Margaret Cavendish on Passion, Pleasure, and Propriety

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Abstract
In this paper, I present three claims belonging to Cavendish's theory of the passions. First, positive and negative passions are species of love and hate. Second, love and hate involve pleasure and pain. Third, pleasure and pain are regular and irregular, where these notions are to be understood in teleological terms. From these commitments, it follows that hate is irregular. I argue that this consequence is a problematic one for Cavendish. After defending my reading through a consideration of Cavendish's reflections on mental health and disorder, I explore ways in which she might revise her commitments to avoid the problem. Throughout the paper, I demonstrate the extent to which Cavendish's theory of the passions draws on Aristotelian and Augustinian ideas that loomed large in late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century writings on the topic.

Keywords
Margaret Cavendish; passions; love and hate; pleasure and pain; teleology; mental disorder

1. Introduction

According to Margaret Cavendish:

> All Figures and Creatures have an Operative Power, which Operation is made by Sympathetical and Antipathetical motions in several Creatures or Figures, and Parts of Creatures and Figures. (PPOII, 70)[1]

By appeal to the workings of sympathy and antipathy, pervasive throughout nature, Cavendish seeks to explain a staggering variety of phenomena from the most fundamental to the more mundane. They include, but are not limited to, the individuation of objects (GNP, 68), bodily health and disease (GNP, 84), the emotional power of music (PPOII, 442), social cohesion and conflict (PPOII, 112), gravity (PPOII, 128), freezing and thawing (OEP, 120), fermentation (OEPII, 87), and thunderstorms (PPOII, 228).

But what are sympathy and antipathy? They are, Cavendish writes, 'nothing else but natural Passions and Appetites' (PL, 293). So, it turns out, the passions play wide-ranging explanatory roles in Cavendish's metaphysics, broadly construed, and in her natural philosophy.[2] This suggests that to understand and assess Cavendish's contributions to these areas of inquiry we need to understand and assess her theory of the passions. While this has received some attention in recent scholarship (for example, Broad and Sipowicz 2022), there is an important component that has yet to be discussed.

[1] On sympathy in both Cavendish's work and seventeenth-century philosophy more generally, see (Lobis 2015; Mercer 2015; Meyns 2018; Borcherding 2021).
[2] As do the appetites. I explain this contrast in §2.

Cavendish offers an account of what distinguishes *positive* passions—such as love, delight, joy, and hope—from *negative* passions—such as hate, despair, anger, and grief. In this paper, I will present that account (§3). Having so, I will show that it is doubly problematic—it is implausible on independent grounds, and it is inconsistent with some of Cavendish's other philosophical commitments (§4). In view of this, and in the spirit of charity, one might wonder if my reading of Cavendish is correct. Accordingly, I will defend that reading by addressing a challenge to it relating to Cavendish's remarks on what she calls 'madnesse' (§5). In closing, and in the same spirit, I will explain how Cavendish might revise the way in which she distinguishes positive and negative passions to avoid the problems facing her account (§6).

In addition to uncovering a dimension to Cavendish's theory of the passions and contributing to its critical assessment, this paper will identify significant influences on that theory. In particular, I will show that Cavendish is channelling Aristotelian and Augustinian ideas on crucial points.[3] By the 1660s, Cavendish had read Thomas Stanley's *History of Philosophy* (1656), in which some of those ideas can be found. However, notwithstanding her protestations of ignorance,[4] they can also be found in Cavendish's work from the early 1650s.

Scholasticism, which incorporated and communicated Aristotelian and Augustinian thought, served as the backdrop to seventeenth-century debate (see Ariew and Gabbey 1998). It would have been a second language to those family-members who served as Cavendish's informal tutors and interlocutors (see PPO, 'Epistle'), as well as to members of the 'Newcastle Circle' of leading intellectuals at whose meetings Cavendish was present, if not as an active participant.[5] In addition, as I will show, the views of Aristotle and Augustine concerning the passions figure prominently in widely-read texts from the late 1500s and early 1600s.[6] Since those works were published in English prior to the 1650s, they were accessible to Cavendish, who understood 'no other language' (PPO, 'Epilogue'), at the earliest stages of her career. So, while it might not be possible to identify their exact provenance, it should not be a surprise to find Aristotelian and Augustinian ideas informing Cavendish's reflections on the passions.

2. The background

Before presenting Cavendish's distinction between positive and negative passions, I will set the scene. According to Cavendish, all that exists in nature is matter. As she says:

> Nature is purely corporeal or material, and there is nothing that belongs to, or is a part of Nature, which is not corporeal. (OEP, 155)

There are three 'degrees' or 'parts' of matter—the inanimate, the sensitive, and the rational (GNP, 3).[7] These are not separate substances, Cavendish insists, since as 'it is impossible one should be without the other' (OEP, 'To the Reader'). The sensitive and the rational degrees are distinguished from the inanimate in having what Cavendish calls 'self-motion', which is the capacity to initiate change.[8]

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[3] Scholars have explored the influence of Stoicism on Cavendish's metaphysics and her theory of the passions (see, respectively, O'Neill 2013; Broad and Sipowicz 2022). Here I show that Cavendish draws in addition (not instead) on other ancient sources.

[4] For example: 'If any *Philosophers* have written of these *Subjects* […] it is more then I know of' (P&F, 'To Naturall *Philosophers*).

[5] On the Newcastle Circle, see (O'Neill 2001, xiii; Whitaker 2011, 94–97).

