

MALEBRANCHE'S AUGUSTINIANISM AND THE MIND'S
PERFECTION

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Dedication

To my lovely wife and soul mate Katherina
and
my beautiful daughter Anna.

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation presents a unified interpretation of Malebranche's philosophical system that is based on his Augustinian theory of the mind's perfection, which consists in maximizing the mind's ability to successfully access, comprehend, and follow God's Order through practices that purify and cognitively enhance the mind's attention. I argue that the mind's perfection figures centrally in Malebranche's philosophy and is the main hub that connects and reconciles the three fundamental principles of his system, namely, his occasionalism, divine illumination, and freedom. To demonstrate this, I first present, in chapter one, Malebranche's philosophy within the historical and intellectual context of his membership in the French Oratory, arguing that the Oratory's particular brand of Augustinianism, initiated by Cardinal Bérulle and propagated by Oratorians such as Andre Martin, is at the core of his philosophy and informs his theory of perfection. Next, in chapter two, I explicate Augustine's own theory of perfection in order to provide an

outline, and a basis of comparison, for Malebranche's own theory of perfection. In chapter three, I present Malebranche's theory, along with showing its compatibility with his theory of divine illumination. In chapters four and five, I reconcile the mind's ability to perfect itself with Malebranche's strict occasionalism. In the end, I argue that Malebranche is not a full-blown occasionalist, but rather an instrumental occasionalist, which ultimately leaves metaphysical room for the mind to freely control its attention and produce its own attentive desires.

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Introduction

In Anglo-American philosophy, the seventeenth-century philosopher Nicolas Malebranche is typically seen as an innovative Cartesian philosopher who is best known for his theocentric doctrines of occasionalism and divine illumination, in which God is the only active causal agent in the universe as well as the metaphysical and epistemological ground for all knowledge. Arguably, interest in Malebranche stems from these two doctrines because they provide unique and innovative insights into the nature of, and problems with, Cartesian theories of causation and knowledge. Early modern scholars have, nonetheless, taken an interest in Malebranche's system as a whole, with book length treatments examining the creative ways in which he uses Cartesian principles to support his own philosophical and theological agenda.¹ This work has ultimately defined Malebranche and the great attention paid to his occasionalism and divine illumination has given the impression that they are the immovable points in his system and that all other aspects, most notably his theory of freedom, must be understood in terms of, and ultimately conform to them.

¹ See Daisie Radner (1978), Steven Nadler (1992), Tad Schmaltz (1996), and Andrew Pyle (2003).

There is no doubt that a proper understanding of these two doctrines within the context of his Descartes's system is absolutely vital for understanding Malebranche's own metaphysics and epistemology. With such an intense focus on these particular aspects of Malebranche's Cartesianism, however, scholars have inadvertently missed another aspect of his system that is just as vital, his Augustinianism. Of course, Malebranche's connection to Augustine, through his membership in the French Oratory, is well known, and scholars have duly noted Augustine's influence on Malebranche's thought, from his theory of divine illumination to God's dispensation of grace.² But Augustine's influence goes much deeper than this. In fact, it goes to the heart of his system informing its bedrock theory, namely the mind's perfection. Here, Malebranche follows the rich philosophical tradition of intellectual eudaemonism, whereby the soul, through the attainment of wisdom, achieves happiness.

This tradition begins with Plato, and passes through the works of Plotinus to Augustine, who, in turn, provides the metaphysical and theological framework for Malebranche's own theory.³ At its core is the idea

² See Nadler (2000), p. 3 and (1992), pp. 101-108; Pyle (2003), p. 508; Patrick Riley (1992), pp. 1-3.

³ Gary Hatfield (1986) argues that Augustine influenced Descartes in a similar way. In fact, he argues that Descartes's *Meditations* is patterned after Augustine's own three-staged method of perfection, pp.

that the mind, through its reason, is in some way connected, or at least in contact with, a rational order that structures the material and moral realms. The method by which the mind connects, and maintain contact with, the rational order begins with the mind purifying itself by turning away from the distractions of the sensible world along with exercising and strengthening its rational attention so that it can properly focus on it. By doing this, the mind will gain direct access to the rational order, enabling it to put itself in harmony with it. Knowledge acquisition, in this case, requires an interior cultivation of the mind, whereby the mind must develop the proper dispositions and intellectual habits in order to acquire knowledge and then use it as guide for its intellectual and sensible life. We see this method most notably in Plato's *Phaedo*, in Plotinus's early work *On Beauty*, and in Augustine's *Confessions*. Malebranche, in his *Treatise on Ethics*, follows the same method and believes that the mind, through its intimate union with God, can perfect itself by turning its attention inwards and upwards, away from the body's desires,

48-51. Stephen Menn (2002) also provides a detailed analysis and explication of the structural and conceptual parallels between Augustine and Descartes. So my division between Cartesianism and Augustinianism is used *only* to underline the Augustinian origin of Malebranche's theory of perfection and the proclivity of Malebranche scholars to focus on issues that uniquely concern Descartes' system. For illustrative purposes, see chapter two in Pyle (2003) and Schmaltz's (1996) introduction. In section 1.3.2, I argue that Malebranche, just like Arnauld and La Forge, recognized Descartes' use of Augustine, and it probably reinforced his own Augustinianism. The direct source, following Henri Gouhier (1948), is more likely the Oratorian André Marin.

towards God and his immutable Order. By attending to God's Order, the mind can act according to it, with the ultimate goal of unifying itself with God by fully participating in it. It is this goal that frames and guides Malebranche's philosophical agenda.

Malebranche's Augustinian theory of the mind's perfection is not just historically interesting in its own right, but also philosophically important as well. Although the mind's perfection has received little attention by early modern scholars, it figures centrally in his philosophy and is the main hub that connects the three fundamental principles of his system, namely, his occasionalism, divine illumination, and theory of freedom. Without this central piece, early modern scholars have had serious problems reconciling occasionalism with the mind's freedom, as well as providing a proper interpretation of the relationship between the mind and God's illumination that adequately accounts for the cognitive and volitional resources that Malebranche attributes to the mind. I argue that a proper understanding of the mind's perfection and its essential role in Malebranche's system can not only mitigate these problems, but also provide a unifying theory for his philosophy as a whole.

