

*Émilie du Châtelet's Theory of Happiness: Passions and Character*

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RH: *du Châtelet's Theory of Happiness*

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Abstract: The *Discourse on Happiness* is du Châtelet's most translated work, but there is no systematic interpretation of her account of the nature and means to happiness in the secondary literature. I argue that the key to understanding her account lies in interpreting the various roles of the "great machines of happiness." I show that du Châtelet provides a sophisticated hedonistic account of the *nature* of happiness where passions and tastes are the means to self-perpetuating, increasing, and long-lasting source of pleasure. In addition, I argue that the remaining "great machines of happiness" are not logically necessary conditions for happiness, but character traits that support our tastes and passions.

Keywords: du Châtelet, happiness, passions, well-being, desire

One must have passions to be happy,  
but they must be made to serve our happiness.

– *Émilie du Châtelet*

Émilie du Châtelet (1706–1749) works are primarily in natural philosophy and metaphysics.<sup>1</sup> However, her most widely read and translated work is the *Discourse on Happiness* (*Discours sur la bonheur*). Despite the popularity of the *Discourse*, there are relatively few scholarly discussions of its philosophical content.<sup>2</sup> Judith Zinsser provides an excellent account of the development and writing of the *Discourse*, its relation to Du Châtelet’s translation of Mandeville, and the influence of Fontenelle, Voltaire, and La Mettrie. Barbara Whitehead shows how du Châtelet’s views differed from the treatises on happiness of her close contemporaries, Voltaire, d’Holbach, La Mettrie, and Helvétius. But many discussions, such as Robert Mauzi’s “Introduction” to the first critical edition, focus on the autobiographical aspects of the *Discourse*.<sup>3</sup> As of yet there is no systematic interpretation of du Châtelet’s theory of happiness presented in the secondary literature. That is, there is no clear account of du Châtelet’s views on the nature of, and the means to, happiness nor an interpretation of the roles played by “great machines of happiness.”

This paper addresses these three essential aspects of the *Discourse*. First, what is happiness? The first pages of the *Discourse* lead one in different directions concerning her theory of the nature of happiness. However, an analysis of the text provides evidence for interpreting her account as a version of hedonism rather than a pluralist or a desire-based account of happiness. Second, what are the means to achieving happiness? Here, I argue that we should understand du Châtelet’s passions and tastes as providing an account of long-term, self-sustaining, and indeed, often increasing, sources of pleasure and happiness. So, while her general view is hedonistic, her emphasis on passions as the *means* to pleasure and happiness is unique. This surprisingly twenty-first century sounding treatment of the passions makes her version of hedonism more psychologically nuanced than typical versions of the view. It also sets her view apart from the

works of her eighteenth-century contemporaries whose views were influenced by Epicurean and Stoic accounts of happiness.

Finally, I discuss what du Châtelet calls the “great machines of happiness.” She provides a list of things that are somehow related to happiness: freedom from prejudice, health, virtue, having tastes and passions, and being susceptible to illusions. The key to understanding du Châtelet’s account of happiness is in interpreting the roles of items on this list. As noted above, my interpretation is that passions and tastes are the means to achieving pleasure and happiness and should be treated as more fundamental than the other items on the list. But how are we to understand the remainder of the list? Some commentators claim the five remaining features are logically necessary conditions for happiness. However, it seems unlikely that du Châtelet would offer this sort of account of happiness. Moreover, these items are neither logically necessary, nor jointly sufficient, for happiness. Here, I argue that the remainder of her great machines of happiness are better understood as the character traits which enable one to develop and sustain one’s passions and tastes. Thus, these character traits are prudentially rational traits to cultivate, but not logically necessary.

## 1. What is Happiness?

Before turning to the analysis of du Châtelet’s account, we must address a few issues about happiness and well-being. First, there are many people who do not sharply distinguish happiness from well-being or what makes a life go well for the person who lives it.<sup>4</sup> But I take du Châtelet to be providing a guide to well-being. She is certainly not providing an account of morality, as virtue is only one feature of her account. Additionally, her list of elements of the happy life includes things like freedom from prejudice and health, and there is no direct line from these

qualities to happiness construed as a temporary emotional or psychological state. Rather, they seem to be constituents of a life of flourishing. Moreover, du Châtelet begins her *Discourse* by emphasizing that it is difficult to be happy without “reflecting on and planning conduct,” which shows that the happy life takes care to cultivate. These considerations should lead us to believe that she is concerned with what makes a life go well for the person who lives it, and that she uses ‘happiness’ to express the content of well-being.

I begin by assessing her view with respect to the three commonly held types of theories in well-being: objective list, desire-satisfaction, and hedonism.<sup>5</sup> This helps us see the ways in which du Châtelet’s views can be understood in twenty-first century terms, but also picks out the ways in which her understanding of happiness and its sources is distinctive and how it differs from our contemporary views.

The opening paragraphs of the *Discourse* provide du Châtelet’s aims for the work. She writes, “it is commonly believed that it is difficult to be happy, and there is much reason for such a belief; but it would be much easier for men to be happy if reflecting on and planning conduct preceded action” (*DH* 349).<sup>6</sup> She advocates the use of reason and self-knowledge in guiding our actions. In presenting the *Discourse*, she provides the reader with “what age and the circumstances of their life would provide too slowly,” so that they might benefit from her experience (*DH* 349).<sup>7</sup> She formulates her view based on her experience of what makes herself and others happy. However, there is some question as to whether Du Châtelet’s account of happiness can be generalized so that it applies to all people. Indeed, she claims “not to write for all sorts of social orders and all sorts of people” (*DH* 350). This statement has led commentators, like Barbara Whitehead, to claim that there is no universal account to be found in Du Châtelet’s work. Whitehead writes that du Châtelet, “did not present a universalized

systematic dissection of the nature of happiness and the necessary conditions for its pursuit.”<sup>8</sup>

Whitehead argues that since du Châtelet’s account is based on her personal experience and allows that individuals will differ with respect to the exact activities that will bring them happiness, her account is not universal.<sup>9</sup> However, as I will show, du Châtelet’s account of passions and tastes as the essential means to happiness is universal in its recommendations, even though individuals will vary with respect to their particular passions and tastes. Moreover, while it is true that some of the text is ambiguous because it is not clear whether du Châtelet is making claims about the deep *nature* of happiness or about the *means* to happiness, my interpretation shows that she offers an account of the nature of happiness and how to achieve it.

Du Châtelet begins, “In order to be happy, one must have freed oneself of prejudices, one must be virtuous, healthy, have tastes and passions, and be susceptible to illusions” (*DH* 349).<sup>10</sup> These are what she calls “great machines of happiness [*les grandes machines du bonheur*].”<sup>11</sup> But what are we to make of this list? Perhaps, we should read it as a list of non-instrumental goods? If this were true, then perhaps the items on the list constitute happiness? Or perhaps having some of each of the items would give us a well-balanced life? Is she, then, providing a pluralist account or objective list theory of happiness? As Christopher Rice notes, “The objective list theory of well-being holds that a plurality of basic objective goods directly benefit people. ...The objective list theory is pluralistic (it does not identify an underlying feature shared by these goods) and objective (the basic goods benefit people independently of their reactive attitudes toward them).”<sup>12</sup>

According to objective list theorists, states such as knowledge, achievement, and virtue are non-instrumentally good for all persons, whether they want them or not. It is possible that du Châtelet might hold that virtue, freedom from prejudice, and health are good for one whether one

wants them or not. But she indicates that some of the items on her list are only for the sake of other items. That is, they are instrumental welfare goods. For instance, she holds that health is a good in service of having and indulging in one's passions. She writes, "But in order to have passions, to be able to satisfy them, one must certainly be healthy; this is the first good" (*DH* 351).<sup>13</sup> In addition, she seems to think that virtue is prudentially valuable, not because its achievement is sufficient for happiness, but to avoid suffering the scorn of others and one's own conscience. She calls the claim that "one cannot be immoral and happy at the same" time an "axiom," but holds that the torture of conscience and disdain of others is what prevents one from being happy while immoral. So, virtue seems to be beneficial in part for avoiding suffering or on account of what it causes or prevents. Its value may even derive from a subjective aversion to suffering. Of course, it is possible that having all the items in the list in the right way, might be conducive to, or perhaps even, constitutive of, happiness. I will return to this thought in section 3.2. But it does not appear that du Châtelet is offering what we now call an objective list theory, since some of the items on the list are not directly beneficial and others depend on subjective attitudes.