[6] On the passions in seventeenth-century British and European philosophy, see (James 1999a; Schmitter 2013).

[7] On the degrees of matter, see (James 1999b, 225–31; O'Neill 2001, xxiii–xxv; Cunning 2016, 196–99; Boyle 2018, chap. 3; Shaheen 2021).

[8] On Cavendish on motion, see (Peterman 2019; Lascano 2021; Chamberlain 2024; Whiting 2024).

As Susan James notes, there is 'a traditional opposition between passion and reason' (1998, 915). Cavendish was certainly familiar with this tradition, which dates back to antiquity. In one of her principal sources, Stanley reports (via Alcinous) Plato's view that the 'passionate and reasonable are separate by nature' (1656, 80). Cavendish alludes to that contrast in this caricature:

> *Moralists* are like powerfull *Monarchs*, which can make their *Passions* obedient at their pleasure, condemning them at the Bar of *Justice*, cutting of their heads with the sword of *Reason*. (P&F, 51)

From early to late, Cavendish opposes tradition and maintains that the passions belong to rational matter,[9] which she identifies with reason (PL, 37; GNP, 83), in contrast to the bodily appetites that belong to sensitive matter:

> The Passions of the Mind are Rational, the Humours of the Body, Bestial. (WO, 149-150)

> Passions are made by the rational animate Matter, and the Appetites by the sensitive. (PL, 297)

While the passions are motions of rational matter, they stand in systematic relations to those of sensitive matter.[10] According to Cavendish, a sensory experience may occasion a passionate response (GNP, 79). For example, on seeing a spider, I might be afraid. When that happens, the rational matter makes a 'figure' that corresponds to the 'pattern' the sensitive matter presents. However, Cavendish insists, the passions are 'voluntary actions of figuring' in the sense that they can be formed spontaneously and without taking their figures from external objects (see OEP, 210). For example, I might hope for another creature to catch the spider, despite not seeing one. In turn, rational passions can occasion the sensitive matter to move the inanimate in accordance with its figures. For example, my desire to avoid the spider might result in my walking around it. Cavendish offers the following analogy for the relations among the different parts of matter:

> The Rational part […] is, as it were, the Surveigher or Architect; the Sensitive, the labouring or working part, and the Inanimate, the materials. (OEP, 'An Argumental Discourse')

Having outlined the established contours of Cavendish's theory of the passions, I will now turn to the distinction she draws among the passions.

3. Positive and negative

3.1 Love and hate

In one of Cavendish's earliest works, she writes:

> There are but two Parent-Passions, as Love and Hate, from whence all the rest are begot, or derived (WO, 148)

In another work from the same period, she claims that 'love' and 'hate' are the 'two chief passions' (PPO, 206). The remaining positive passions—joy, admiration, and so on—are species of love, while the remaining negative passions—anger, fear, and so on—are species of hate. This idea persists in Cavendish's later work. There she repeats that love and hate are the 'two Chief

[9] On this issue, Cavendish anticipates what is now the dominant view in the philosophy of emotion (Solomon 1977; de Sousa 1987; Elster 1998; Nussbaum 2001; Brady 2009; Na'aman 2021).
[10] On the inputs and outputs of the passions, see (Broad and Sipowicz 2022).

Passions' (PPOII, 260). And, in the play *Youths Glory*, Cavendish's mouthpiece, Sanspareille, refers to love and hate as the 'two Principle passions' (P, 142).

This view was not an original one. Cavendish herself attributes it 'the Ancient philosophers' (P, 141), and it was in circulation in earlier sixteenth- and seventeenth-century writings on the passions.[11] In his *Treatise of Melancholie*, for example, Timothie Bright writes:

> Love and hate are the first kinds and primitives of the rest. (1586, 82)

Similarly, in his *Treatise of the Passions*, Edward Reynolds claims that love and hate are the two 'fundamentall' passions—they are 'the first springings or out goings of the soule' (1640, 39).

In Cavendish's earliest publication, we find the suggestion that, while love and hate are more basic than other passions, love is in turn more basic than hate.[12] Love is 'the Parent of Passions' that 'doth create' all the others (P&F, 92).[13] In a later work, Cavendish calls love the 'prime passion' (PPOII, 59). This view, which originates in Augustine's *City of God* (1998, 592),[14] was also a familiar one at the time. Thomas Wright, in his *Passions of the Mind* (1604), reports that 'Divines and Philosophers commonly affirme, that all other passions acknowledge love to be their fountaine, root, and mother' (1604, 146).[15] Wright's reference to motherhood is echoed by Cavendish's reference to parenthood. He goes on to explain why the 'Divines and Philosophers' hold this view:

> All passions either prosecut some good, or flie some evill; those which flie evill, as hatred, feare, sadnesse, presuppose the love of some good. (1604, 146)

The thought here is that love and hate are directed at good and evil, respectively. Evil is that which thwarts or frustrates the good. So, hate is directed at that which thwarts or frustrates love. In this way, love is explanatorily prior. On the same basis, in addition to saying that love and hate are fundamental, Reynolds says that love is the more fundamental of the two:

> The root and ground of all Passions, is principally the good; and secondarily, or by consequent, the evill of things. (1640, 32)

The Augustinian view can also be found, under that description, in Jean-François Senault's *Use of Passions*, translated into English in 1649. He writes:

> I am enforced to embrace the opinion of Saint *Augustine*, and to maintain with him, that love is the only passionate which doth agitate us, or hath operation in us. (1649, 26)

Senault then explains that other passions, hate included, are 'but properties of love' (1649, 27). The view also appears in Pierre Charron's *Of Wisdom*, translated into English by 1612:

> The first and chiefe mistresse of the passions is Love. (1612, 75)

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[11] Amy Schmitter notes that the authors to follow operate within 'a largely Aristotelian-scholastic framework' (2013, 443–44).