In order to see this, we need to undergo a Gestalt shift. That is, Malebranche's system needs to be examined, not from the perspective of his Cartesianism, but from his Augustinianism. Given that seventeenth-century Augustinianism was neither a monolithic nor systematic movement, we need to pinpoint Malebranche's brand of Augustinianism by examining the Augustinian tradition in the French Oratory and see how this tradition influenced Malebranche not only in terms of his philosophical *persona*, but also in terms of his metaphysics in general and the mind's perfection in particular. With this in hand, we can then begin to develop an interpretation of the mind's perfection by examining Augustine's own theory of perfection. This will provide us with the philosophical blueprint we need to construct Malebranche's account and to see how it constitutes the central hub of his system. From this perspective, we will see that Malebranche actually attributes cognitive and volitional resources to the mind, giving the mind directional control over its attention so that it can acquire knowledge through God's divine illumination, and in turn perfect itself.

The mind's self-perfection, however, requires that the mind be responsible in some way for its own perfection. Given the general consensus that Malebranche is a full-blown occasionalist, making God causally

responsible for the mind and all of its modal changes, it appears that the mind cannot be responsible in any way for its own perfection. Typically, early modern scholars have examined the mind's free will and responsibility from the perspective of his occasionalism, assuming that occasionalism is the immovable point of his system and that all other aspects of his system must conform to it. From this, they try to figure out how Malebranche could possibly attribute responsibility to the mind without ascribing causal powers to it. Such examinations, though insightful and resourceful, inevitably end up with unsatisfying results. A better way to deal with the problem is to examine it not from the perspective of his occasionalism but from his theory of perfection. This makes better sense given that his theory of perfection, not his occasionalism, is at the center of his system, and that his occasionalism is more malleable than we might think.

As we will see, Malebranche, throughout his writings, consistently argues that the mind has self-perfecting powers, but it is *not* clear that he was a full-blown occasionalist in terms of the mind's modifications. In fact, I argue that Malebranche's brand of occasionalism leaves metaphysical room for the mind's self-perfecting powers. By looking back at scholastic and Cartesian accounts of divine causation, we will see that Malebranche's arguments for

occasionalism do not exclude the mind's ability to direct its attention, and that since God's governance of minds and bodies through general laws requires him to use occasional causes to diversify his effects, the mind's ability to perfect itself does not come into conflict with his occasionalism. In the end, by examining his philosophy from the perspective of his Augustinianism rather than from his Cartesianism, I present Malebranche in a much different, and arguably, better light.

1. Malebranche's Augustinianism

1.1 Introduction

As a devote Oratorian, Augustinianism figures centrally in Malebranche's spiritual and intellectual life. In fact, it provides the fundamental principles of his thought. In particular, it inspired Malebranche to put the mind's perfection at the heart of his system, and provided him with the moral and intellectual precepts for achieving it. So in order to understand Malebranche's conception of the mind's perfection and the central role it plays in his philosophy we need to identify and explicate his Augustinianism. To do this properly, we need to study it from both a historical and philosophical perspective. This will provide

us with the comprehensive picture we need to anchor our interpretation of Malebranche's philosophical system.

1.2 Malebranche's Spiritual and Intellectual Influences

In 1664, there were two major events that shaped the spiritual and intellectual life of Malebranche that represent different, yet complementary, aspects of his thought, namely his Cartesianism and Augustinianism. The more well known of the two events is Malebranche's fortuitous discovery of Descartes' book *Treatise on Man* while browsing the bookstalls on *rue St. Jacques* (or perhaps the *rue des Augustins*).⁴ His early biographer, Father Yves Andre, recounts a popular story known amongst Malebranche's friends about his physical reaction to reading Descartes' book. "The joy of learning about so many recent discoveries caused him such violent palpitations of the heart that he was forced to put the book down and interrupt his reading in order to breath more easily".⁵ What Malebranche discovered in Descartes' book was a new mechanical account of human physiology that provided him with a new way

⁴ Robert Remsberg (1940) believes that it was on *rue des Augustins*, arguing that Father Yves André (1886) inaccurately placed the event on *rue Saint-Jacques*, which was then picked up and retold by Henri Gouhier (1926), p. 135fn. Nadler (2000) follows this tradition and places the event also on *rue Saint-Jacques*, p. 3. Unfortunately, Remsberg offers no evidence to support his claim and given that *rue Saint-Jacques* was a major hub for bookshops in the seventeenth-century (it had up to seventy-one bookshops by the end of sixteenth-century), we can assume that the event probably happened there. See Phillips (1997), p. 263.

⁵ See Andre (1886), pp. 11-12; cf. Gouhier (1926), p. 49.

of understanding the physical world that was, in his eyes, more satisfying than the scholastic theories he was taught while studying at the College de la Marche (1654-1656). Unlike an Aristotelian world of causally interacting substances, each with its own individual nature and activities, determined by its matter and substantial form, the Cartesian world is filled with matter in motion, which is governed by a set of laws decreed by God at creation. Descartes believes that the material structures that make up the universe, such as the human body, can ultimately be explained in these terms. In addition, he replaced the sense-based epistemology of Aristotelian physics by building his physics on the metaphysical knowledge of the soul and God; knowledge gained through the intellect alone. As Descartes' philosophy radically changed Malebranche's understanding of the physical world, its metaphysical grounding on principles derived from knowledge of the soul and God aligned perfectly with his brand of Augustinianism. This brings us to the other major, but less well known, event that shaped Malebranche's life in 1664, his ordination into the priesthood of the Oratory of Jesus Christ at Paris on 20th of September of that year.⁶ But first, some background.

⁶ Gouhier (1926), pp. 19.

The French Oratory was an Augustinian congregation founded in 1611 by Cardinal Bérulle (1575-1629). Bérulle was one of the main spiritual leaders of the Catholic Reformation in France and is most known, at least in philosophical circles, for encouraging Descartes to publish his new philosophical method after he demonstrated it, at the expense of the featured speaker, the chemist and mechanist Chandoux, at a public lecture in Paris at the end of 1627, famously known as *L’Affaire Chandoux*.⁷ Bérulle’s interest in Descartes’ new method stemmed from his desire to find a new Christian philosophy for the Catholic Church that would successfully replace the ailing scholastic Aristotelian theology of the universities, which had been under serious attack from various groups, such as Christian reformers, Platonists, humanists and other anti-Aristotelians, who objected to it on various religious, philosophical, and moral grounds. Generally, Aristotelian scholastic theology was attacked for its contribution to Church corruption, with its perceived incompatibility with the central doctrines of Christianity, such as God’s creation and providence of the universe, and the immortality of the soul. It was also attacked for its apparent academic pedantry, with its obsessive logic chopping and endless debates about abstract concepts that had nothing to do