She pulls us in a different direction in the next paragraph when she writes, "One is only happy because of satisfied tastes and passions [*On n'est heureux que par des goûts & des passions satisfaites*] (*DB 4/DH 349*)." The claim that tastes and passions are to be "satisfied" might tempt us to claim that du Châtelet is offering a desire satisfaction account of happiness. If we read 'tastes' and 'passions' as desires (or types of desires), then we might hold that she is providing an account on which the satisfaction of one's desires is constitutive of happiness. According to such a view, attaining the objects of your desires is good for you, and not attaining

the objects of your desires is bad for you. With the stipulation that passions and tastes are types of desires, we can say that the more of your passions or tastes are satisfied, the happier you are.

Is this good evidence that she holds a desire satisfactionist theory? It does not seem so. Passions and tastes are playing an important role in du Châtelet's account, but ultimately she does not give a desire fulfillment account of happiness. This is evinced by the passages following her discussion of passions and tastes that make a strong case for a hedonistic theory of the *nature* of happiness with tastes and passions as the main causal drivers, or means, to happiness.

She writes, "one must begin by saying to oneself, and by convincing oneself, that we have nothing to do in the world but to obtain for ourselves some agreeable sensations and feelings" (*DH* 349).<sup>14</sup> In a similar vein she claims, "Now, the only point of living is to experience agreeable sensations and feelings, and the stronger the agreeable feelings are, the happier one is" (*DH* 350).<sup>15</sup> For du Châtelet, agreeable sensations and feelings just are pleasure, and the more pleasure you have, the happier you are. The inclusion of feelings indicates that she acknowledges both physical and mental pleasure in her account. That is, she thinks that sensations, like those one might get from a good massage, as well as those mental states like loving feelings or pride in accomplishments, are pleasure.<sup>16</sup> In addition, she emphasizes the intensity of feeling as something that increases happiness. Here, she prefigures the views of Bentham, who held that intensity and duration were important aspects of measuring the intrinsic value of an episode of pleasure.<sup>17</sup>

Further, du Châtelet believes that pleasures and pains are commensurable. This is most obvious in her discussions of balancing the pain of overeating with the pleasure of good food. She writes, "If the stomachache or the gout that the excesses of the table give you causes pain more acute than the pleasure you find in satisfying your love of fine food, you calculate badly"

(*DH* 351).<sup>18</sup> She also recognizes the notion of diminishing returns when she admits that she gets great pleasure out of acquiring a new snuffbox, but knows that her pleasure would not be as great if she already owned thirty snuffboxes as she “would be less appreciative of the thirty-first” (*DH* 359).<sup>19</sup> Finally, while commentators have claimed that du Châtelet’s views are influenced by Epicurean philosophy, this does not seem to be the case.<sup>20</sup> In a passage which condemns the Epicurean notion that merely minimizing pain and suffering is sufficient for a good life, she writes, “But it is not enough for us not to be unhappy, life would not be worth the effort of living if the absence of suffering was our only goal; nothingness would be better, for assuredly, that is the state of least suffering” (*DH* 354).<sup>21</sup> Du Châtelet holds that one’s life must have a positive balance of pleasure over pain to be worth living.<sup>22</sup> At the end of the *Discourse*, she proclaims, “as long as we prefer to endure life, we must open ourselves to pleasure by all the doors leading to our soul; we have no other business” (*DH* 365). These passages all support a hedonistic account of the nature of happiness—the view that pleasure is the only basic source of non-instrumental benefit—and one that is quite sophisticated in that she seems to have presaged many features of hedonism that others will develop later.<sup>23</sup>

So, despite there being a case to be made for a desire-fulfillment view of the nature of happiness, du Châtelet is best interpreted as a hedonist about the nature of happiness. She believes that experiencing physical and mental pleasure constitutes our well-being. The next question to be addressed is, given that the nature of happiness is pleasure, how do we get it? Here, I believe the answer is that pleasure comes from satisfying passions and tastes. At this point, the reader might think that desire satisfaction is the *means* to happiness. But in what follows, I will argue that her passions should not be understood as desires.



## 2. Passions and Desires

Du Châtelet provides a conception of passions that can do more for her moral psychology and theory of happiness than desires (as these are understood by advocates of desire-based theories). Her passions have the traits of the two kinds of desires identified by philosophers, but since passions are not extinguished by an instance of satisfaction, they can create long-term and consistent pleasure. Given that I will argue that her account of the passions is a departure from seventeenth and eighteenth century views of the passions, it is important to note some of the way in which she was influenced by, and diverges from, her peers.

Debates about whether reason or passions are more conducive to our happiness were common in this time period, and while an overview of these debates is well beyond the scope of this paper, it is helpful to see her work in context. For instance, Descartes affirms the Stoic view of happiness as the contentment of mind achieved by the pursuit of virtue (AT XI.442/ CSM I.382). He argues that many passions, which he understands as emotions, must be managed by reason and habit (AT XI.488/CSM I.404).<sup>24</sup> In addition, Descartes lists desires as one of the primary passions. Finally, Descartes emphasizes generosity, which is both a passion and a virtue. Generosity consists in knowing that one has free will along with the determination to use it well.<sup>25</sup> While du Châtelet did not think that contentment was sufficient for happiness, she does agree with Descartes that reason and free will have roles to play in making our passions serve our happiness. However, as we will see, she does not provide a Cartesian account of the passions as mere emotions, nor should we think of passions as desires.<sup>26</sup> So, while Descartes is an influence on certain features of her account, like her view that reason and freedom are important for choosing and managing passions, there are more differences than similarities between their theories of the nature of the passions.

Voltaire and La Mettrie also influenced the development of du Châtelet's account of happiness. Both Voltaire and Le Mettrie thought that the passions should be moderated.<sup>27</sup> However, while Voltaire argued for moderation in all things (except for study), La Mettrie held that only disagreeable passions should be moderated, and that pleasure should in no way be limited. Du Châtelet agreed with Voltaire that moderation was important for preventing pleasurable activities from becoming painful. For example, she advises the avoidance of overindulgence in one's favorite food to prevent a stomachache. Moderation in indulging one's passion for fine foods allows for a greater balance of pleasure over pain in the long-term. Moreover, she holds that moderation makes occasional indulgences more pleasurable. She suggests periodic dieting and abstemiousness so to have "a more delicious pleasure" when one next indulges (*DH* 351). While she does advocate occasional moderation for the heightening of pleasure, du Châtelet's views on pursuing passions seem somewhat closer to La Mettrie's views than those of Voltaire. As we will see, like La Mettrie, du Châtelet thinks the only reason for extinguishing a passion is if it ceases to provide more pleasure than pain.