[12] In Cavendish's later work, she claims that self-love is the 'prime and chief action' in nature (OEP, 583). Strictly-speaking, however, self-love is not a passion (see GNP, 68), so I set it aside for present purposes. For discussion, see (Boyle 2018, 91–95; Georgescu 2023).

[13] Thanks to Kevin Lower for bringing this poem to my attention.

[14] On Augustine's reduction of all passions to love, see (James 1999a, 6). In the Stoic tradition, by way of contrast, there are four fundamental passions: desire, fear, pleasure, and pain (see Laertius 1925, 7.1115). For discussion, see (Sorabji 2002, 29; Brennan 2003, 269–267; Graver 2007, chap. 2).

[15] Wright does not endorse this, suggesting instead that there are six fundamental passions (1604, 25). He also holds that 'selfe-love' is prior to all—it is the 'nurse, mother, or rather stepdame' of the passions (1604, 11–12). Cp. 12.

Cavendish has such a view in mind when she describes hate as '*Loves Champion*, which opposeth all / *Loves Enemies*' (P&F, 92). In the immediately following poem, we find another expression of the thought that hate is derivative with respect to love:

> *Love* is the Cause, and *Hate* is the Effect,
> Which is produc'd, when *Love* doth find *Neglect*. (P&F, 92)

As I have shown, this idea of the primary of love was widespread among late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century theorists of the passions.

3.2 Pleasure and pain

Having reduced all the passions to love and hate—or simply to love—Cavendish then makes two further claims regarding them. She makes those claims together, but they are distinct, and it will help in what follows to keep them apart.

One of Cavendish's claims, to a first approximation, is that love and hate go hand in hand with pleasure and pain, respectively. That pleasure and pain 'accompany' all passions is an idea that dates back to Aristotle's *On Rhetoric* (see 1991, sec. II.i).[16] In the chapter on Aristotle, Stanley writes:

> Every passion is conversant in pleasure and griefe. (1656, 264)

Prior to this, Wright reports both the view and its provenance:

> Aristotle reduces all passions to pleasure and payne. (1604, 25)

Reynolds too refers to '*Aristotle* speaking of these two Elements and Principles of all Passion, Pleasure and Griefe, (one of which, all others whatsoever partake of)' (1640, 58).

In combination with the Augustinian claim, the Aristotelian claim entails that love and hate are, or are accompanied by, pleasure and pain. Cavendish expresses this view when she writes:

> *Pleasure*, and *delight*, *discontent*, and *sorrow*, […] is Love, and hate. (PPO, 14)

Here, Cavendish identifies pleasure and delight with love, on the one hand, and discontent and sorrow with hate, on the other. In later work, Cavendish's official position is that pleasure and pain belong to the sensitive matter, and that 'delight' and 'grief' are their respective counterparts in the rational matter.[17] She draws this contrast when she refers to 'the difference of some of the Sensitive and Rational actions; as, Sensitive Pain, Rational Grief; Sensitive Pleasure, Rational delight' (GNP, 64). On this view, delight and grief, hence, love and hate, are not identical with pleasure and pain. Nor, for the later Cavendish, are they invariably accompanied by them. While there is 'for the most part, a sympathetical Agreement between the Appetites, and the Passions' (GNP, 74), they sometimes come apart. So, it is possible to have delight without pleasure, or grief without pain, and in each case vice versa.

However, Cavendish is not consistent in restricting pleasure and pain to sensitive matter. She talks, for example, of 'the pleasures of the Rational Parts' (GNP, 75; see also SL, 22, 156, 257). I suggest that this relaxed approach to terminology reflects the fact that the later Cavendish views delight and grief as pleasure and pain of a sort, specifically, as intellectual, as opposed to bodily, pleasure and pain. In line with this, Cavendish is explicit that the motions of the rational matter

[16] On Aristotle on this issue, see (Dow 2015, chap. 9).
[17] In a transitional text, Cavendish says that pain and hate are the sensitive and rational species, respectively, of 'displeasure' (PPOII 303).

that constitute delight and grief mirror those of the sensitive matter that constitute pleasure and pain, properly so-called:

> That which we call pain or sickness in the body, when patterned out by the mind, is called trouble, or grief. (OEP, 226)

For Cavendish, then, love and hate are pleasure and pain, respectively, or some analogue of them in the rational matter. For ease of presentation, I will drop the qualification in the remainder.

3.3 Regularity and irregularity

Cavendish's next claim concerns the natures of pleasure and of pain. Her view on this issue remains stable from early to late:

> All Pain comes by cross and perturbant Motions, all Pleasure by even and regular Motions. (WO, 198)

> All Irregular and crosse motion, is Pain, all regular motion is pleasure and delight, being Harmony of Motion, or a discourse of Motion. (PPO, 15; see also 104, 125; PPOII, 414)

> According as Regularities and Irregularities have power, they cause either Peace or War, Sickness or Health, Delight and Pleasure, or Grief and Pain, Life or Death, to particular Creatures or parts of Nature. (PL, 238-239)

> All Pain proceeds from Irregular and perturbed Motions. (GNP, 117)

Common to these remarks is the association of pleasure and pain with regularities and irregularities, respectively. In some remarks, Cavendish identifies the two pairs. In others, she says that regularity and irregularity are the causes of pleasure and pain.[18] The thought might be that, insofar as some motion or change results from irregularity, it is itself an irregularity. I will return to this thought below. A more immediate issue is what Cavendish understands by regularity and irregularity.