⁷ Bérulle’s influence on Descartes’s work is debatable. See Stephen Menn (2002), p. 48, and Richard Watson (2007), p. 144 for contrasting opinions.

with living a good Christian life. Bérulle believed that a new Christian philosophy that could address these issues would not only strengthen the intellectual foundation of the Catholic Church, but also provide a theological bulwark against the Protestant reform movement, in his case the French Calvinists (or Huguenots), who intentionally bypassed the authority of the Church, and looked to the early Church Fathers for new ways of living a pure Christian life. This general attitude goes back to the fourteenth-century and is expressed in the works of Petrarch and Erasmus on one side, and Luther on the other.⁸ It peaks in the sixteenth and seventeenth-centuries and Bérulle's interest in finding a new philosophy is representative of the general desire during this time to find a new systematic Christian philosophy that could not only surpass Aristotelianism in its explanatory power in physics, medicine and morality, but also, more importantly, in supporting Christian theology.⁹

Bérulle's search for a new Christian philosophy was the intellectual side of his reform plan for the Church in France. The institutional side of his plan was to establish the French Oratory. He founded the Oratory to support the Catholic reform program, which attempted, after the religious wars ended with the Edict of Nantes in 1598, to enact the reforms promoted by the Council

⁸ See Menn (2002), pp. 41-47.

⁹ I closely follow Menn (2002), pp. 18-24, and (1997), pp. 35-38.

of Trent (1545-1563), whose overall goal was to expand and deepen the commitment of the faithful to Catholicism and properly educate the clergy to fulfill this task.¹⁰ Bérulle specifically established the Oratory to reform the secular clergy, who in turn, could “re-Christianize” the French people.¹¹ Through an intense program of religious devotion and scholarship, he hoped to transform the spiritual lives of the secular priesthood while instilling deep loyalty to the Catholic cause.¹² He also believed that his congregation would produce an educated and dedicated priesthood that could critically defend the Catholic faith and challenge the Protestant opposition.

By this time, the Oratory, which was founded in Rome by Philip Neri in 1575, had spread throughout Italy and had established a handful of houses in southern France. The Oratory’s rapid expansion was mainly the work of Neri’s close associates Francesco Maria Tarugi and Antonio Talpa; the former eventually becoming the archbishop of Avignon. Both hoped that the Oratory could provide a model for clerical reform, a model that happened to be in line with Bérulle’s mission in France.¹³ Bérulle knew of Neri’s work and learned about the Congregation’s mission and works from his friends Francois de

¹⁰ Henry Phillips (1997), p. 9, and Remsberg (1940), pp. 120-121.

¹¹ Menn (2002), p. 22, and Phillips (1997) pp. 29-41.

¹² Gouhier (1926), p. 19

¹³ John Patrick Donnelly (1994), p. 197.

Sales, who founded an Oratorian community in Savoy in 1599, and Jean-Baptiste Romillion, the superior of an Oratorian house in Provence. He was particularly attracted to the Oratory's model of clerical reform and its liberal rules for membership, worship, and study. Encouraged by Brulard de Silly and the archbishop of Paris, Bérulle founded the French Oratory in 1611, incorporating the houses in southern France.¹⁴

Consistent with the loose confederate relations amongst the Oratories, the French Oratory was independent of the Italian or Philippine Oratory. Its internal government, reflecting its beginnings as a free association of priests, was republican in nature. A superior general, who was elected for life by the General Assembly, represented all the Oratorian houses but had limited executive power. All of his decisions had to be approved by the Assembly and he could not make permanent changes when the Assembly was not in session.¹⁵ Constitutionally, the Assembly was the power center of the Oratory. The Assembly, which convened triennially, was made up of elected representatives from each house, and decided all questions that concerned the congregation as a whole. At the house level, there was also an elected superior, who held a three-year term, which governed each house. Though the

¹⁴ Donnelly, 203.

¹⁵ Donnelly, 205; cf. H.G. Judge (1961), p. 49.

superior was considered first among equals, he, nonetheless, had to participate in the everyday duties of the house.¹⁶ Closely following the Philipine model, the members took no formal vows and did not have a fixed set of priestly duties, thereby giving members the free time for other spiritual and intellectual pursuits. They lived in community, but had to support themselves by private means and contribute to the expenses of the house. As members of a “free association”, they also had the liberty to leave the order at any time. The members were also not bound to uphold any particular philosophical system and could freely engage in, at least privately, any aspect of the Christian intellectual tradition. The Oratory’s republican government and its liberal conditions of membership separated the Congregation from the monastic orders, which had autocratic systems of government, demanded that its members follow a strict set of rules after taking formal vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, and, in the case of the Jesuits, constitutionally bound to subscribe, teach and defend Thomistic Aristotelianism.¹⁷

Politically, the French Congregation was gallican in spirit, in opposition to the Jesuit’s strong ultramontane desires, and, therefore, intensely loyal to

¹⁶ Remsberg, 146.

¹⁷ Roger Ariew (2002) suggests that the Jesuits in practice incorporated other forms of Aristotelianism, such as Scotism, p. 48.

the French crown. Bérulle himself was deeply involved in politics and close to the French crown. He was chaplain to Henry IV and was briefly appointed councilor of state during the reign of Louis XIII. He also brokered the marriage of Louis XII's sister, Princess Henreitta-Marie, to Charles I of England. His most infamous political plot was to encourage Louis XIII and Richelieu's blockade of La Rochelle (1627-28), a major Huguenot city, which lasted fourteen months, leading to the starvation and death of thousands of people. For this, Richard Watson has branded Bérulle a "genocidal maniac".¹⁸ Nevertheless, Bérulle, through his political machinations, was able to gain the trust of the French crown, and the Oratory continued to nurture that trust. As a consequence, the Oratory's fortunes became tied to the French crown, which increased during the reign of Louis XIV and fell at the height of the French Revolution, finally being dissolved in 1792.¹⁹ After sixty years, it was eventually reestablished in 1852, receiving papal decree in 1864.

Of course, the Oratory was also responsible to the pope and regularly sent new statutes to Rome for approval. In fact, Pope Paul V (1605-1621), who officially approved the French Oratory by the bull *Sacrosanctae romanae ecclesiae* on May 10, 1613, pushed for the establishment of Oratorian colleges,

¹⁸ Watson, p. 147.

