

excellent
The passion of delight is interesting for its moral significance, for Descartes regards it, together with its contrary, revulsion, as the strongest and most deceptive passion, the one to be "guarded against" most carefully.

well written, elegantly thought through
Descartes views delight as a species of the passion of love. Love is the passion inciting the soul to join itself willingly to apparently agreeable objects (Article LXXIX), and these in turn are denominated "good." The objects of delight, however, are termed "beautiful," or "that which is so represented by our outward senses, principally that of sight, which alone is more considered than others" (Article LXXXV).

Desire is defined as an agitation of the soul caused by spirits (associated with the other passions) disposing it to wish for agreeable things in the future (Article LXXXVI). (Joy, the passion we associate with the possession of a good thing in the present, and satisfaction, the passion we associate with a good thing possessed in the past, will be considered shortly.) It follows that there are as many species of desire as there are of love, and that desires associated with delight (and revulsion) are the strongest (Article LXXXVIII). The desires supported by delight are in turn as numerous as and vary with the strength of the different kinds of delight (Article XC). For Descartes, The beauty of flowers incites us "only" to look at them,

while that of fruits more strongly arouses us to eat them. The most powerful delight results from impressions of perfections we discern in a person of the opposite sex. We represent these perfections as capable of complementing our own defects in the production of another self; to acquire these perfections is represented, "confusedly" for Descartes, as the greatest of all goods.

Since delight in the opposite sex is the most powerful delight, sexual desire is in principle the most powerful desire. Before we consider the moral significance of these conceptions, we must recall with Descartes that sexual desire does not rest on lust, or the passion of "a brutal man for a woman whom he desires to violate." Sexual delight, like one's affection for one's mistress (Article LXXXII), stands somewhere "between" the lust of a brutal man and the love a good father has for his children. The brutal man loves only the possession of his object, for which he "only has desire mingled with other particular passions." The good father loves the child itself, seeks its good as much or more than his own, and desires no more union with it than he already has, because he and it already form a whole. Sexual desire, because of a lack of wholeness, is similar to the brutal man's desire to possess, but resembles the father's desire for the good of the other as a part of one whole. Since the love in perfect friendship is equated with that of a good father, we can say that sexual delight is in

a middle position on a gradient between lust and "Platonic" love.

The moral significance of delight for Descartes is as follows. Five of the six primitive passions, including love of which delight is a species, relate to the body and serve either to maintain it or render it more perfect (Article CXXXVII). Since it is more important to repel things that may injure and destroy the body than to acquire things that may add perfection to it, revulsion ranks more "highly" in the order of passions than delight. Furthermore, delight, as a strong passion, may deceive us, as animals are deceived by bait in traps. While revulsion is equally strong, it is better for the body to separate itself from what seems ugly but really would add perfection to it, than to join itself to that which seems beautiful but would hurt it (perhaps the expression "romantic love" captures the unreliability better than sexual delight).

Fortunately, the possibility of perfection need not be thrown to the winds in a headlong rush toward mere self-preservation. The soul can use experience and reason to distinguish and judge between things that are good and evil in themselves, to which the passions of delight and revulsion are the least reliable guides (Article CXXXVIII). The guidance of reason can turn the whole order of importance of the passions around. There cannot be enough love that is guided by knowledge of the true goods, because only this combination

of reason and passion leads us to the perfection attainable by us (Article CXXXIX). For our example, the control of reason involves so moderating sexual desire as to keep it in accordance with virtue (Article CXLIV). The effectiveness of this virtuous disposition in turn generates an "inner emotion" of satisfaction that renders the soul immune to the force of delight (Article CXLVIII).

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Whether this "remedy" for the passion of delight serves to perfect the body as well as the soul is an important question. Joy is the "inner emotion" caused by the impression of the healthy functioning of the bodily faculties. Assuming that the bodily faculties include the sexual faculty, unless one maintains the health of the latter, one cannot experience perfect joy. To maintain the health of the sexual faculty, one must exercise it regularly, and thus be susceptible to the passion of delight on those occasions. If, then, the "inner emotion" of satisfaction has rendered the soul immune to the force of delight, it would seem that this intellectual passion both inhibits bodily perfection and is in conflict with another intellectual passion, joy. The only way out for Descartes would be to subject himself voluntarily to the passion of delight, in a way that accords with virtue.