This is controversial.[19] For present purposes, I will work with a relatively minimal interpretation of Cavendish that almost all parties can accept, even if some would build more into it.

According to Cavendish, there are 'distinct kinds or sorts of Creatures' in nature (GNP, 7). For the motion or figure of a creature to be regular is for it accord with and express the nature that it possesses as a member of its kind. More straightforwardly, a motion or figure is regular just in case it is natural for the relevant kind of creature. By implication, the motion or figure of a creature is irregular just in case it is not a motion or figure that that kind of creature is supposed to make or have. In Cavendish's words:

> Every Creature, if regularly made, hath particular motions proper to its figure; for natural Matters wisdom makes distinctions by her distinct corporeal motions. (PL, 184)

> When I speak of unnatural Motions, I mean such as are not proper to the nature of such or such a Creature. (PL, 539)

> A perfect Creature is produced in the same shape, and has the same interior and exterior figure as is proper to it according to the nature of its kind and species to which it belongs. (OEPII, 6)

[18] Causes, for Cavendish, must be understood as occasional. For discussion, see (O'Neill 2013).
[19] For a range of views, see (Detlefsen 2007; Walters 2014, 83–87; Cunning 2016, 70–79; Boyle 2018; McNulty 2018; Lascano 2023).

By way of illustration, Cavendish writes:

> Neither can we say Man is defective, because he cannot flie as Birds: for flying is not his natural and proper motion; We should rather account that Man monstrous that could flie, as having some motion not natural and proper to his figure and shape. (OEP, 32)

To return in light of this to the issue at hand, when Cavendish says that pleasure is a regular motion, she means that it is a motion that is natural or appropriate for members of the kind to which the thing in motion belongs. Accordingly, in a world with 'no Irregularities, Human Creatures cannot be subject to Pains' (GNP, 278).

I suggest that here too Cavendish is drawing—via a no doubt indirect route—on Aristotle. According to Aristotle, pleasure is the 'unimpeded' 'activity' of a thing towards its 'natural state' (2020, 1152b).[20] So, both Aristotle and Cavendish hold broadly teleological theories of pleasure. In each case, pleasure is what results from a thing moving or acting of its own accord in a way that is proper given the nature of that thing.

This Aristotelian conception of pleasure finds expression in an early poem by Cavendish, in which Nature tells its constituent parts:

> It is my nature things to make,
> To give out worke, and you directions take.
> And by this worke, a pleasure take therein. (P&F, 1)

It also finds expression in later writings when Cavendish characterizes the motions of infinite Nature as a whole, as opposed to those of its finite parts:

> Since Nature is but one body, it is intirely wise and knowing, ordering her self-moving parts with all facility and ease, without any disturbance, living in pleasure and delight. (OEP, 4)

Nature's activity is unhindered, orderly, and, as a result, pleasurable.

3.4 Taking stock

For Cavendish, the various passions are species of love and hate. Love and hate are pleasure and pain. Pleasure and pain are regularities and irregularities. It follows is that love and hate—hence, positive and negative passions more generally—are regularities and irregularities. Cavendish makes explicit this consequence when she writes:

> Love, and hate, is like light, and darknesse; the one is a quick, equal, and free motion; the other is a slow, irregular, and obstructed motion. (PPO, 14)

> Pride, Ambition, Faction, Malice, Envy, Suspition, Jealousie, Spight, Anger, Covetousness, Hatred, or the like […] are Irregular Actions among the Rational Parts. (GNP, 279).

It is this consequence to which I will object. But first I will return to the issue of Cavendish's influences.

I have identified various sources on which Cavendish might be drawing. One might wonder if René Descartes is another. After all, Descartes was a prominent member of the Newcastle Circle,

[20] Aristotle later defines pleasure, not as an activity, but as what 'completes' it (2020, 1174b, 4). For discussion of Aristotle on pleasure, see (Annas 1995, 145–46; Broadie 1994, chap. 6; Bostock 2000, chap. 7; Taylor 2008).

and Cavendish admits to having read early on at least 'half his book of passion' (PPO, 'Epilogue'), namely, *The Passions of the Soul*, translated into English in 1650.

I do not deny that Cavendish incorporates or otherwise responds to Descartes' views on the passions. However, the three themes in Cavendish's reflections that are the focus of this paper are not to be found in Descartes' *Passions*.[21] First, Descartes maintains that there are 'six primitive passions' (1985, ATXI 380/CSM 353).[22] They include wonder, desire, joy, and sadness, alongside love and hate. So, Descartes does not agree with Cavendish who, following Augustine, recognizes only two fundamental passions, with one of them more fundamental still. Moreover, while Descartes contrasts his view with the 'opinion of all who have written previously about the passions', the opinion he refers to is that all passions reduce 'to desire or to anger', both of which he contrasts with love and hate (1985, ATXI 379/CSM 352).