¹⁹ Remsberg, p. 148.

which was not part of Bérulle's initial plans for the order.²⁰ Bérulle founded the first school in Dieppe in 1616 and by 1710 there were 72 Oratorian colleges, close behind the Jesuits' 117.²¹ The popularity of Oratorian colleges had a lot to do with its educational program. Oratorian education departed from the Jesuit's standard *ratio studiorum* by placing mathematics, natural science, history, and modern languages earlier in the curriculum, and by teaching them, at least for the first few years, in French rather than in Latin.²² The Oratory's progressive curriculum, and its royalist politics, made Oratorian colleges popular among political elites, who sent their children there to be educated.²³ As a consequence, the spread of Oratorian colleges throughout France encroached upon the Jesuit's educational monopoly, which was already under constant pressure by the University of Paris, where, ironically, they also had a college.²⁴ This contributed to the intense political and intellectual rivalry between the two that was started by Louis XIII and Richelieu in their attempt to keep Jesuit power in check. Such power politics continued under Cardinal Mazarin and Louis XIV.²⁵

²⁰ Remsberg, p. 149, Ariew, p. 47.

²¹ Phillips, p. 76.

²² Remsberg, pp. 149-150.

²³ André Robinet (2000), p. 290.

²⁴ Phillips, p. 101.

²⁵ Remsberg, pp. 145-148.

The theological and intellectual spirit of the Oratory was Bérulle's Augustinianism. At this time, Augustinianism, a term that will be qualified shortly, was the main rival of Aristotelian scholasticism in France.²⁶ Bérulle's personal admiration for Saint Augustine and his concern with finding a new Christian philosophy put him on the Augustinian side of the movement and naturally based the Oratory on Augustinian principles.²⁷ Strategically, this gave him a clear advantage over scholastic theology in the Church's theological war with Protestantism. Augustine's thought and doctrinal authority had always loomed large in Western Christendom and what Christians took as axioms of Christian philosophy, such as the soul's immateriality and God's creation of the universe *ex nihilo*, were essentially the work of Augustine. His metaphysical works on God and the soul, and his theological works on free will and grace were the chief authority after the scriptures by which theological positions were measured and controversies resolved.²⁸ During the sixteenth and seventeenth-centuries Augustine's authority became the ultimate prize as both Protestants and Catholic reformers tried to link their theology and tradition back to the "pure"

²⁶ Phillips, pp. 136-137.

²⁷ Remsberg, p. 122.

²⁸ Menn (2002), pp. 22-23.

Christianity of the early Church Fathers prior to the Church's institutional corruption and before it was yoked to scholastic theology. In the end, it came down to a battle over what group could legitimately claim to possess the true essence of Christianity. By grounding Oratorian theology on Augustinian principles, Bérulle attempted to combat Protestant claims to pure Christianity on common ground, by focusing on the Bible and the works of the early Church Fathers without appealing to scholastic theology, which the Protestants associated with the Church's irredeemable corruption, and, therefore, rejected outright.²⁹ In terms of his intellectual reform, Bérulle believed that a new Christian philosophy could be built on an Augustinian foundation, which would effectively replace Aristotelianism, and, in turn, strengthen the Church. So his Augustinianism separated the Oratory intellectually from the scholastic tradition just as the Oratory's internal government and membership requirements separated it institutionally from the traditional monastic orders. Both clearly identified the Oratory as part of the Catholic reform movement.

Of course, seventeenth-century Augustinianism was not a monolithic movement with a common doctrine, a coherent theological and philosophical

²⁹ Remsberg, pp. 123-124.

agenda, or an institutional structure comparable to scholastic Aristotelianism. Generally speaking, since Augustine was the theological and philosophical stitching that held together the tapestry of the Western Christian tradition, the term “Augustinian” could be legitimately used, with some minor qualifications, to describe most Christians in Western Christendom, which makes any use of the term relatively uninformative.³⁰ Even if we limit our discussion to the Western Christian *intellectual* tradition and try to split it neatly into Aristotelian and Augustinian camps, we still cannot say, as Stephen Menn rightly points out, that there was a single Augustinianism to which all Augustinians professed; rather, we must recognize that there was, in fact, a variety of Augustinianisms.³¹ This is not to say, however, that it is conceptually useless to categorize the many different ways in which seventeenth-century philosophers and theologians used Augustine or to find common intellectual bonds that could help circumscribe an Augustinian tradition, one that developed alongside Aristotelian scholasticism. For our purposes, identifying Bérulle’s particular Augustinianism and tracking its evolution in the Oratory are necessary for understanding the spirit and

³⁰ Gouhier (1926), p. 28.

³¹ Menn (2002), p. ix.

conduct of the Oratory, and more importantly, Malebranche's Augustinianism and how it influenced his philosophy.

1.3 Remsberg's Wisdom-Science Model

Robert Remsberg, in his important but relatively unknown work, "Wisdom and Science at Port-Royal and the Oratory", provides an interesting model for identifying different Augustinianisms in seventeenth-century France that gives us a basic framework for examining Malebranche's Augustinianism. Remsberg constructs his model out of the ways in which philosophers and theologians understand the relationship between wisdom and science, however the content of the two might be conceived or defined. For him, the way a thinker (or tradition) understands this relationship is more revealing than what the thinker believes to be the content of wisdom and science.³² Indeed, it reveals the necessary context for understanding the thinker's methodology, system and goals. He believes that this relationship is key to understanding the fundamental philosophical differences between Aristotelians and Augustinians, and, more importantly, to identifying a single

³² Remsberg, p. 17.

Augustinian intellectual “tradition” and distinguishing the various Augustinianisms that stem from it.³³

Remsberg argues that the distinction between wisdom and science goes back to the earliest days of the Western intellectual tradition and is seen, for example, in how the two are contrasted in language, for example, the words *sapientia* and *scientia* in Latin.³⁴ Wisdom and science are seen as different modes of knowledge, with science ranging from ordinary knowledge gained through observation to more sophisticated kinds of knowledge achieved through rational systems of inquiry, and with wisdom marking the highest form of knowledge—knowledge traditionally achieved by the proverbial “wise” person, who is seen as a model or guide for life. How we conceive both wisdom and science is necessarily determined by how we conceive the relation between them.³⁵

Remsberg suggests that there are two ways of conceiving the wisdom-science relation. One way is to understand science as the essential foundation of wisdom, making wisdom the achievement of the scientific enterprise. Wisdom, in this case, is the knowledge achieved by discovering the causes of

³³ Remsberg, p. 14.

³⁴ Remsberg, p. 13.