I do not interpret du Châtelet's passions as desires, but commentators have equated du Châtelet's passions with desires. For instance, Véronique Le Ru, discussing du Châtelet's passions, writes,

Émilie met ici l'accent sur un point très important: le désir est ce qu'il y a de plus précieux dans une vie car on a beau vouloir désirer, le désir ne se commande pas. Le désir est ce qui anime la vie humaine, d'où a contraio le fait que l'absence de tout désir conduit à la mort. La Marquise rejette l'ataraxie, sa philosophie moral est proche de celle de Descartes qu'elle connaît bien notamment par la correspondance du philosophe avec la Princesse Elisabeth. Sa

moral, à l'instar de celle de Descartes, est un apologie de passions et de leur regulation mâtinée d'epicurisme et de stoïcisme.<sup>28</sup>

Here, Le Ru refers to du Châtelet's passions as desires in addition to noting her rejection of Epicureanism and Stoicism. I have already noted there are reasons to reject that du Châtelet is following the Epicurean view, but I also believe that we should reject the interpretation of her passions are mere desires. Her view is more original and prescient than commentators have claimed. So, while commentators might think that du Châtelet developed the view that pleasure is achieved by the satisfaction of desires, this would be a mistake.<sup>29</sup>

First, it Du Châtelet might have used the term "désirs" rather than "goûts" and "passions," in her discussion, but she seems to take these terms to mean different things.<sup>30</sup> She does use the term "désirs" in the *Discourse* but not in connection with the great machines of happiness. Rather, she discusses how one can learn to moderate one's desires so to better appreciate what one already has (*DH* 358).<sup>31</sup> Her point in these passages appears to be that it is best to avoid things out of reach or beyond one's means. Moreover, she uses the terms together when she argues against those who advocate the elimination of passions and desires as necessary for happiness: "The moralists who say to men, curb your passions and master your desires if you want to be happy, do not know the route to happiness. One is only happy because of satisfied tastes and passions (*DH* 349)."<sup>32</sup> Here, I read Du Châtelet as claiming that some moral philosophers, following the Epicurean and Stoic traditions, associate eliminating, or at least minimizing, passions and desires with a happy life, while her account of happiness requires satisfying one's passions and tastes. Passions always have both an affective part (an associated emotion) and an appetitive part (that is something like desire or motivation to pursue). These two

aspects of passions are most clear in her discussions of the passions of love and gambling. In her discussion of “the passion of gambling,” which she thinks is most useful (if moderated) in old age when other passions like love are no longer available. She writes, “Our soul wants to be moved by the passions of hope or fear; it is made happy only by things that cause it to feel alive. Now gambling places us perpetually in the grip of these two passions, and consequently holds our soul in an emotion that is one of the great principles of happiness to be found in us (*DH* 359).”<sup>33</sup>

How do du Châtelet’s passions work? On my interpretation, first, we experience the emotions or feelings associated with the activity—the hope of winning and fear of losing in this case. This causes the excitement and motivation for pursuing the activity. The same holds for the passion of love where hope and fear also play a role. We first experience the emotional aspect of love—the hope of loving and being loved, and the fear of rejection. These emotions lead to the sense of excitement and a motivation to pursue the loving relationship. This dual aspect of the passions sets du Châtelet’s view of passions apart from mere desires. In a recent article, Chris Heathwood, drawing on Hume’s account of types of passions (*Treatise* 2.3.3–4), argues that it makes a great difference to the formulation of the desire-based theory which of the two types of desire we focus on. According to Heathwood, desires can either be “behavioral,” which is “an intentional state that disposes the person in it to try to act in the ways that (according to the person’s beliefs) would make its content true,” or a desire can be “genuinely attractive” which is when a “person finds the occurrence of the event attractive or appealing, is enthusiastic about it (at least to some extent), and tends to view it with pleasure or gusto.”<sup>34</sup> He writes,

Hume’s calm and violent passions seem to correspond, respectively, to our behavioral and genuine-attraction desires. For Hume talks about the influence that a passion can have on the

will—this is the behavioral sense—and contrasts this with the violence of the passion, or the disorder it occasions in the temper—which evokes our genuine-attraction sense. But Hume’s remarks suggest that one and the same state might have both a degree of influence on the will and a degree of violence. My characterization of the distinction, as well as the characterizations of most of the philosophers mentioned above, suggest, alternatively, that in such a case there would be two different states: a behavioral desire, which has a degree of influence on the will, and a true desire, which has a degree of violence.<sup>35</sup>

Present day desire theorists favor the genuine-attraction account of desire as the account of “true” desires. Hume thought that there were two kinds of passions that affect either the will or cause an emotional response, but du Châtelet’s passions always have both features. As was said above, du Châtelet’s passions are not to be equated with mere feelings, since they also have a motivational component. Nor are they merely a motivation for action because they have associated feelings of positive affect which drives the motivation. While philosophers like Descartes saw the passions as mere emotions that were opposed to reason, du Châtelet argues that there are passions that are reasonable to pursue. Moreover, du Châtelet’s passions are active endeavors or pursuits. That is, the passion for study *is* the enthusiastic and enjoyable pursuit of study. This may differentiate her view from both Descartes’s view, where passions are non-voluntary emotional reactions, and contemporary views, such as Heathwood’s where the object of a desire is the actualization of a state of affairs. For du Châtelet, a passion is in no way passive. We must seek out passions, and as she says, “passions do not come for the asking,” and “it is for us to make them serve our happiness” (*DH* 350).<sup>36</sup>

Another interesting aspect of her account of passions is how much it sounds like our twenty-first century ordinary usage of having a *passion for* something. Du Châtelet speaks of having a passion for study or a passion for fine food in very much the same way think of passions today—as activities that we enjoy pursuing.<sup>37</sup>

Finally, and most importantly, her account of passions does something that desire accounts cannot, and this feature should be of great appeal to anyone interested in happiness or well-being. For the main difference between mere desires and her understanding of passions is that desires are extinguished when satisfied; that is, once the state of affairs or object of the desire has been attained, that desire no longer exists. Desires must be continually generated and satisfied to increase one's well-being.<sup>38</sup> This feature of desires has long been recognized. For instance, Hobbes writes that “to have no desire, is to be dead.”<sup>39</sup> If you have a desire for a particular food like a piece of dark chocolate and you eat a piece of dark chocolate, that desire is satisfied. Of course, you may later generate a similar desire for another piece of dark chocolate, but it is not the numerically same desire as the previous one. Du Châtelet's passions do not work in the same way.

For du Châtelet, the pursuit of the object or the activity one is passionate about does not extinguish the passion. Instead, the pursuit feeds and increases the passion! For instance, a passion for study is not extinguished by a particular act of studying. Rather, if one cultivates a true passion for study, the activity of study reinforces that passion and makes it stronger.<sup>40</sup> What is so good about having passions is that they support long-term happiness by their persistence.<sup>41</sup> A passion is like a fire that is stoked by its fuel as opposed to a desire which is like a thirst that is quenched by water. This is not to say that passions cannot be extinguished. They most certainly can be if their pursuit is deemed hopeless or if experience or reason convinces us that they will

cause more pain than pleasure. But this does not undermine the essential difference between passions and desires.

This feature of passions might give du Châtelet a solution to the Makropulos case proposed by Bernard Williams.<sup>42</sup> In his essay regarding the possibility of immortality, Williams argues that immortality would be boring. The worry is that with endless time, how could anyone remain occupied and interested in anything? The problem, as Williams sees it, is that no activity could possibly make boredom unthinkable.<sup>43</sup> He notes that most attempted answers to this problem lack either something that insures a sufficiently engaging activity or the motivation to continue the activity. Since desires are extinguished upon attainment of their objects, given eternity to satisfy our desires, it seems we will eventually run out of them. Here, du Châtelet's account of passions might fare better if we can identify and cultivate passions. She can maintain that engaging in passions provides both a pursuit that is enjoyable in itself and which provides increasing motivation to pursue it. As opposed to desires, passions are long-term and consistent. This is a feature that du Châtelet acknowledges. In her discussion of ambition—a pursuit which she discourages because it makes our happiness rely too much on other people—she makes clear that a good-making feature of passions is that they are, in one sense, unsatisfiable. In claiming ambition should be avoided, if possible, she writes, “This is not because it does not give enjoyment, for I believe that this passion can provide that; it is not because ambition can never be satisfied—that is surely a great good” (*DH* 357).<sup>44</sup> This might seem paradoxical, but I take her usual use of “satisfying” passions to mean any actual engagement in the activity of a passion. Here, her claim that passions in general are “unsatisfiable” is simply the claim that passions are not extinguished by any single instance of engagement in the activity.

