

There are at least two senses of "clear and distinct" in the Meditations. The first sense, is the clarity and distinctness that characterizes a "simple," such as God, the thing that thinks, and an object of mathematics. It is evident that a passion is as little capable of being called clear and distinct in this sense as any other "composite," such as sense-perception.

The second sense is the clarity and distinctness of perceptions of good and evil. Descartes does not systematically work out the way in which the understanding distinguishes between good and evil, though apparently intuition is involved as it is with respect to mathematical objects. In Meditation VI (p. 194), he claims that what is sensed is usually "sufficiently clear and distinct" for signifying to the mind the hurtful or the beneficial, though "too obscure" for determining the essence of bodies. The passions in turn usually serve to fortify a useful response to what is perceived as good or evil. However, in cases where the subject suffers from dropsy, allergies, or any tendency to strong passions, access to the clarity and distinctness of good and evil via the road of sense-perception is at best doubtful.

Perhaps, one may wonder, we can attain a clear and distinct idea of a passion by first attaining clear and distinct ideas of its component parts, and then "deducing" the passion from them. Aside from the difficulties of such a "deduction" under

the best of circumstances, a direct approach to passion by ^{an} the understanding is prevented at the outset by the problems that passion poses for the will. There are two possible strategies for such an analysis, neither of which can lead to anything. The first involves attending to one's own passion introspectively. Here one has all the "data" for the analysis, but precisely here the will is so occupied with questions of good and evil that it cannot assist the understanding in its theoretical task. The second involves attending to the passions of others, but in this case the ideational affect of the spirits on the soul of the subject supposedly is not observable ("ghost in the machine" problem). The first strategy cuts us off from an adequate method, while the second strategy cuts us off from the complete data.

Perhaps the kind of clarity and distinctness that the understanding can attain with respect to good and evil can be used as a criterion in "clarifying" passions. The task here would be to show just how the will is able to assist the understanding in making such distinctions at the same time as attention is bound by the passion under consideration. Descartes seems to think, at least, that many moral decisions involve the possibility of being able to reason in such a way in such circumstances.

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