³⁵ Remsberg, p. 17.

particular events, and from this, generating principles that can order individual experiences, explain similar events in the future, or provide the necessary ingredients for mastering a field of study.³⁶ Such knowledge is necessarily about the world, whether in the material or moral realms, and depends on the mind's relation to it. Achieving wisdom is the result of the mind's good use of its natural rational faculties, resulting in intellectual virtue. Thus, wisdom is not reserved for the rare wise person, but for those who properly use their reason in their particular field of inquiry, whether concrete or theoretical. Remsberg argues that Aristotle is representative of this conception of the wisdom-science relation and is seen, with various modifications, in works of Saint Thomas Aquinas, the Thomism of the Jesuits, and other Aristotelians.³⁷

Now, the second way reverses the relation and sees wisdom as the necessary foundation for science.³⁸ Wisdom, in this case, is not derived from scientific inquiry, but is a higher knowledge that makes all other knowledge possible. Specifically, it is the higher knowledge of eternal truths, those truths that are the intellectual structure of the moral and material realms, and

³⁶ Remsberg, pp. 25-27.

³⁷ Remsberg, pp. 25-65.

³⁸ Remsberg, p. 12.

provide the mind with the principles for understanding them. According to this position, wisdom, defined as the possession of immutable truths, cannot be derived from the mutable truths of the world that are acquired through the senses, but only discoverable through rational processes. This means that the mind is directed towards itself, not towards the world as the "Aristotelian" position implies. The mind, however, being part of the contingent world, cannot be the source of these truths; they belong to an ontologically higher realm to which the mind has access. Plato is an obvious representative of this position, and as his indirect intellectual descendent, via Plotinus and other neo-Platonists, Saint Augustine.

Briefly, Augustine believes that wisdom is a form of divine revelation that is based on the intimate relationship between God and the mind by which God "illuminates" the mind so that it can see the truth, just as the sun illuminates the surface of the earth for the eyes to see it (*Sol.* 30).

Let it [the mind] then remember its God to whose image it was made, and understand and love him. To put it in a word, let it worship the uncreated God, by who it was created with a capacity for him and able to share in him. In this way it will be wise not with its own light but by sharing in the supreme light, and it will reign in happiness where it reigns eternal. For this is called man's wisdom in such a way that it is also God's (*De Trin.* 14.15).

Now this is not a gift that is reserved for a few pious Christians, but is something that is given to all people, Christian or pagan, and it is up to each person to recognize it.

Then where are these standards written down, where can even the unjust man recognize what being just is, where can he see that he ought to have what he does not have himself? Where indeed are they written but in the book of light called truth...as for the man who does not do justice and yet sees what should be done, he is the one who turns away from that light, and yet is still touched by it. But the man who does not even see how one ought to live has more excuse for his sin, because not knowing the law he is not a transgressor, yet from time to time even he is touched by the brilliance of truth everywhere present, when he receives a warning reminder and confesses (*De Trin.* 14.21).

God does not just illuminate the mind with moral truths but also with the mathematical and physical truths he used to design the world. Without access to God's divine order, genuine knowledge of the material world is impossible.

Wherever you turn she [wisdom] speaks to you through certain traces of her operation. When you are falling away to external things she recalls you to return within by the very forms of external things. Whatever delights you in corporeal objects and entices you by appeal to the bodily senses, you may see is governed by number, and when you ask how that is so, you will return to your mind within, and know that you could neither approve or disapprove things of sense unless you had within you, as it were, the laws of beauty by which you judge all beautiful things which you perceive in the world (*De lib. arb.* 2.16.42).

Augustine also explains this in terms of angelic knowledge.

For this reason, since the holy angels with whom we shall be equated after the resurrection...always see the face of God...there can be no

doubt that they have first come to know the universal creation, in which they themselves were the first to be established, in the Word of God himself, in whom are the eternal ideas even of things which were made in time...Only after that do they know creation in itself, by glancing down below, as it were, and then referring it to the praise of the one in whose unchangeable truth they originally see the ideas according to which it was made (*De Gen. ad litt.* 4.24.41).

With knowledge of the divine order, the mind can base its scientific investigations on solid principles. Scientific knowledge is not acquired through the senses, but by the mind comparing its sensible experiences with the divine order and judging them accordingly. Indeed, the core Augustinian discipline of meditative, or cognitive, reflection that trains the mind to turn away from the distractions of the world and focus its attention on God and its relationship to him is designed to exercise the mind's rational capacities and moral disposition so that it can effectively receive God's illumination. This practice is seen very earlier on in his philosophical works, particularly in the *Soliloquia*, where he illustrates this process through a dialogue between his soul and Reason in which Reason exercises Augustine's rational faculties so that he can discover some important truths about himself and God. For Augustine, the path to wisdom is the path to God.

Therefore he who journey towards wisdom, beholding and considering the whole created universe, finds wisdom appearing unto him graciously on his way and meeting him in every purpose or

providence; and his eagerness to press along that way is all the greater because he sees that the way is rendered beautiful by the wisdom he longs to reach (*De lib. arb.* 2.17.45).

Remsberg uses Augustine's conception of the wisdom-science relation to identify an Augustinian tradition that is methodologically distinct from the scholastic tradition. He recognizes, however, that the tradition is neither monolithic nor systematic. Even though all Augustinians subscribe to Augustine's wisdom-science relation, and the meditative discipline that goes along with it, they have interpreted it in a variety of ways. Remsberg identifies two general lines of interpretation that correspond to the two themes that are dominant in Augustine's work, namely, knowledge and grace. In seventeenth-century France, Remsberg contends that the Jansenists represents the latter, and the Oratorians the former.

1.3.1 The Augustinianism of Jansenism

Given their mutual devotion to Augustine, the relations between the Jansenists and Oratorians were naturally rather close. The founders of Jansenism, Cornelius Jansen and Saint-Cyran (Jean du Vergier), were generally tied to the Oratory through their similar Catholic reform program, and personally tied to it through Saint-Cyran's friendship with Bérulle and

Charles de Condren, the second Superior General of the Oratory.³⁹ In fact, Jansen made his nephew an Oratorian, and Saint-Cyran, who privately supported the Oratorian cause and helped found an Oratorian house at Louvain, was at one point thrown in jail for his association with the treatise *De Virginitate* by the Oratorian Seguenot.⁴⁰ In this treatise, Seguenot argues against the Trentine doctrine that attrition (repentance based on the fear of eternal punishment) is sufficient for the soul's reception of sacramental absolution, and contends that the soul can receive forgiveness for its sins and receive God's grace only by achieving the hard-won disposition of contrition (repentance based on the love of God).⁴¹ Richelieu, who supported the Trentine position, discovered, through Condren, that Seguenot's work was inspired by Saint-Cyran. Saint-Cyran was subsequently arrested and spent four years in jail (1638-1642), only being released after Richelieu's death. After the death of Saint-Cyran in 1643, the dispute exploded with Antoine Arnauld's *De la Frequente Communion*, a work that was an apologetic for Jansenism in general and a defense of Saint Cyran's position in particular. In the end, the work popularized Jansenism and made Arnauld the unofficial

³⁹ Nigel Abercrombie (1936), p. 167.