As we can see, du Châtelet's account of passions is compelling, but tastes (*goûts*) are also a means to pleasure. Tastes, as she notes, are what we have when we are "not happy enough" to have passions (perhaps this is an allusion to the idea that motivation and sentiment wane when one is in a disturbed or troubled state of mind). It seems that tastes are closer to what we think of today as desires, but perhaps a better way of thinking of them is to see them as standing preferences or values.<sup>45</sup> Like standing preferences or values, tastes are things that we care about, enjoy, and under the right circumstances, are motivated to get or promote. Our tastes reflect who we are and how we see ourselves. While it is true, as Zinsser and Bour say, that tastes are "less emotionally intense than passions," they still bring us pleasure (*DH* 349n10). Unlike desires, tastes also are not extinguished with the attainment of the object.<sup>46</sup> If I have a taste for fine wine, this is a stable feature of my psychology (barring some major change in my sensory abilities). She claims that we may have enough of some taste, say wine, on a given occasion, but one's taste for it will increase again in its absence. Du Châtelet writes, "our tastes are easily blunted by satiation, and one must give thanks to God for giving us the necessary privations to preserve them" (*DH* 359–60).<sup>47</sup> These more or less stable features of our psychology provide ongoing pleasure. They are not the sources of great pleasures, nor do tastes increase our interest in the way that happens with passions, but they are important nonetheless.

I have argued that du Châtelet's hedonism is driven by an unique account of passions and tastes. She provides an understanding of the dynamics of the sources of self-perpetuating, increasing, long-lasting pleasures, going beyond most accounts of hedonism and desire satisfactionism, which tell us what happiness consists in, but provide no details on its sources and their causal dynamics. I will now turn to the remaining features of her account.



### 3. The Other Great Machines of Happiness

I begin by briefly discussing the role of reason in determining which tastes and passions to pursue. Then I turn to the consideration of the other “great machines,” where I argue that they are character traits that support the satisfaction of tastes and passions.

#### 3.1 The Role of Reason in Happiness

According to the interpretation presented so far, having satisfied tastes and passions are the means to pleasure and happiness. But how does one know what one’s tastes are and what passions to pursue? Here, du Châtelet believes that reason has an important role to play. As Barbara Whitehead has noted, du Châtelet does not think that there is one universal method for achieving happiness.<sup>48</sup> She holds that we must consider our station and circumstances, our degree of wealth, our sex or gender, and age, as well as the various opportunities available to us to make determinations regarding our long-term happiness. In other words, happiness requires some degree of self-knowledge. She writes, “Whoever knows how to make the most of his station in life and the circumstances in which fortune has placed him so well – that he succeeds in putting his mind and his heart in an untroubled state, that he is susceptible to all the feelings, to all the agreeable sensations his situation carries – is surely an excellent philosopher and should thank nature (*DH* 350).”<sup>49</sup>

In addition, to understanding ourselves and our circumstances, du Châtelet believes that we must use our liberty to avoid making hasty decisions in “reflecting on and planning conduct.” She holds a Lockean account of liberty in that we are free to the extent that we are able to think or not think or move or not move in accordance with the preference of the mind (“*Sur la liberté*” 485).<sup>50</sup> In addition, like Locke, she holds that we have the ability to suspend action in order to

allow time for reflection and the consideration of evidence with respect to our actions (“*Sur la liberté*” 494). Her discussions of the other machines of happiness and her views on determining which passions we pursue show her emphasis on liberty and reasoning as central to our happiness. For instance, in writing about worries concerning the passion of love, she offers the following advice.

Reason must be heard when we take counsel with ourselves; not the reason that condemns all types of commitment as contrary to happiness, but that which, in agreeing that one cannot be very happy without loving, wants one to love only in order to be happy, and to conquer an attraction by which it is obvious that one would only suffer unhappiness. But if and when this inclination has prevailed, when, as happens only too often, it has triumphed over reason, one must not pride oneself on a constancy that would be as ridiculous as it would be misplaced. This is a case in point for putting into practice the proverb *The shortest follies are the best*; above all the shortest follies cause the shortest unhappiness. (*DH* 364)<sup>51</sup>

We should employ experience and reason when considering whether a particular pursuit is conducive to our long-term happiness or not. If we have a temporary lapse of judgment and pursue a passion that makes us unhappy, we should not stubbornly maintain the course. Instead, we should admit our folly and, understanding that repentance is a “useless” feeling, move ahead (*DH* 355).

We must understand ourselves and the circumstances in which we are placed to determine what tastes and passions are appropriate to pursue. We have the aid of reason and experience to help us consider whether some course of action will be conducive to our happiness or not.

Moreover, we are at liberty to suspend our actions and consider the choices that face us. This cerebral approach to happiness—even in the case of great passions like love—is an important feature of du Châtelet’s account. She does not think that passions are opposed to reason, but she does believe that some passions are more reasonable than others. In addition, although she does not discourage momentary pleasures, she thinks it is foolish to choose such pleasures over long-term happiness. As she notes for her “wise and happy mean the same” (*DH* 356–7).

### 3.2 Freedom from Prejudice and Susceptibility to Illusion

As mentioned above, some commentators, like Barbara Whitehead, have held that the “great machines of happiness” are logically necessary conditions for happiness. However, there is reason to reject this interpretation. After all, it seems possible to be happy and be prejudiced or unhealthy.<sup>52</sup> I claim that tastes and passions are the *means* to happiness, I now offer my account of the other features, which is that they are character traits that happy people share. The development of these characteristics is prudentially valuable; that is, if one cares about well-being, one should care about developing them. This interpretation fits well with du Châtelet’s aim of providing what experience and age has shown her to be true.<sup>53</sup> In the first section of this paper I noted that perhaps having all the traits on her list in the right ways would be sufficient for happiness. If we accept passions and tastes as the means to happiness and understand the remaining items as character traits, we can see why she would advise their cultivation and why they count as “great machines of happiness.” In what follows, I offer the ways in which these character traits support the satisfaction of passions and tastes. I begin with her views on freeing oneself from prejudice and allowing oneself to be susceptible to illusions.

If our goal is to be happy, du Châtelet believes it is rational to rid ourselves of prejudices. She defines prejudice as “an opinion that one has accepted without examination, because it would be indefensible otherwise” (*DH* 352).<sup>54</sup> She cites religion as the prejudice that most greatly influences our happiness and unhappiness but insists that all prejudice should be avoided. “We all have a sufficient share of intelligence to examine things that others want to oblige us to believe” (*DH* 352). If we have unfounded beliefs about the world or ourselves, we will not be able to develop appropriate passions and tastes.

The ability to judge for oneself considering facts gained through reason and experience is a character trait of happy people. We try to inculcate this habit in students and children so that they may be well-equipped to assess the truth of claims and evaluate their beliefs and actions. Having an orientation towards truth is important, according to du Châtelet, not just in the sciences, but most importantly “in the things on which the conduct of life depends” (*DH* 352). A person who has a commitment to truth is less likely to be deceived or to make errors. The upshot is that being free from prejudice allows for a more accurate assessment of the world. This in turn allows a better assessment of what is truly conducive to happiness.

Some have thought that this emphasis on truth and reality is in tension with her view that one must be susceptible to illusion to be happy. So, while du Châtelet writes that “we owe most of our pleasures to illusions, and unhappy is the one who has lost them,” one might object that illusions are, by their very nature, deceptive and false (*DH* 349).<sup>55</sup> However, I have argued elsewhere that her illusions of happiness are non-deceptive illusions because, just like harmless sense illusions, they have the following three features: First, they are a result of a combination of the laws of nature and the structure of the human perceptual system. Second, they are prudentially rational traits to cultivate for our well-being. Finally, they are correctable in that we

can know that, and how, they misrepresent through reason and experience.<sup>56</sup> She believes that reason and experience can prevent illusions from turning into self-deception. We can contrast her commitment to truth and reality in her account of happiness to that of Julien Offray de La Mettrie's account in his work on happiness, *Anti-Seneca or the Sovereign Good* (also published as *Discours sur la Bonheur*). La Mettrie takes a more radical stance on illusion than du Châtelet. He argues that all illusory states, including dreams and hallucinations (like those caused by opium), are excellent means to happiness. La Mettrie writes of opium use: "one would like to remain for eternity; it would be the true paradise of the soul if it were permanent."<sup>57</sup> He also argues that curing someone of delirium or madness is often a disservice.<sup>58</sup>