Second, Descartes does not subscribe to or even discuss the Aristotelian view that all passions involve pleasure and pain. For Descartes, pleasure and pain are sensations that 'refer to the body', as opposed to passions in the strict sense which 'refer to the soul itself' (1985, ATXI 347-348/CSM 337-338). Alongside pleasure and pain, so understood, Descartes characterizes 'joy' and 'sadness' as 'pleasant' and 'unpleasant' emotions, respectively (1985, ATXI 396-398/CSM 360-361).[23] So, joy and sadness are the passionate correlates to pleasure and pain, as delight and grief are for Cavendish. According to Descartes, this is how each pair relates:

> Titillation of the senses [i.e. pleasure] is followed so closely by joy, and pain by sadness, that most people make no distinction between the two. Nevertheless, they differ so markedly that we sometimes suffer pains with joy, and receive titillating sensations which displease [i.e. sadden] us. (1985, ATXI 399, CSM 361)

So, for Descartes, the sensations of pleasure and pain need not accompany the passions of joy and sadness. Moreover, since joy and sadness are but two of the primitive passions, it follows that love, hate, wonder, and desire need not involve them, even if as a matter of fact they often precede or succeed them (1985, ATXI 430-431/CSM 376-377).

Finally, Descartes does not sign up to the Aristotelian analysis of pleasure and pain. He does hold a teleological account of the passions (see James 1999a, 100). While ends or final causes play no role in Descartes' explanations for the workings of the material world (1984, ATVII 55/CSM 39), he is happy to attribute them when seeking to explain the workings of the immaterial soul. Thus, Descartes writes:

> The function of all the passions consists solely in this, that they dispose our soul to want the things which nature deems useful for us, and to persist in this volition. (1985, ATXI 372/CSM 349)

One can accept this idea without also thinking that passions are pleasurable in virtue of fulfilling or unfolding in accordance with their function, painful otherwise. Moreover, Descartes is explicit that the function he postulates extends to all the passions, including hate and sadness. So, in

[21] On Descartes on the passions, see (James 1999a, chap. 5; Brown 2006; Shapiro 2006). There were, of course, other inhabitants of Cavendish's intellectual milieu, including Walter Charleton, Kenelm Digby, Thomas Hobbes, and Henry More. It is not the aim of this paper to explore all possible influences on her theory of the passions.

[22] As does Wright. See n15.

[23] Descartes holds in addition that there is such a thing as 'intellectual joy', which is neither a sensation nor a passion. For discussion, see (Tate 2018).

Descartes' view, in contrast to Cavendish's, there is nothing inherently dysfunctional or irregular about negative or unpleasant passions.

In view of these points, I suggest that, while Cavendish found things to agree and disagree with in Descartes's 'book of passion', her reflections on the distinction between positive and negative passions take their inspiration from elsewhere. Consider, for example, the following remark by Reynolds:

> Passions are nothing else, but those naturall, perfective, and unstrained motions of the creatures unto that advancement of their Natures. (1640, 31–32)

Reynolds here has in mind passions that are 'regular'—a term he frequently uses when evaluating passions (for example, 1640, 81, 101, 113, 142, 166, 248–318). So, by implication, irregular passions are motions that are unnatural in the sense that they are in some way impeded or somehow fail to perfect the nature of the creature in question.

When situated alongside others in circulation in English in the early seventeenth-century, it becomes clear just how indebted Cavendish's theory of the passions is to those theories, which in turn are indebted to Aristotelian and Augustinian thought.

4. Problems

For Cavendish, hate and its species are irregular motions, which is to say that it is improper or unnatural for a creature to hate something or to have some other negative passion concerning it. This view, I suggest, is implausible.[24]

Anger is an appropriate response to wrongdoing. Grief is an appropriate response to loss. Fear is an appropriate response to danger.[25] These are substantive verdicts. While I take them to be independently plausible, they are non-trivial. However, given how Cavendish herself understands the appropriateness of passions—in teleological terms—she is under some pressure to accept those verdicts. For Cavendish, a passion is regular just in case it expresses and accords with the nature that the creature has as a member of its kind. In this sense, it is appropriate for a rabbit to fear a predator.[26] Its sensory organs and limbs—including its swivelling ears and sprung hind legs—have as their function the detection and avoidance of predators. They discharge this function and thereby contribute to the continued existence of the rabbit, when a predator is spotted or evaded. Corresponding to the sensitive motions of these parts are rational motions, among them fear, which are occasioned by and in turn occasion them.[27]

It might seem that my presentation of this example involves assumptions that Cavendish rejects. She claims that creatures that are predators in this world would be 'harmless' in a 'Regular

[24] The corresponding claim about positive passions—that they are always proper and natural—is also implausible. I will focus on hate in the main text, but the points could be developed in relation to love.
[25] For contemporary defences of negative passions, see (Cholbi 2017; Moller 2017; Srinivasan 2018; Cherry 2021). There are tricky questions as to how proximity to their objects bears on the appropriateness of negative passions, but they are tangential to the concerns of this paper. For discussion, see (Na'aman 2020; Marušić 2021).
[26] This assumes that rabbits possess rational capacities. Cavendish shares this assumption. 'Every part' of nature, she says, contains 'rational matter' (OEPII, 21). On Cavendish on non-human animals, see (Cunning 2016, 74–179; Suzuki 2016; Boyle 2018, chap. 8).
[27] One might quibble about the details of the particular example, but it is intended to illustrate an independently plausible point—again, that negative passions need not be improper as Cavendish understands this.