⁴⁰ Remsberg, p. 70.

⁴¹ Remsberg, p. 17; Abercrombie, pp. 188-189.

leader of the Jansenist party. Historically, the dispute appears to be the result of political intrigue, personal animus, and doctrinal pettiness. But theologically, it went to the heart of the Jansenist reform movement, which called for all Christians to live a pure Christian life.

In general, Jansenism is a very austere and deeply introspective theology that focuses on the severe weakness of the soul and the desperate need for God's grace to overcome it. It requires its congregants to follow a strict moral code that demands rigorous self-examination. They do this by following an intense meditative program that requires them to examine their soul and its relationship to God. Through this examination, congregants recognize, and come to terms with, the fragility of their own human nature and the necessity of God's grace for salvation and the performance of good works. Neophytes are advised to undergo this meditative program for at least a year before entering the fold, and all congregants must use it to prepare their souls for communion and the reception of absolution that comes with it. Some, such as the lawyer Antoine Lemaitre, his brother Isaac, known as De Saci, and to a limited extent the famous Blaise Pascal, left public life and entered into a

life of solitude that involved penitential exercises, mediation and prayer.⁴² Such requirements went well beyond the measures espoused by the Council of Trent, setting a high bar for practicing the Christian faith, necessarily excluding those that did not follow this strict regimen. It also irritated some people, like Richelieu, who lost many good lawyers and other influential people to the Jansenists.

Jansenism bases its rigorous spiritual program on a particular brand of Augustinianism that developed out of Saint-Cyran and Jansen's intense study of Augustine's work. They spent four years (1611-1614) examining his writings at Saint-Cyran's family estate, focusing on Augustine's later works on grace and free will, believing that Augustine deliberately abandoned his earlier philosophical concerns when he realized the full importance of grace and free will in Christian life. Their emphasis on free will and grace is seen in Jansen's definitive work *Augustinus* (published posthumously in 1640), where, Remsberg points out, Jansen makes 7,595 references to Augustine and the majority are to his works that pertain to grace and free will, which were written after 410 CE.⁴³ From this, he calculates that "Jansen quotes Augustine's

⁴² Abercrombie, p. 186.

⁴³ Remsberg, pp. 92-94. Augustine's shifts focus from metaphysical and epistemological issues to the theological issue of grace after 410 CE when he devotes most of his attention to the Pelagian

works on grace 4.6 times as much as he quotes the works on knowledge. 260 of the 1120 references to the latter works are to the *De libero arbitrio*. That means that except for the *De libero arbitrio*, Jansen prefers the works on grace by a ratio of 6 to 1".⁴⁴ Believing that grace is at the core of Augustine's theology, Jansen and Saint Cyran developed what could be called an "Augustinianism of grace" that emphasizes the invincible efficacy of God's grace and its vital importance in the soul's salvation.

Jansen and Saint-Cyran's focus on the necessity of God's grace is based on their belief that the soul was severely impaired after the Fall and cannot, on its own, restore itself to its pre-lapsarian state. Adam's prideful free act of turning away from God and focusing on himself and the sensible world resulted in the soul losing its ability to turn back to God and surrendering its control over the body and its concupiscent desires. In this state, the soul is harassed constantly by its concupiscent desires and lacks the internal resources to combat them. The only way for the soul to conquer these desires is to counterbalance them with contrary desires, which, in this case, can only

controversy. *Contra* Augustine, Pelagius (c.360-c.420 CE) and his followers believed that human beings are perfectly free, and can do good works and live virtuously without the aid of God's grace. See Peter Brown (1967), pp. 340-352; Abercrombie, pp. 3-47. As the Jansenists focus on Augustine's works after 410 CE, the Oratorians pay particular attention to his works before 410 CE. This difference in attention led to two very different versions of Augustinianism.

⁴⁴ Remsberg, p. 93.

come from God's, or more specifically Christ's, dispensation of efficacious grace. Jansen argues for, what we would call today, a compatibilist theory of free will. For him, the will is free only in so far as the action under question is in its own power, not that it could choose to do otherwise when all of the conditions for the performance of an action are given.⁴⁵ Accordingly, even though free acts are in the power of will, the will is, nonetheless, determined by pre-deliberative cognitive and appetitive states, making the will act in accordance with the most dominant state at the time. The will is analogous to a balance scale where the will is determined by the "heaviest" preceding states. Unfortunately, after the Fall, the will is not equally balanced, but is weighted in favor of concupiscent desires and there is no way for the soul to counterbalance them with contrary desires. Consequently, the will is always leaning towards sensible pleasures and is primed to act in accordance with them. For Jansen, Christ's efficacious grace, which produces contrary desires in the soul that motivates it to act through God's love, is the only way for the soul to counterbalance them. So not only is it impossible for the soul to act contrary to its dominant desires, it is also impossible for the soul to perform

⁴⁵ Elmar Kremer (1994), pp. 219-220.

good acts on its own.⁴⁶ The soul, nonetheless, still retains the power to do good, but given that the will is severely impaired, it does not have the *ability* to do good on its own. That is, the ability to act depends upon the soul's condition at the time of the action. If the soul has the right amount of efficacious grace, then it can perform a good act, but if it does not, it cannot perform the act.⁴⁷ In both cases, the soul retains the power to act, but in the latter case it cannot *exercise* its power as it can in the former case. Jansen believes that this is sufficient for attributing responsibility to the soul. That is, the soul may be determined by grace and concupiscence to act well or badly respectively, nevertheless, it is free in that it retains the power, though not the ability, to act.