But even if du Châtelet thinks illusions of happiness are harmless, we might ask why we should think being susceptible to illusions is a character trait that aids happiness? She claims that illusions are valuable for making the *most* of one's pleasurable experiences. Allowing oneself illusions provides a gloss or polish on an already pleasurable experience. So, we should see susceptibility to illusions as a heightening mechanism. Indeed, her examples show this to be the case. For instance, when watching a puppet show or viewing a performance, one gets greater pleasure if one allows oneself the illusion, which we are naturally susceptible to, of believing the characters and events are real. Likewise, we enjoy a magic show more if we do not try to work out the trick, and we enjoy our friendships and relations more when we view our loved ones with an accepting, rather than a too critical, eye. This ability to suspend judgment to allow for a heightened pleasure, is one that can add relish to our tastes and passions. But when our illusions threaten our happiness by becoming self-deceptive with respect to our passions, then we must submit them to the scrutiny of reason. For instance, if you develop a passion for gambling, the illusion that lady luck is on your side may heighten the pleasurable experience of a night of

gambling. However, if this illusion causes you to continually “double down” when you are losing more than you can afford, then your illusion is no longer serving your happiness and should be subjected to the demands of reason. As Du Châtelet writes,

We must not deceive ourselves about the means to happiness; experience must at the least teach us to rely on ourselves and to make our passions serve our happiness. One can keep control of oneself up to a point. No doubt complete self-control is out of reach, but a measure of it is not; and I suggest, without fear of being wrong, that there is no passion that one might not overcome once one is fully convinced that it can only lead to unhappiness. What misleads us on this point in our early youth is that we are incapable of reflecting, that we have no experience at all, and imagine that we will recapture the good that we have lost if we run after it long enough. (*DH* 363)<sup>59</sup>

Illusions can turn into self-deception if we are not careful, but harmless illusions increase our pleasure in the same way that being optimistic can improve our experiences. Everyone knows a foul mood can ruin an otherwise pleasant experience. This demonstrates that a not small part of our pleasure depends on how we engage with our experiences. The ability to immerse ourselves in an experience and to save our critiques for another time is one way to increase our pleasure. Susceptibility to illusion is the ability to immerse oneself in an experience and keep away overly critical or negative thoughts. She recommends the avoidance of disagreeable thoughts like death because they are “the source of all metaphysical anxieties” (*DH* 356). Here du Châtelet directly opposes Montaigne’s view that fear of death is overcome by making the thought of death mundane through continual exposure.<sup>60</sup>

Freedom from prejudice and susceptibility to illusion are two important features of the happy person's psychology. First, a person who is truth oriented and follows reason-based beliefs is better able to choose appropriate means to happiness. On the other hand, to maximize the enjoyment of our passions and tastes we should immerse ourselves in our harmless illusions, and not seek "to make them disappear by the torch of reason" (*DH* 349).

### 3.3 Health and Virtue

The last two character traits involve health and virtue. Here, I discuss how du Châtelet thinks we should care for ourselves and others to aid our well-being.

Health, according to du Châtelet is "the first good" because without it one may be limited in pursuing one's tastes and passions. The inclusion of the character trait of caring for your health, while it may not seem surprising to us, was rare in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>61</sup> In the *Discourse*, her discussion is largely about diet and balancing indulgence with abstemiousness. The character trait of caring for one's health has both mental and physical components. To gauge our individual needs, we must employ a certain amount of self-assessment. For example, du Châtelet claims she cannot drink wine due to her fiery nature. She writes,

When one has been persuaded that without health one cannot enjoy any pleasure and any good thing, one finds it easy to make some sacrifices to preserve one's own. I may say that I am a good example of this. I have a very good constitution; but I am not at all robust, and there are some things that would be sure to destroy my health. Such is wine, for example, and all liqueurs; I have forbidden myself these from early youth, I have an abundance of fire in my nature, I spend all morning drenching myself with liquids (*DH* 352).<sup>62</sup>

As Zinsser and Bour note, du Châtelet is referring to the Galenic notion that human males and females have different natures (*DH* 352n16). Women are supposedly cold and wet while men are dry and hot. She refers to herself as having the masculine quality of a fiery nature. While this view is no longer held, du Châtelet's point here, and in her discussion of how she balances her eating habits, is that the proper attitude towards one's health is one of attention to one's unique needs and habits. Being attuned to physical needs and habits will likely make one healthier over their lifetime, and therefore more capable of pursuing tastes and passions. So, caring for the physical state of the body and mind is prudentially valuable. Developing this character trait requires us to understand ourselves and learn about the ways we can preserve our health through diet, exercise, sleep, check-ups, medicines, stress relief, etc.

Health is a state that may be taken for granted as good health does not in itself produce pleasure but seems only valuable to avoid pain. However, it is important to note that du Châtelet thinks it is obvious that we should make some "sacrifices" to maintain our health. This involves balancing tastes which can be immediately satiated against our long-term ability to pursue passions and tastes. For example, if we succumb to the pleasure of smoking, we may find that we are less able to pursue other passions, such as running.

Good health enables us a wider range of activities. While each of us has a unique health profile with different needs, to maximize our choices, we must understand our needs and tailor our behavior to make the most of our abilities. In doing so, we support our long-term happiness.

In addition to understanding what we need to do for ourselves, we must also consider what it is that we owe to others. As du Châtelet notes, "one cannot be immoral and happy at the same time" (*DH* 353). In claiming this, she directly opposes La Mettrie's view that "those who do



evil” can be happy.<sup>63</sup> She defines virtue as “all that contributes to the *happiness* of society, and consequently to ours, since we are members of that society” (*DH* 353, emphasis mine).<sup>64</sup> This indicates that what you owe to others is to allow, and perhaps even promote, their pursuit of passions and tastes, as well as the character traits that facilitate them. Compare du Châtelet’s discussions of “the golden rule” in her opinionated translation of Mandeville’s *Fable of the Bees*.<sup>65</sup> As Ruth Hagenruber notes, du Châtelet “believes there is a *universal principle* to which people adhere...it is the law that one should not do to others what one does not want to be done to oneself.”<sup>66</sup> Judith Zinsser writes that du Châtelet takes the golden rule as a “universal law for all men that God himself engraves in their hearts,” which allows us to discern virtue from vice.<sup>67</sup> Obeying the golden rule requires that we not interfere with the well-being or happiness of others, but du Châtelet’s definition of virtue as contributing to the happiness of society indicates a positive duty to enable the pursuits of others. For du Châtelet, virtue means ensuring the freedom and education required for others to develop into self-aware agents who can pursue their tastes and passions in accordance with reason.<sup>68</sup>

She also addresses the question of why one should be moral. Her answer appeals to the fact that humans share a god given duty to contribute to the happiness of society. She claims that we should be moral to avoid the pangs of our conscience and the distress of the disdain of others. She writes, “I say that one cannot be happy and immoral, and the demonstration of this axiom lies in the depths of the hearts of all men. I put it to them, even to the most villainous, that there is not one of them to whom the reproaches of his conscience—that is to say, of his innermost feeling, the scorn that he feels he deserves and that he experiences, as soon as he is aware of it—there is not one to whom these are not a kind of torture (*DH* 353).”<sup>69</sup>

The inner feeling of shame and remorse for vicious actions blunt our happiness, and so developing the character trait of virtue is prudentially rational for avoiding pain. In discussing the torture of societal judgment, she claims that “there is no one on earth who can feel that he is despised and not feel despair” (*DH* 353). This might indicate that the usefulness of virtue is only in avoiding pain. However, Du Châtelet thinks that there is also a positive reason to act virtuously. She writes,

One is an exacting judge of oneself, and the more one can bear witness to oneself that one has fulfilled one’s duties, done all the good that one can do, that in short, one is virtuous, the more one tastes this interior satisfaction that one can call “the health of the soul.” I doubt that there is a more delicious feeling than what one experiences after doing a virtuous action, an action that merits the esteem of honorable men. To the inner satisfaction caused by virtuous actions can be added the pleasure of enjoying universal esteem. (*DH* 354)<sup>70</sup>

The inner feeling of pleasure one receives from knowing that you have chosen as well as you can—done your best—provides the reward for virtuous action. Here du Châtelet agrees with Fontenelle, who claims that virtue brings “an infallible compensation: inner satisfaction.”<sup>71</sup> This satisfaction is compounded when your virtue is recognized by others, as everyone wants to be thought well of, according to du Châtelet. She tells us that imagining your future reputation is a source of pleasure that is linked to self-esteem [*l’amour-propre*], which she believes is tied to being able to pursue one’s passions (*DH* 358).<sup>72</sup>

Her accounts of health and virtue provide the additional character traits of the person whose life is going well. These people take care of their physical and mental needs and do not treat

others as they would not like to be treated. While du Châtelet insists that those who hold that “one must love virtue for its own sake, for its own beauty” are mistaken, she certainly thinks the reward of virtue is pleasure. If we are vicious or if we let ourselves fall into avoidable ill health, our well-being will suffer. Developing the character traits of caring about our own and others’ flourishing is in our own best interests.

