchement mes sentimens ; & s'ils manquent de luy estre agreables, ce que ie ne pense pas, i'en tireray au moins cet auantage que i'auray satisfait à mon deuoir, & que cela me donnera occasion de pouuoir d'autant plutost retourner en ma solitude, hors de laquelle il est difficile que ie puisse rien auancer en la recherche de la verité ; & c'est en cela que consiste mon principal bien en cette vie.

Monsieur Fr(einshemius) a fait trouuer bon à sa Maiesté que ie n'aille iamais au Chasteau, qu'aux heures qu'il luy plaira de me donner pour auoir l'honneur de luy parler ; ainsi ie n'auray pas beaucoup de peine à faire ma cour, & cela s'acommode fort à mon humeur. Apres tout neant [V 431] moins, encore que l'aye vne tres-grande veneration pour sa Maiesté, ie ne croy pas que rien soit capable de me retenir en ce païs plus long-temps que iusques à l'esté prochain ; mais ie ne puis absolument répondre de l'auenir. Ie puis seulement vous asseurer que ie seray toute ma vie, &c.

ENGLISH

And even if it does not change, the virtue I observe in this Princess will always oblige me to put the usefulness of serving her above the desire to please her, so that it will not keep me from telling her frankly what I think. And if my opinions fail to please her, which I do not expect, I will at least draw this advantage from it: that I shall have done my duty, and that it will give me occasion to return all the sooner to my solitude. Outside it, I can hardly make any progress in the search for truth; and it is in this that my principal good in this life consists.

Monsieur Freinshemius has persuaded Her Majesty to agree that I should never go to the Castle except at the hours she is pleased to give me for the honor of speaking with her. So I shall not have much trouble paying court, and this suits my temperament very well. After all that, [V 431] though, even though I have very great veneration for Her Majesty, I do not believe anything could keep me in this country beyond next summer; but I cannot answer absolutely for the future. I can only assure you that I shall be all my life, etc.

ELISABETH TO DESCARTES, 4 DECEMBER 1649

In the last letter, Elisabeth rejoices in Christina's accomplishments and hopes he will return soon.

FRENCH

AT V 451 **ELISABETH** Monsieur Descartes,

Vostre lettre du (29sept.)/(30oct.) s'est promenée par Cleue ; mais toute vieille elle ne laisse pas d'estre tres-agreable & vne preuue fort obligeante de la continuation de vostre bonté pour moy, qui m'asseure aussi de l'heureux succés de vostre voyage, puisque le suiet en merite la peine & que vous trouuez encore plus de merueilles en la Reine de Suede que sa reputation n'en fait éclater. Mais il faut auouer que vous estes plus capable de les connoistre que ceux qui se sont meslés iusqu'icy de les proclamer. Et il me semble en sauoir plus, par ce peu que vous en dites, que par tout ce que i'en ay appris d'ailleurs.

Ne croyez pas toutefois qu'vne description si auantageuse me donne matiere de ialousie, mais plutost de m'estimer vn peu plus [V 452] que ie ne faisois auant qu'elle m'a fait auoir l'idée d'vne personne si accomplie, qui affranchit

ENGLISH

ELISABETH Monsieur Descartes,

Your letter of 29 September/30 October has wandered by way of Cleves. But old as it is, it is still most welcome, and a very obliging proof that your kindness toward me continues. It also assures me of the happy success of your journey, since its object is worth the trouble and you find even more marvels in the Queen of Sweden than her reputation proclaims. It must be admitted, though, that you are better able to recognize them than those who have so far taken it upon themselves to proclaim them. And I seem to learn more of them from the little you say than from all I have heard elsewhere.[12]

Do not think, however, that so flattering a description gives me cause for jealousy. Rather, it gives me cause to esteem myself a little more [V 452] than I did before it gave me the idea of so accomplished a

12 Cleves, a duchy on the lower Rhine then held by the Elector of Brandenburg.

FRENCH	ENGLISH
nostre sexe de l'imputation d'imbecilité & de foiblesse que MM. les pedants lui souloient donner. Ie m'asseure, lorsqu'elle aura vne fois gousté vostre philosophie, elle la preferera à leur philologie. Mais i'admire qu'il est possible à cette Princesse de s'appliquer à l'étude comme elle fait, & aux affaires de son royaume aussi, deux occupations si differentes, qui demandent chacune vne personne entiere.	person, who frees our sex from the charge of feebleness of mind and weakness that the gentlemen pedants used to lay on it. I am sure that once she has tasted your philosophy, she will prefer it to their philology. But I marvel that this Princess can apply herself to study as she does, and to the affairs of her kingdom as well—two such different occupations, each of which demands a whole person.
AT V 452 L'honneur qu'elle m'a fait, en vostre presence, de se souuenir de moy, ie l'attribue entierement au dessein de vous obliger, en vous donnant suiet d'exercer vne charité que vous auez temoigné d'affecter en beaucoup d'autres occasions, & vous dois cet auantage, comme aussi si i'obtiens celuy d'auoir quelque part en son approbation, que ie pourray conseruer d'autant mieux que ie n'auray iamais l'honneur d'estre connue de sa Maiesté autrement que vous me representez. Ie me sens toutefois coupable d'vn crime contre son seruice, estant bien aise que vostre extreme veneration pour elle ne vous obligera pas de demeurer en Suede. Si vous en partez cet hyuer, i'espere que ce sera en la compagnie de M.	The honor she did me, in your presence, of remembering me, I attribute entirely to her wish to oblige you by giving you occasion to exercise a charity you have shown yourself fond of on many other occasions. I owe you that advantage, as I shall also owe you the one of having some share in her approval, if I obtain it. And I shall be able to keep it all the better since I shall never have the honor of being known to Her Majesty otherwise than as you represent me. I feel myself guilty, however, of a crime against her service, since I am glad that your extreme veneration for her will not oblige you to stay in Sweden. If you leave this winter, I hope it will be in the company of Monsieur
Kleist, où vous trouuerez la meilleure commodité pour donner le bonheur de vous reuoir à	Kleist, with whom you will find the best means of giving the happiness of seeing you again to[13]
Vostre tres-affectionnée à vous seruir, Élisabeth. M. Descartes. Ce 24/4 9bre/10bre. Ma derniere estoit du 10/20 nou.	Yours most affectionately, always at your service, Elisabeth. Monsieur Descartes. 24 November/4 December. My last was of 10/20 November.

13 An envoy of the Elector of Brandenburg then at the Swedish court.