World'—that is, a world with no irregularities—and would not there 'feed on' other creatures (GNP, 272-273). So, for Cavendish, it is indeed irregular for rabbits to fear foxes.

However, according to Cavendish, the kinds we are talking about when we use the labels 'rabbit' and 'fox' in relation to the Regular World need not be the kinds we talk about when we apply those labels to inhabitants of the actual world. As she says, 'those Kinds, might be different from those of this World' (GNP, 267).[28] In that case, we cannot draw conclusions about what is (not) proper or natural for rabbits in the actual world from claims about what is (not) proper or natural for creatures with the same name in the Regular World.

Even if it is granted that rabbits fear foxes only in worlds that contain irregularities, it does not follow that fear itself is one of those irregularities. Instead, fear might be a natural and proper response to some *other* irregularity in the environment, for example, predation. More generally, negative passions might be regular motions occasioned by or directed towards irregular motions. I will return to this point in §6.

In addition to being independently implausible, the claim that hate is irregular is in tension with some of Cavendish's other philosophical commitments. As noted at the outset, Cavendish identifies the 'operative power' of antipathy with hate (PL, 293; GNP, 72-73). While Cavendish frequently associates antipathy with irregularity (for example, PPOII, 332-333, 339, 426; PL, 359; OEPII, 37), her (to my knowledge) only explicit pronouncement about their connection is the following:[29]

> There are Sympathetical, and Antipathetical Motions; and yet both sorts may be Regular. (GNP, 157)

If antipathy is hate, and antipathy need not be irregular, then hate need not be irregular. But this conclusion is inconsistent with Cavendish's identification of hate with irregularity.

Consider also the following remark, which recalls the idea of hate as love's champion:

> Perfect Love or Hate must come from chosen Opinions of Good or Bad, either to love Good or hate Evill, as it is natural. (WO, 146)

Here, again, Cavendish is alluding to Aristotelian and Augustinian thought. In his *Politics*, Aristotle writes, 'Goodness consists in […] loving and hating aright' (1995, 1340a14). For Augustine, virtue is 'love by which we love that which is worthy to be loved' (1998, XV.xxii, 680). The problem for Cavendish is that the suggestion that hate is perfect or natural, hence, regular, when its object is evil is inconsistent with her claim that hate is irregular.

Rather than attribute inconsistency to Cavendish, one might suspect that the problem lies with my interpretation. However, Cavendish's explicit remarks on the irregularity of hate outnumber those concerning the regularity of antipathy and of hating evil. Moreover, that hate is irregular is an immediate consequences of commitments Cavendish also explicitly makes on more than one occasion in both early and later work, commitments concerning the relations of hate to pain and of pain to irregularity.

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[28] On this issue, see (Boyle 2018, 201–5; Fasko and West 2025). It need not be in conflict with the claim that natural kind terms are 'rigid designators' (Kripke 1980). The Regular World might be an epistemic possibility, not a metaphysical one.

[29] Without appealing to this remark, Boyle makes the case that, for Cavendish, 'antipathy among parts is not always bad' (2018, 124).

That said, there might be other passages in Cavendish's work that challenge to my reading. In the next section, I will consider such a challenge. In doing so, I will uncover further Aristotelian influences on Cavendish's theory of the passions.

5. Mental disorder

Cavendish has a theory of mental health and mental disorder.[30] It proceeds in now familiar terms:

> There are two sorts different in madnesse, the one is irregular motion, amongst the rational innated [i.e. self-moving] matter, the other amongst the sensitive innated matter. (PPO, 137; also 167; PPOII, 333)

> There are several sorts of that Distemper named *Madness*; but they all proceed through the Irregularities, either of the Rational, or the Sensitive Parts; and sometimes from the Irregularities both of Sense and Reason. (GNP, 124; also 71, 82)

Mental disorder, for Cavendish, consists in part in the sensitive or rational matter moving in ways that are irregular in the sense explained earlier. Mental health, then, requires the absence of this irregularity.

I say 'in part' because Cavendish suggests at one point that mental disorder—at least with respect to the rational mind—is constituted by motions that are both irregular *and violent*:

> The motions of the rational madness are, when they move violently, and irregularly, if the motions be onely vio|ent, then they fall into violent passions; as anger, fear, malice, or loving, hating, grieving, dispraises, and resolute intentions; if their motions be irregular, then they have strange conceptions, wild fancies, mixt memories, inconstant and various opinions; if their motions be violent and irregular, they have strong and strange imaginations, high despaires, obstinate and dangerous resolutions. (PPO, 136)

Cavendish seems to say here that hate can take a form that is violent but not irregular. She says the same about love. Doesn't this undermine my reading, according to which Cavendish distinguishes negative and positive passions in terms of regularity and irregularity?

At most, it shows that Cavendish is inconsistent on this issue. The passages cited in §3, which include passages from the very same text, straightforwardly identify love and hate with regular and irregular motions. On closer inspection, however, the inconsistency is only apparent.

In her remarks on mental disorder, Cavendish is using 'violent' in the Aristotelian sense. Aristotle distinguishes the 'natural' motions of a thing and its 'violent' or 'unnatural' motions according to whether it moves 'by nature or contrary to nature and by force' (1999, 4, 256b). For example, if a sunflower activates its capacity to turn its head towards the sun, its motion is natural. In contrast, if the sunflower's head is twisted away from the sun by an invasive vine, the motion is violent. This distinction made its way into Scholasticism (see Ariew and Gabbey 1998, 442–43), and it was familiar to members of the Newcastle Circle. Kenelm Digby (1644, 76), for one, explicitly theorizes it, seeking to explain the natural/violent distinction in mechanistic terms. It appears also in Stanley's *History*. In a chapter on Aristotle, Stanley explains that an event—in this case, death—is 'violent, when the cause is extrinsecall; naturall, when the principle thereof is in the animate Creature' (1656, 260).