#### 4. Conclusion

Émilie du Châtelet’s account of happiness is both unique and compelling. She encourages us to “choose for ourselves our own path in life,” and tells us to “strew that path with flowers” (*DH* 365). But her work more than just a fun read, it is a thoughtful and original account of happiness that provides us with a sophisticated version of hedonism, a conception of passions and tastes that provides for long-term self-sustaining pleasures, and the recommendation of the cultivation of character traits to support our happiness. We would do well to embrace the wisdom she offers.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Most notably, she wrote a translation and commentary of Newton's *Principia Mathematica* and her own treatise on metaphysics and physics, *The Foundations of Physics (Institutions de Physique)*. For recent work in these areas, see Brading, *Foundations of Physical Science*; Brading, "Problem of Bodies;" Gessell, "Mon petit essai;" Hagengruber, *Châtelet, Between Leibniz and Newton*; Hutton, "French Newtonianism;" Janiak, "Case of Gravity;" Le Ru, *Émilie Du Châtelet philosophe*; and Rey, "Agnostic and Epistemic Pluralisms."

<sup>2</sup> Detlefsen, "Émilie du Châtelet;" Detlefsen, "Women's Minds;" Gottman, "Transformation;" Hagengruber, "Du Châtelet on Liberty;" Lascano, "Émilie du Châtelet on Illusions;" Le Ru, *Émilie Du Châtelet philosophe*; Whitehead, "Analysis of le Bonheur;" Zinsser, "Entrepreneur of the Republic of Letters;" and Zinsser, *La Dame d'esprit*.

<sup>3</sup> Zinsser, "Entrepreneur of the Republic of Letters" and *La Dame d'esprit*, respectively. It was common for eighteenth century men of means to write treatises on happiness, which were often circulated privately. Du Châtelet's *Discourse* bears some similarities to those of her companion Voltaire's *Discours sur l'homme*, and their friend La Mettrie's *L'Anti-Seneque, ou discours sur le bonheur*. For a more detailed discussion of Voltaire's and La Mettrie's views, see Whitehead,

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“Analysis of le bonheur.” Mauzi’s “Introduction” to the French critical edition focuses on the personal nature of the *Discourse* and du Châtelet’s relationship with Voltaire.

<sup>4</sup> Several commentators on Aristotle reject the common translation of ‘eudaimonia’ as ‘happiness,’ thereby distinguishing happiness from well-being or human flourishing. Ross writes that “for whereas ‘happiness’ means a state of feeling, differing from ‘pleasure’ only by its suggestion of permanence, depth, and serenity, Aristotle insists that eudaimonia is a kind of activity; that it is not any kind of pleasure, though pleasure naturally accompanies it. The more non-committal translation, ‘well-being’ is therefore better” (Ross, *Aristotle*, 200). Cooper writes that the traditional translation is “not a good choice, since ‘happiness’ tends to be taken as referring exclusively to a subjective psychological state, and indeed one that is often temporary and recurrent.” Cooper proposes the translation ‘human flourishing’ on the grounds that “flourishing implies the possession and use of one’s mature powers over, at any rate, a considerable period of time, during which, moreover, the future looks bright” (Cooper, *Reason and Good in Aristotle*, 89 fn.1). Anscombe also rendered ‘eudaimonia’ as ‘human flourishing’ (Anscombe, “Modern Moral Philosophy,” 193). Contemporary writers on well-being commonly distinguish it from happiness, on the grounds that the latter is a psychological state, while the former involves non-mental states of affairs as well (Haybron, *Pursuit of Unhappiness*, 30; cf. Raibley, “Happiness is not Well-Being,” 1108–11). While Feldman argues that well-being consists in happiness, understood in a particular way, he acknowledges that well-being and happiness are conceptually distinct (Feldman, *What is this thing called Happiness?*). By contrast, Annas, *Intelligent Virtue*, uses ‘happiness’ to express the concept of well-being.

<sup>5</sup> While I refer to twenty-first century ways of categorizing these views, there are historical precedents for the taxonomy that date back to Plato’s *Protagoras* where Socrates argues for

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hedonism (353b-354e). While this is a common taxonomy of theories of well-being, it does not adequately capture all contemporary views of well-being. But it should become clear that there is some reason for thinking that her view might be one of these three types. For more on theories of well-being, see Crisp, “Well-Being.”

<sup>6</sup> She writes, “On croit communément qu'il est difficile d'être heureux, & on n'a que trop de raison de le croire; mais il serait plus aisé de le devenir, si chez les hommes les réflexions & le plan de conduite en précédoient les actions” (*DB* 3).

<sup>7</sup> Zinsser notes that du Châtelet began that *Discourse* “after a decade of marriage,” so around 1735, and she finished it in the late 1740s, likely in June 1748 (*La Dame d'esprit*, 47, 102, and 265). This means she was 29 years old when she began the *Discourse* and 41 years old when she finished it (about a year before her death). Mauzi's critical edition is based on the 1779 edition, which he calls the “A edition,” and he notes variations in the other editions. *Reflexions sur le bonheur* in five reprints with only minor variations in the text: *Huitième Recueil philosophique et littéraire* (Bouillon: Societe typographique de Bouillon, 1779), *Opuscules philosophiques et littéraires* (Paris: Chenet, 1796) is the B edition; *Lettres inédites de madame la marquise du Châtelet à M. le comte D'Argental* (Paris: Xhrouet, 1806) is the C edition, which Mauzi notes is almost identical to the B edition. There are also two handwritten manuscripts: *Réflexions sur le Bonheur*, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, ffr. 15.331 [edition N] and *Discours sur le Bonheur*, Mazarine: no. 4.344 [edition M]. For a discussion of the various editions, see Mauzi's “Introduction” (*DB* cx-cxxv).

<sup>8</sup> Whitehead, “Analysis of le Bonheur,” 258.

<sup>9</sup> Whitehead, “Analysis of le Bonheur,” 258–63.

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<sup>10</sup> “Il faut, pour être heureux, s’être défait des préjugés, être vertueux, se bien porter, avoir des goûts & des passions, être susceptible d’illusions” (*DB 4*).

<sup>11</sup> I take her use of ‘machines’ to be metaphorical and to indicate that the items on the list are somehow productive of happiness.

<sup>12</sup> Rice, “Objective List Theory,” 196.

<sup>13</sup> “Mais pour avoir des passions, pour pouvoir les satisfaire, il faut sans doute se bien porter; c’est là le premier bien” (*DB 7*).

<sup>14</sup> “Il faut commencer par se bien dire à soi-même & par se bien convaincre que nous n’avons rien à faire dans ce monde qu’à nous y procurer des sensations & des sentiments agréables” (*DB 4*).

<sup>15</sup> “Ce n’est la peine de vivre que pour avoir des sensations & des sentiments agréables; & plus les sentiments agréables sont vifs, plus on est heureux” (*DB 6*).

<sup>16</sup> Whitehead claims that Du Châtelet reduces “the experience of happiness to a physical sensation” (“Analysis of le Bonheur,” 266). However, du Châtelet notes that we are seeking “des sensations & des sentiments agréables.”

<sup>17</sup> Bentham, *Principles of Morals*, chapter IV, section II. Citations from this work are by chapter and section number. Bentham also mentions certainty and propinquity as important features for legislators to consider when making laws, but these features arguably do not pertain to the intrinsic nature of an episode of pleasure (*Principles of Morals*, IV.I).

