**The Passions of the Soul: Descartes vs Aquinas**

**BA+Erasmus module**

**Winter Term 2019**

**Calendar**

**1)** 3.10: Introduction to the course. What is a passion?

**2)** 10.10: The Third Primitive Notion: the correspondence with Elisabeth and the genesis of the *Treatise on the Passions*

**3)** 17.10: What is the place of the *Passions*?

**4)** 24.10: Descartes on the union vs Aquinas on the union: … (1)

**5)** 31.10: … (2) *Forma corporis* vs *forma assistens*

**6)** 7.11: Back to the passions. Taxonomy and Order

**7)** 14.11: The primitive passions

**8)** 21.11: Love as convenient (Descartes)

**9)** 28.11: Love as the first passion (Thomas)

**10)** 5.12: room for seminars

**11)** 12.12: no class

**12)** 19.12: room for seminars

**13)** 9.1.: final remarks. Texts on the passive mind (Descartes)

**I. What is a passion?**

**1**. Descartes, *Passions de l’âme*, AT XI 328, l. 5-13:

Et pour commencer, je considere que tout ce qui se fait ou qui arrive de nouveau, est généralement appelé par les Philosophes une Passion au regard du sujet auquel il arrive, et une Action au regard de celuy qui fait qu’il arrive. En sorte que, bien que l’agent et le patient soient fort differens, l’Action et la Passion ne laissent pas d’estre toujours une mesme chose, qui a ceux deux noms, à raison des deux divers sujets auxquels on la peut raporter.

Next I note that we are not aware of any subject which acts more directly upon our soul than the body to which it is joined. Consequently we should recognize that what is a passion in the soul is usually an action in the body. Hence there is no better way of coming to know about our passions than by examining the difference between the soul and the body, in order to learn which of the two we should attribute each of the functions present in us.

[tr. by J. Cottingham, *Descartes’ Philosophical Writings*; since now on, this will be the reference tr.]

**2.** “No one before me”: Descartes, *PA*, I, 1, AT 328, 9-13, 16-18, 329, 1-5:

Il n’y a rien en quoy paroisse mieux combien les sciences que nous avons des Anciens sont défectueses qu’en ce qu’ils ont écrit des Passions. Car, bien que ce soit une matiere dont la connaissance a toujours esté fort recherchée (…) toutesfois ce que les Anciens en ont enseigné est si peu de chose, et pour la plupart si peu croyable, que je ne puis avoir aucune esperance d’approcher de la vérité, qu’en m’éloignant des chemins qu’ils ont suivis. C’est pourquoi je seray obligé d’escrire icy en mesme façon, que si je tratois d’une matiere que jamais personne avant moi n’eust touchée.

The defects of the sciences we have from the ancients are nowhere more apparent than in their writings on the passions. This topic, about which knowledge has always been keenly sought, does not seem to be one of the more difficult to investigate since everyone feels passions in himself and so has no need to look elsewhere for observations to establish their nature. And yet the teachings of the ancients about the passions are so meagre and for the most part so implausible that I cannot hope to approach the truth except by departing from the paths they have followed. That is why I shall be obliged to write just as if I were considering a topic that no one had dealt with before me.

**3.** Francisco Suárez (1541-1617), *Disputationes Metaphysicae,* 48(cf. É. Gilson, *Index scolastico-cartésien*, Paris 1913, p. 8)

Actio et passio ita coniunguntur realiter in uno motu seu mutatione, ut nec actio a passione, nec passio ab actione separabilis sit (…) Quia repugnat passionem fieri in aliquo sujecto, quin ab aliquo agente procedat, quia non potest esse effectus sine causa, hoc autem ipso quod ab aliquo agente procedat, invenitur in illa mutatione vera ratio actionis (…) e converso etiam non potest esse actio ex subjecto quin hoc ipso inferat passionem, nam si ex subjecto fit, in subjecto recipitur terminus ejus et in eodem fit; ergo est passio et receptio ex parte talis subjecti; sunt ergo omnino inseparabilis passio et talis actio.

Action and passion are so truly united in a movement or change, that nor can the action be separated from the passion or the passion from the action (…) Because it is contradictory that a passion happens in a subject without proceeding from an agent, because there can be no effect without cause; and for the same fact that it proceeds from some agent, in that change lies the cause of the action (…) on the opposite, as well, there cannot be an action (proceeding) from a subject, unless the latter brings about a passion. In fact, if it comes from the subject, it ends in the subject as its terminus and it stays in it. Thus, passion and reception are depending on such subject. Thus, a passion and such an action are inseparable for sure.

**II. The genesis of the *Passions*:**

Elizabeth to Descartes, 6.5.1643

“Today Monsieur Pollot has given me such assurance of your good-will towards everyone and especially towards me that I have overcome my inhibitions and come right out with the question I put to the Professor [Regius], namely:

Given that the soul of a human being is only a thinking substance, how can it affect the bodily spirits, in order to bring about voluntary actions? The question arises because it seems that how a thing moves depends solely on (i) how much it is pushed (ii) the manner in which it is pushed or (iii) the surface-texture and shape of the thing that pushes it. The first two of those require contact between the two things, and the third requires that the causally active thing be extended. Your notion of the soul entirely exclude extension, and it appears to me that an immaterial thing can’t be possibly touch anything else. So I ask you for a definition of the soul that homes in on its nature more thoroughly than does the one you give in your *Meditations*, i.e. I want one that characterizes what it is as distinct from what it does (namely to think). It looks as though human souls can exist without thinking – e.g. in an unborn child or in someone who has a great fainting spell – but even if that is not so, and the soul’s intrinsic nature and its thinking are as inseparable as God’s attributes are, we can still get a more perfect idea of both of them by considering them separately. In writing to you like this I am freely exposing to you the weaknesses of my soul’s speculations; but I know that you are the best physician for my soul, and I hope that you will observe the Hippocratic oath and supply me with remedies without making them public. […]