[30] The terminology here is fraught. I follow (Radden 2023, sec. 1), which I take to represent presently accepted usage.

This Aristotelian notion of violence appears frequently in Cavendish's natural philosophy. For example, in a discussion of 'Tempest and storms', she appeals to 'unforced raines (as I may call them) which is without a violent constraint' (PPO, 91). In a contribution to pathology, Cavendish talks of bodily motion which 'becomes more violent, by how much more it were forced' (PPO, 188). More generally, when listing the various 'alterations of motions' that are to be found in nature, Cavendish includes those 'forced by stronger motions to alter their natural course' (PPO, 93).

In later work, Cavendish continues to talk of violence in a recognizably Aristotelian sense. There she contrasts a 'natural motion' with one that is 'forced or violent', where the former results from 'self-motion' and the latter 'from an external agent or moving power' (PL, 308-309; see also PL, 107). Cavendish also explains that 'Violence is beyond the particular nature of such a particular Creature, that is, beyond its natural motions' (PL, 539). Here violent motion is explained in more or less the same terms as irregular motion—as motion that does not accord with the nature of the creature in motion.

In other mature work, Cavendish distinguishes between 'Artificial and Natural Motions' (OEPII, 53).[31] Although the terminology is different, the distinction is almost the same. An artificial motion in this context is just a special case of a violent motion—one in which a forced, unnatural motion is caused by human artifice as opposed to something in nature, like an invasive vine:[32]

> When such a figure has some other exterior motions besides those which are proper to its particular nature, caused by Art, I call them artificial, and do distinguish them from such motions as are proper and natural to it; as for example, […] the nature of Iron or Steel is not to have an exterior progressive local motion, such as animals and other Creatures have, and therefore the motion of the wheels of a Watch is forced, or artificial. (OEPII, 53)

All of this shows that Cavendish was familiar with and makes regular use of the Aristotelian notion of violence—sometimes though not always under that heading—in her theoretical writings from the 1650s through the 1660s.

How does this bear on the issue at hand? For Aristotle, violent motions are unnatural. So too for Cavendish. She explicitly links being 'forced to move' with, in her terms, 'irregularity' (GNP, 105). So, for Cavendish, when hate is violent, it is an irregular passion.

But doesn't Cavendish contrast the violent and the irregular in her remarks on mental disorder? Well, yes, but no. Consider how those remarks continue:

> Mistake me not, for when I say, too violent, strong, swift, weak, slow, it is irregular, as to the temper or nature of the figure, but not as to its own nature; as for example, a clock may go too swift as to the distance of the hour, and yet strike even every nick; and the pulse may be too swift for the natural temper, and yet keep even time. (PPO, 136)

Cavendish's corrective is obscurely expressed, but the examples succeed in conveying the idea. To elaborate: Consider a clock with an hour-hand that moves every fifty-nine minutes. If the motions result from the clock's internal mechanism, they are not violent in the Aristotelian sense, since they are not the result of force. In contrast, if the hour-hand moves every fifty-nine minutes due to objects striking it in opposition to the clock's internal mechanism, its motions

[31] Consider also the contrast between 'forced and constraint actions' with 'natural self-motions are free and voluntary' (OEP, 138).
[32] On the theme of art versus nature in Cavendish, see (Newman 2004; Chao 2012; James 2018; Shaheen 2022).

are forced and so violent in the Aristotelian sense. Only in the first case is the clock an irregular instance of its kind—not a 'proper' clock. But in both cases, the motions are irregular for a clock—the difference lies in whether the source of the irregularity is internal or external to it.

To return to Cavendish's remarks on mental disorder, in contrasting passions due to violence and due to irregularity, she is (really) contrasting two ways in which rational matter might move in an irregular fashion, according to whether the source is internal or external. So, Cavendish's treatment of mental disorder in fact supports the suggestion that she views hate in whatever form as an irregularity.

6. Solutions

I have argued that the view of negative passions—anger, fear, disappointment and the like—as always irregular is independently implausible and in tension with some of Cavendish's other remarks. How might Cavendish revise her position? Since the view is a consequence of three claims, I will consider them in turn.[33]

The first is that all negative passions are to be understood in terms of hate. Whatever is to be said for or against this claim, it is not where the problem at hand lies. Suppose that Cavendish were to hold that other passions are also fundamental or that none are. She might still distinguish the negative and positive passions in terms of the pleasure and pain they involve, and in turn explain pleasure and pain in terms of regularity and irregularity.

An alternative is for Cavendish to disassociate hate and pain, on the one hand, and love and pleasure, on the other.[34] On this view, negative passions might involve pain, but they might not. So, even if pain is an irregularity, hate need not be. That would not leave Cavendish unable to distinguish positive and negative passions—she might do so in terms of what occasions them, the motions and figures they involve, or the sensitive motions they occasion when regular. In addition, or instead, Cavendish might distinguish them in terms of their proper objects, that is, the objects to which the passions are directed when natural or regular.