<sup>18</sup> “Si le mal d’estomac ou la goutte que vous donnent les excès que vous faites à table, vous causent des douleurs plus vives que le plaisir que vous trouvez à satisfaire votre gourmandise, vous calculez mal, si vous préférez la jouissance de l’un à la privation de l’autre: vous écartez de votre but, & vous êtes malheureux par votre faute” (*DB 8*).

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<sup>19</sup> Zinsser and Bour note that in some versions of the manuscript of the *Discourse*, du Châtelet uses 300 and 301 snuffboxes (DH 359n35).

<sup>20</sup> See, for instance, Whitehead, “Analysis of le Bonheur,” 266.

<sup>21</sup> “Mais ce n’est pas assez pour nous de n’être pas malheureux; la vie ne vaudrait pas la peine d’être supportée, si l’absence de la douleur étoit notre seul but; le néant vaudrait mieux: car assurément c’est l’état où l’on souffre le moins” (DB 13).

<sup>22</sup> After claiming that the pleasures of old age are very meager, du Châtelet writes, “Thank goodness, it is up to us to choose the time of our death, if it is too slow coming” (DH 365).

<sup>23</sup> As noted above, the claim that happiness consists in pleasure goes back to Plato’s *Protagoras*, but the features of additivity, commensurability, and diminishing returns are much later developments.

<sup>24</sup> Descartes does not go as far as Seneca who thought that all passions or emotions should be replaced with rational responses. Descartes thought that the passion of generosity (knowledge of our free will and the resolve to use it wisely) was virtue. For excellent analyses of Descartes and Elisabeth on the passions, see Kambouchner, “L’homme des passions,” and Shapiro “Descartes’s Ethics” and “Passions and the Union.” For an overview of the role of the passions in the seventeenth century, see James, “Passion and Action.” For insight into passions in the eighteenth century, see Schmitter, “Passions, affections, sentiments.”

<sup>25</sup> Descartes (AT XI 445-6/CSM I.384). For an account of Descartes’s views on generosity, see Shapiro, “Cartesian Generosity.”

<sup>26</sup> For an argument that du Châtelet’s views are closer to Descartes’s views, see Le Rue, *Émilie Du Châtelet philosophe*.

<sup>27</sup> Voltaire, “Discours sur l’homme,” 510–11; La Mettrie, *Anti-Seneca*, 123.

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<sup>28</sup> Le Ru, *Émilie Du Châtelet philosophe*, 65.

<sup>29</sup> If she had done so, it would be a very early version of the view and place her in an interesting position in the history of desire accounts. It is commonly held that the earliest versions of theories of desire satisfaction were Pigou, *The Economics of Welfare*; Brandt, *A Theory of the Good and Right*; Pitcher, “The Misfortunes of the Dead;” and Griffin, *Well-Being Importance*.

<sup>30</sup> Du Châtelet notes in this passage that since “one is only happy by satisfied desires” (on n’est heureux que par des desirs satisfaits), one should only allow oneself to desire things that can be obtained without too much care and effort (*DB 24/DH 358*). It should be noted that the B manuscript of the *Discourse* does not contain the italicized phrase. It also should be noted that du Châtelet uses the term “désir” in her essay “Sur la liberté,” which has some important connections to her work on happiness. However, in “Sur la liberté” du Châtelet echoes John Locke’s discussion of the suspension of desires as a means for evaluating our desires to make better choices regarding our actions.

<sup>31</sup> “One of the great secrets of happiness is to moderate one’s desires and to love the things already in one’s possession” (*DH 358*).

<sup>32</sup> “Les moralistes qui disent aux hommes: réprimez vos passions, & maîtrisez vos désirs, si vous voulez être heureux, ne connoissent pas le chemin du bonheur. On n’est heureux que par des goûts & des passions satisfaites” (*DB 4*).

<sup>33</sup> “Notre ame veut être remuée par l’espérance ou la crainte; elle n’est heureuse que par les choses qui lui font sentir son existence. Or, le jeu nous met perpétuellement aux prises avec ces deux passions, & tient, par conséquent, notre ame dans une émotion qui est un des grands principes du bonheur qui soient en nous” (*DB 26*).

<sup>34</sup> Heathwood, “Which Desires,” 274–5.

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<sup>35</sup> Heathwood, “Which Desires,” 675. Heathwood cites G.F. Schueler, Wayne Davis, Melinda Vadas, T. F. Daveney, Thomas Nagel, Philippa Foot, David Lewis, L.W. Sumner, Derek Parfit, Stephen Campbell, and Tamar Shapiro as recognizing the two types of desires.

<sup>36</sup> “Il est donc à désirer d’être susceptible de passions, à je le répète encore: n’en a pas qui veut. C’est à nous à les faire servir à notre bonheur, & cela dépend souvent de nous” (*DB* 6).

<sup>37</sup> She writes, “Par cette raison d’indépendance, l’amour de l’étude est de toutes les passions celle qui contribue le plus à notre bonheur,” and “passion est la gourmandize” (*DB* 20, 8).

<sup>38</sup> There are accounts of “standing desires” which some philosophers take to be dispositions to generate desires. However, many accounts think that only occurrent desires are real desires. See Schroeder, “Desire.”

<sup>39</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 54.

<sup>40</sup> Helvetius also expressed a love of study in his poem “Épître sur l’amour de l’étude,” which he dedicated to du Châtelet.

<sup>41</sup> For a contemporary view that seems similar see Deci and Ryan, *Motivation and Self-determination*.

<sup>42</sup> Williams, “Makropulos,” 82–100. I would like to thank Colin Chamberlain for bringing up this point.

<sup>43</sup> Whitehead notes Helvetius’s concern that the privileged often suffer from boredom which impedes their happiness (“Analysis of le Bonheur,” 261). Du Châtelet cautions against restlessness (*DH* 359). Mauzi discusses the connection between action and happiness noting the important role that the passions play in the development of the eighteenth-century view that activity is necessary for happiness (*L’idée du bonheur*, Chapter XI).



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<sup>44</sup> She writes, “ce n’est pas par la raison qu’elle n’a pas de jouissance, car je crois que cette passion peut en fournir; ce n’est pas parce que l’ambition désire toujours, car c’est assurément un grand bien, mais c’est parce que de toutes les passions c’est celle qui met le plus notre bonheur dans la dépendance des autres” (*DB* 20). It was common in the stoic tradition to discuss ambition and glory. See for instance Montaigne, “On Glory,” Cicero, *De Officiis*, Book I. Sections 19–20, and Voltaire “On Moderation in all Things.”

<sup>45</sup> This account of standing preferences is based on a similar treatment of values. (Tiberius, *Well-Being as Value Fulfillment*, 37–55; Raibley, “Well-Being and Values,” 593–620).

<sup>46</sup> One might worry that a distinction between tastes and desires did not exist in the eighteenth century, however it seems that there were distinct meanings of the terms. For instance, the 1718 *Dictionnaire de l’Académie française*, 2e édition defines ‘Goût’ as “The pleasant or advantageous feeling we have about something” [“On le prend aussi, pour le sentiment agreable ou avantageux qu’on a de quelque chose. Cet ouvrage est au goust de tout le monde. cela n’est pas de mon goust”]. ‘DÉSIR’ is defined as a “Wish, movement of the will toward a good one does not have” [“Souhait, mouvement de la volonté vers un bien qu’on n’a pas”].

<sup>47</sup> “Nos goûts s’émoussent aisément par la satiété, & il faut rendre grâces à Dieu de nous avoir donné les privations nécessaires pour les conserver” (*DB* 27).

<sup>48</sup> Whitehead believes that because tastes and passions will vary from person to person, that du Châtelet’s account is not universal (“Analysis of le Bonheur,” 263–5). However, pleasure generated by satisfied tastes and passions is how happiness is achieved for everyone. It makes sense that individual tastes and passions will vary.

<sup>49</sup> “Quiconque a su si bien économiser son état & les circonstances où la fortune l’a placé, qu’il soit parvenu à mettre son esprit & son cœur dans une assiette tranquille, qu’il soit susceptible de

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tous les sentiments, de toutes les sensations agréables que cet état peut comporter, est assurément un excellent philosophe, & doit bien remercier la nature” (*DB* 6).