Remsberg suggests that the intense focus on the soul's moral integrity and salvation influenced the Jansenists understanding of Augustinian wisdom and its relation to science; essentially limiting the relation to the sphere of the soul's interior state and its actions.⁴⁸ For them, wisdom is knowledge about the soul's interior moral state, its relationship to God, and its potential improvement. Science, in turn, is the affectatious knowledge that enlightens as

⁴⁶ Abercrombie, pp. 150-151.

⁴⁷ Kremer, p. 223.

⁴⁸ Remsberg, p. 82.

well as moves the soul towards its particular moral and salvatory activities. Both kinds of knowledge are more affectitious than abstract, essentially stirring the soul to good actions.⁴⁹ In the end, Jansenism identifies wisdom with God's illuminating grace, and science with grace's efficacious power to repair the soul's damaged nature and to move the soul closer to its salvation.

By limiting the wisdom-science relation to the soul and its actions, Jansenism is able to separate theology from natural philosophy, establishing both as separate realms of knowledge that requires different epistemic methods, the former derived from God's revelatory grace and the latter from the soul's own intellectual and experiential resources.⁵⁰ With the realm of grace effectively quarantined from the realm of nature, the Jansenists were free to explore different philosophical and scientific methods without worrying about contaminating the moral condition of their souls by deriving knowledge from one realm with methods from the other. Some Jansenists, most notably Arnauld, favored Cartesianism for what they believed to be its Augustinian underpinnings and Descartes' perceived separation of theology from natural philosophy.⁵¹ Within this framework, they argued that as God's

⁴⁹ Remsberg, p. 143.

⁵⁰ Remsberg, pp. 89-90.

⁵¹ Phillips, p. 160.

salvific grace is direct and specific to the moral conditions of each soul, with its dispensation known only to God, God's governance of the natural world is uniform and can be described in terms of general laws, which can be known through observation and rational inquiry. Jansenism's "separate realms" principle is at the heart of Arnauld's uncompromising objection to Malebranche's *Treatise on Nature and Grace*, where Malebranche argues that God governs the realm of nature and grace in the same way with analogous general laws. He believes that Malebranche dangerously confuses God's individual care for souls with his general governance of the physical world.⁵² This division between theology and natural philosophy put Jansenism at odds with the Augustinianism of the Oratory that uses Augustine's works on knowledge, rather than grace, to develop a broader understanding of an Augustinian wisdom-science relation that encompasses both theology and natural philosophy.

1.3.2 The Augustinianism of the Oratory

The Oratory's interpretation of Augustine's wisdom-science relation developed out of Bérulle's theocentrism, which emphasized God's power and

⁵² Remsberg, pp. 81-82, 89-90; Riley (1992), pp. 2-3.

influence in the created world. According to Henri Gouhier, Bérulle introduced into the Oratory a new Christian meditative practice that focused not on the soul's moral weakness and salvation, as Jansenism did, but on God's power and glory. "La vie intérieure du chrétien prend alors une direction nouvelle; le problème du salut personnel se trouve subordonné au désintéressement d'un amour où Dieu est aimé pour lui-même".⁵³ For Bérulle, the love for God should be at the center of the Oratorian spiritual life, not the possible salvific benefits that could be reaped from him. This shift in focus from personal salvation to the disinterested praise of God and his attributes puts God's power and influence on the soul and the created world at the center of Oratorian thought. Naturally, philosophically inclined Oratorians attempted to describe and articulate how God's power manifests itself in the world. Gouhier suggests that Bérulle's theocentrism was supported and propagated by the early Superior Generals, Condren and Bourgoing, and eventually became entrenched in Oratorian thought, inevitably influencing Malebranche's philosophy, particularly in terms of his occasionalism.⁵⁴

⁵³ Gouhier (1926), p. 124.

⁵⁴ Gouhier (1926), p. 127.

As Gouhier discusses Bérulle's theocentrism in terms of God's power, Remsberg focuses on Bérulle's theocentrism in terms of God's divine illumination. Again, as Jansenism limited God's illumination to knowledge of the soul's interior state and its potential improvement, Bérulle believes that God is the epistemological ground for *all* knowledge, from ethics and politics to mathematics and natural philosophy.⁵⁵ Consequently, Bérulle's conception of the wisdom-science relation, *contra* Jansenism, unites the realms of nature and grace, making God the foundation of all knowledge. Remsberg suggests that this aspect of Bérulle's Augustinian theocentrism naturally became the intellectual foundation of the Oratorian mind.

Another quality of the Oratorian is his determination to make religion and learning go together. Not only is he interested in being both a priest and a scholar, but he feels that the two activities interpenetrate so as to form one homogeneous whole. This brings him into contradiction with both the Jesuits and Jansenists, for both of them make a separation of the activity of the scholar and the activity of the religious believer, although they do not relate these separate activities in the same way.⁵⁶

The Oratorian mind, in this case, puts God at the center of its religious, philosophical and scientific life, recognizing that each field is potentially compatible with each other. Naturally, one of the goals of an intellectually inclined Oratorian is to uncover the fundamental harmony between disparate

⁵⁵ Remsberg, pp. 121-122; Gouhier (1948), p. 325 fn.1.

⁵⁶ Remsberg, p. 118.

fields of knowledge, given their mutual epistemological source. This partly explains the Oratory's interest in education, science, and biblical exegesis. It also explains the Oratory's attraction to intellectuals of all stripes, such as the biblical historian and linguist Richard Simon, and the Cartesian philosophers Louis Thomassin and Bernard Lamy.

Bérulle's Augustinianism also had an impact outside the Oratory, most notably Descartes. If we are to believe Menn's account of Bérulle's fateful meeting with Descartes after the *L'Affaire Chandoux*, where Bérulle "told Descartes to construct a new philosophy, he also told him to begin with metaphysics, and with metaphysics as conceived in Augustinian terms, as a discipline of reflection on God and the soul", and also his reasonable suggestion that Descartes was introduced to Oratorian Augustinianism through his correspondence with other important Oratorians, such as Charles de Condren and Guillaume Gibieuf, we can see that Bérulle's Augustinianism likely influenced Descartes' philosophy.⁵⁷ Descartes uses not only God as the ultimate epistemological source and justification for his metaphysics, and in turn, his physics, but also Augustine's meditative practice to cultivate the mind's cognitive disposition so that it can properly access the truth without

⁵⁷ Menn (2002), pp. 49-51; Desmond Clarke (2006) pp. 83, 100

relying on the senses.⁵⁸ Philosophers such as Louis de la Forge, Arnauld, and Malebranche instantly identified Descartes as an Augustinian. In fact, De la Forge, in the preface to his important work *Treatise on the Human Mind*, which is entitled “In which the author shows the agreement between Saint Augustine’s teaching concerning the nature of the soul and the views of Mr. Descartes,” conducts a systematic textual comparison of Augustine and Descartes in an attempt to defend Descartes against charges of heterodoxy (DC 5).⁵⁹