The remaining option for Cavendish is to disassociate pleasure and pain from regularity and irregularity. This would allow her to hold on to the idea that love and hate involve pleasure and pain, while denying that love and hate involve regularity and irregularity. Of course, Cavendish would then need an alternative account of what pleasure and pain consist in.[35]

Whether Cavendish rejects the hate-pain equivalence or the pain-irregularity equivalence or both, she can still maintain that there is an explanatory relationship between hate and irregularity. To return to an idea broached more than once above, irregularities in nature might occasion hate, which is not to say that hate is itself irregular. Instead, it might be a regular response to irregularity.

To be clear, I do not think this is Cavendish's view. In a different context she insists that 'to have a perception of the irregularities of other parts, and to be irregular themselves, are different things' (OEP, 234-235). Given that Cavendish is sensitive to this distinction and stresses its importance, we should take her literally when asserting that hate *is* itself irregular. My

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[33] The problematic claims, as I will explain, are the Aristotelian ones. But I take no stand here on whether they are problems for Aristotle. That depends on how he develops those claims and how they fit into his wider philosophy. My concern in this paper is to understand and evaluate Cavendish's theory of the passions, not Aristotle's.

[34] For contemporary defences of the idea that negative emotions need not be painful, see (Neill 1991; Gaut 1993).

[35] One option is that pain is a (regular) perception of (irregular) bodily damage or mental harm.

suggestion is rather that the view that hate is a response to irregularity, and that love is a response to regularity, and that both responses might be regular or irregular depending on the circumstances is available to her.

7. Conclusion

Descartes reports:

> I cannot believe that nature has given to mankind any passion which is always vicious and has no good or praiseworthy function. (1985, ATXI 462/CSM 392)

I have argued that Cavendish holds precisely the view that Descartes finds incredible. It follows from three claims that Cavendish makes, claims which date back to Augustine and Aristotle and which can be found in English in the writings of theorists of the passions in the late sixteenth- and early-seventeenth century. The first is that the positive and negative passions reduce to love and hate. The second is that love and hate essentially involve pleasure and pain. The third is that pleasure and pain are regular and irregular. It follows from these claims that hate is irregular, hence, improper and unnatural, as are all other negative passions. This is not just a conclusion to which Cavendish is committed, perhaps unwittingly, but one which she explicitly embraces.

I have suggested that Descartes' incredulity on this point is well placed. And I have noted a couple of occasions—early and late—on which Cavendish seems to allow that hate, as a kind of antipathy, might be regular, in particular, when directed toward evil, even if this is at odds with her considered position. In closing, I indicated some ways in which she might revise her commitments so as to make room for this view.

My hope is that this paper contributes to a fuller exposition and evaluation of Cavendish's theory of the passions. Given the roles the passions play in her wider theorizing, this is to contribute to a fuller exposition and evaluation of Cavendish's metaphysics and natural philosophy more generally.[36]

Abbreviations

GNP *Ground of Natural Philosophy Divided into Thirteen Parts: with an Appendix Containing Five parts: Written by the Duchess of Newcastle*. London: Printed by A. Maxwell, 1668.

OEP *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy to which is Added The Description of a New Blazing World: Written by the Thrice Noble, Illustrious, and Excellent Princesse, the Duchess of Newcastle*. London: Printed by A. Maxwell, 1666.

P *Playes Written by the Thrice Noble, Illustrious and Excellent Princess, the Lady Marchioness of Newcastle.* London: Printed by A. Warren, for John Martyn, James Allestry, and Tho. Dicas, 1662.

P&F *Poems, and Fancies Written by the Right Honourable, the Lady Margaret Newcastle*. London: Printed by T.R. for J. Martin, and J. Allestrye, 1653.

PL *Philosophical Letters, or, Modest Reflections upon Some Opinions in Natural Philosophy Maintained by Several Famous and Learned Authors of this Age, Expressed by Way of*

[36] Some or all of this material was shared at the *Margaret Cavendish at 400* workshop at the University of Oxford, a research seminar at the University of Kansas, the Travelling Early Modern Philosophy Organization 2024 annual conference in Denver, a Cavendish Collective Virtual Workshop, a reading group at the University of Southampton, and the Renaissance Society of America 2025 annual conference in Boston. I am grateful to audiences on these occasions for their feedback. I am also grateful to the Arts and Humanities Research Council for funding in support of this research (AH/Y003160/1).

Letters: by the Thrice Noble, Illustrious, and Excellent Princess the Lady Marchioness of Newcastle. London, 1664.

PPO *The Philosophical and Physical opinions written by Her Excellency the Lady Marchionesse of Newcastle*. London: Printed for J. Martin and J. Allestrye, 1665.

PPOII *Philosophical and Physical Opinions Written by The Thrice Noble, Illustrious, and Excellent Princess, the Lady Marchioness of Newcastle.* London: Printed by William Wilson, 1663. URL: https://cavendish-ppo.ku.edu/texts/philosophical-and-physical-opinions/

SL *CCXI Sociable Letters Written by the Thrice Noble, Illustrious, and Excellent Princess, the Lady Marchioness of Newcastle*. London: Printed by William Wilson, 1664.

WO *The Worlds Olio written by the Right Honorable, the Lady Margaret Newcastle*. London: Printed for J. Martin and J. Allestrye, 1655.

Unless stated otherwise, all references are to the versions of the texts hosted by Early English Books Online (accessed 18/11/2024): https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebogroup/

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