<sup>50</sup> For a different interpretation of Du Châtelet’s account of freedom, see Jorati, “Du Châtelet on Freedom.”

<sup>51</sup> “Il faut que la raison soit reçue dans le conseil, non cette raison qui condamne toute espèce d’engagement comme contraire au bonheur, mais celle qui, en convenant qu’on ne peut être fort heureux sans aimer, veut qu’on n’aime que pour son bonheur, & qu’on surmonte un goût dans lequel on voit évidemment qu’on n’essuyeroit que des malheurs; mais quand ce goût a été le plus fort, quand il l’a emporté sur la raison, comme cela n’arrive que trop, il ne faut point se piquer d’une constance qui seroit aussi ridicule que déplacée. C’est bien le cas de pratiquer le proverbe, les plus courtes folies sont les meilleures; ce sont sur-tout les plus courts malheurs” (*DB* 36–7).

<sup>52</sup> Whitehead calls them “necessary conditions for happiness” (“Analysis of le Bonheur,” 266).

<sup>53</sup> For discussions of the empirical nature of du Châtelet’s account, see Whitehead, “Analysis of le Bonheur,” 258–65.

<sup>54</sup> “Qui dit préjugé, dit une opinion qu’on a reçue sans examen, parce qu’elle ne se soutiendrait pas” (*DB* 11).

<sup>55</sup> “Nous devons la plupart de nos plaisirs à l’illusion, & malheureux est celui qui la perd” (*DB* 4).

<sup>56</sup> Lascano, “Émilie du Châtelet on Illusions,” 7.

<sup>57</sup> La Mettrie, “Anti-Seneca,” 123.

<sup>58</sup> La Mettrie, “Anti-Seneca,” 124. It should also be noted that the seventeenth century skeptic, La Mothe La Vayer, who was influenced by Sextus Empiricus, somewhat ironically notes that there are great advantages to self-deception. He writes that when one is climbing a mountain it is

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best to look only at what is in front of you rather than the dangers that exist on all sides.

Likewise, the passions can distract us from our misery (*Oeuvres Completes*, vol. 1, page 534). I have argued elsewhere that du Châtelet denies that the illusions of happiness are self-deceptive (Lascano, “Émilie du Châtelet on Illusions”).

<sup>59</sup> “Il n’est pas permis de se tromper sur les moyens du bonheur; l’expérience doit du moins nous apprendre à compter avec nous-mêmes, & à faire servir nos passions à notre bonheur. On peut prendre sur soi jusqu’à un certain point; nous ne pouvons pas tout, sans doute, mais nous pouvons beaucoup; & j’avance, sans crainte de me tromper, qu’il n’y a point de passion qu’on ne puisse surmonter, quand on s’est bien convaincu qu’elle ne peut servir qu’à notre malheur. Ce qui nous égare sur cela dans notre première jeunesse, c’est que nous sommes incapables de réflexions, que nous n’avons point d’expérience, & que nous nous figurons que nous rattraperons le bien que nous avons perdu, à force de courir après” (*DB* 34).

<sup>60</sup> Montaigne, “To Philosophize is to Learn to Die,” 89–108.

<sup>61</sup> Compare Descartes’s claim in the *Discourse* that “the maintenance of health, which is undoubtedly the chief good and the foundation of all the other goods in this life” (AT VI:62/CSM I:143). Leibniz also mentions health as a good (one that is not appreciated until it is lacking) in the *Theodicy* (see, e.g. §12–13 and §251–252).

<sup>62</sup> “Quand on s’est une fois bien persuadé que sans la santé on ne peut jouir d’aucun plaisir à d’aucun bien, on se résout sans peine à faire quelques sacrifices pour conserver la sienne. J’en suis, je puis le dire, un exemple. J’ai un très bon tempérament; mais je ne suis point robuste, & il y a des choses qui sûrement détruiraient ma santé. Tel est le vin, par exemple, & toutes les liqueurs; je me les suis interdits dès ma première jeunesse, j’ai un tempérament de feu, je passe toute la matinée à me noyer de liquids” (*DB* 9–10).

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<sup>63</sup> La Mettrie, *Anti-Seneca*, 141.

<sup>64</sup> Compare what she writes of virtue and vice in her translation of Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees*: "Mais dans tous les pays on appelle vertu ce qui est conforme aux loix etablies, et vice ce qui leur est opposé, car aucune societé n'a pû subsister sans avoir des loix, de mesme qu'on ne peut iouër, sil ny a des regles du ieu" ("Translation of Fable of the Bees," 145).

<sup>65</sup> While the Golden Rule is usually phrased as "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you," du Châtelet's version is "Do not do to others what one would not have them do to oneself" ("Translation of Fable of the Bees," 145).

<sup>66</sup> Hagengruber, "Du Châtelet on Liberty," 198. Hagengruber argues that du Châtelet has a virtue relativist account ("Du Châtelet on Liberty," 197–9). She cites du Châtelet "Translation of Fable of the Bees," 145.

<sup>67</sup> Zinsser, "Entrepreneur of the Republic of Letters," 616. There is a disagreement between Zinsser's interpretation and Hagengruber's discussion. Zinsser connects the Golden Rule with virtue and vice and so with a moral theory, while Hagengruber sees it as a guide to political intervention that is necessary for achieving the well-being of society. For more on her translation of Mandeville, see Gottmann, "Transformation," and Detlefsen, "Women's Minds."

<sup>68</sup> For an illuminating account of du Châtelet's use of the right to liberty in criticizing the subordination of women, see Hagengruber, "Du Châtelet on Liberty," 196–200.

<sup>69</sup> Je dis qu'on ne peut être heureux et vicieux, & la démonstration de cet axiome est dans le fond du cœur de tous les hommes. Je leur soutiens, même aux plus scélérats, qu'il n'y en a aucun à qui les reproches de sa conscience, c'est-à-dire, de son sentiment intérieur, le mépris qu'il sent qu'il mérite & qu'il éprouve, dès qu'on le connoît, ne tienne lieu de supplice" (*DB* 12). Du Châtelet acknowledges there may be people who do not have this inner sense of morality, but they are not

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who she is addressing. She writes, “By villains I do not mean thieves, assassins, poisoners; they do not belong in the category of those for whom I write” (*DH* 353). Compare her note in her translation of *The Fable of the Bees* that Mandeville defense of “thieves and assassins” was taking a principle too far since “Thieves and assassins can never be useful to society” (Translation of *Fable of the Bees*, 173n4).

<sup>70</sup> “On se rend une justice exacte, & pins on peut se rendre témoignage que l’on a rempli ses devoirs, qu’on a fait tout le bien qu’on a pu faire, qu’on est vertueux enfin, plus on goûte cette satisfaction intérieure qu’on peut appeler la santé de l’ame. Je doute qu’il y ait de sentiment plus délicieux que celui qu’on éprouve quand on vient de faire une action vertueuse, et qui mérite l’estime des honnêtes gens. Au plaisir intérieur que causent les actions vertueuses se joint encore le plaisir de jouir de l’estime universelle” (*DB* 14). Du Châtelet also refers to “liberty” as the “health of the soul,” which makes it clear that these two concepts are related.

<sup>71</sup> Fontenelle writes, “Mais une recompense infaillible pour elle, c’est la satisfaction interieure” (*Oeuvres Completes*, Volume 2, 387). For an examination of Fontenelle’s views on happiness and morality, see Matthews Adkins, “Moral Philosophy of Fontenelle.”

<sup>72</sup> “Whatever we do, self-esteem is always the more or less hidden driving force of our actions; it is the wind that fills the sails, without which the boat would not move at all” (*DH* 358).

<sup>73</sup> I would like to thank two anonymous reviewers, Deborah Boyle, and Hank Southgate at the *Journal of the History of Philosophy* for comments that greatly improved this article. I would also like to thank participants at the 2019 *Canadian Philosophical Association* meeting in Vancouver, the *Sixth Annual Undergraduate Philosophy Conference at Southern Utah University* in 2020, and the *Kansas Workshop on Well-Being* in 2019. I am especially grateful to Connie Rosati for her insightful comments which altered my thinking about du Châtelet’s views.

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