Bérulle’s influence on Malebranche is unclear. Gouhier points out that even though Malebranche never cites or mentions Bérulle in his works, “il lui imposa *une forme* [la théocentrisme], et l’amour de cette *forme* lui dictera désormais tous ses jugements”.⁶⁰ So, at a minimum, Malebranche felt the general presence of Bérulle’s Augustinianism and it helped frame his belief that God’s eternal truths are the epistemological ground that unifies mathematics, physics, ethics and theology. There were other Oratorians, however, that seem to have had a direct influence on him. According to Gouhier, the main intellectual connection between Augustine and

⁵⁸ Hatfield (1986) convincingly argues that Descartes’ *Meditations* is patterned after Augustine’s meditative process and Menn (2002) provides a detailed analysis of Descartes’ philosophical relationship to Augustine.

⁵⁹ See Gouhier (1978), pp. 67-68.

⁶⁰ Gouhier (1926), p. 127.

Malebranche is the Augustinian-Cartesian philosopher André Martin, who wrote under the pen name Ambrosius Victor. Martin was a controversial figure in the Oratory. He entered the Oratory in 1641 and was ordained in 1646. He taught at the major Oratorian schools in Marseille, Saumur, and Angers, and was the first Oratorian to publically teach Cartesianism. But in 1652, while teaching in Marseille, he was suspended from his duties for teaching Cartesian theses, and for attempting to synthesize the doctrines of Descartes with Augustine in his works.⁶¹ Martin received the suspension order on January 19, 1652, which Gouhier quotes in full.

Le P. André Martin se rendra au plus tôt de Marseille en notre maison d'Arles, et y résidera jusqu'à nouvel ordre, quittant son cours de Philosophie commencé, lequel sera parachevé par le P. Pierre de Rhodes, Supérieur, et ce pour les dangers auxquels il met la Congrégation tant envers Rome que vers Mr. de Marseille.⁶²

Martin's suspension was a consequence of the much larger political power struggle between the Jesuits and Oratorians over the control of schools that spilled over into disputes over the curriculum at the universities, particularly the public teaching of new philosophies that appear to undermine Aristotelianism. As early as 1624, the Parlement of Paris issued a decree mandating that Aristotelianism must be the only philosophical system taught

⁶¹ Phillips, pp. 159, 295; Gouhier (1948), p. 294.

⁶² Gouhier (1926), p. 52.

at the universities. Louis XIV made this the law of the country in 1671.⁶³ Even though there was support for Cartesianism amongst the lower ranks of Oratory and the Oratory did not officially forbid its members from studying Cartesianism, there was, by 1641, an anti-Cartesian block at the top levels of Oratory, led by conservatives such as Senault and the anti-Cartesian Bourgoing in 1664, which wanted to placate the Jesuits, and in turn, the king by banning the *public teaching* of Cartesianism.⁶⁴ So Martin's suspension had everything to do with the public image of Oratory, rather than with an inherent prejudice against it in the Oratory as we see with the Jesuits. So Oratorian Cartesians, such as Martin, Malebranche and Lamy, did not compromise Oratorian principles by studying and espousing Descartes' philosophy.

Despite Martin's professional problems, Gouhier convincingly argues that Martin's work, *Philosophia Christiana* (1671), had an important influence on Malebranche's Augustinianism.⁶⁵ In this work, Martin formalized Oratorian Augustinianism by collecting and ordering under different philosophical topics relevant passages from Augustine's work. In the

⁶³ Nadler (2008), p. 25.

⁶⁴ Gouhier (1926), pp. 53-53.

⁶⁵ Gouhier (1948), pp. 279-303.

appendix of his work, *La Philosophie de Malebranche*, Gouhier provides a complete collation of passages from Augustine in Malebranche's works and compares them with those in *Philosophia Christiana*, suggesting that Malebranche cited Augustine directly from Martin's work, a work that was in his library.⁶⁶ Furthermore, after comparing Martin's Augustinianism with Malebranche's, particularly in relation their theories of knowledge, Gouhier concludes that "l'augustinisme que Malebranche a connu, c'est celui de la *Philosophia Christiana* ; entre saint Augustin et Malebranche, il y a Ambrosius Victor".⁶⁷

Moreover, Remsberg believes that Martin's work is representative of Oratorian Augustinianism in general. He argues that Martin, in line with Bérulle, but contrary to Jansen and Saint-Cyran, focuses his attention on Augustine's work on knowledge rather than on grace. He calculates that Martin "shows a preference for those works written at a time when Augustine was interested in the problem of knowledge by a ratio of 2.66 to 1."⁶⁸ Since Martin's ratio favors Augustine's work on knowledge, Remsberg concludes that Martin is not concerned with "the problem of grace and free will, but the

⁶⁶ Gouhier (1948), pp. 411-427.

⁶⁷ Gouhier (1948), p. 286.

⁶⁸ Remsberg, 141.

problem of the relation of all knowledge to God, which is the problem of science and religion, science and wisdom".⁶⁹ So whether or not Martin had a strong influence on Malebranche, as Gouhier suggests, Malebranche was obviously aware of Martin's work and probably recognized it as reflection of the Oratory's particular brand of Augustinianism.

For Martin, the mind is intimately united to God's eternal truths, and it is through this union that mind can know the intellectual structure of the physical and moral realms. Consequently, God's illumination is not limited to grace and salvation, but to all areas of knowledge. More importantly, Martin suggests that the mind is not merely a passive recipient of divine illumination, but has the ability to turn the mind's eye towards these truths in an attempt to understand them better and to discover other truths. Of course, the mind, which is finite and corrupted by the Fall, cannot know these truths perfectly, but it can, through the Augustinian discipline of cognitive reflection, train the mind to turn away from the distractions of the world and focus its attention on God and its relationship to him. By doing this, the mind can prepare its rational capacities and moral disposition to receive God's illumination.⁷⁰ As

⁶⁹ Remsberg, p. 142.

⁷⁰ Gouhier (1948), pp. 284-292.

we will see in detail in chapter three, this is important for Malebranche's theory of the mind's perfection.

1.4 Malebranche's Augustinianism and the Mind's Perfection

Four years prior to his ordination in 1664, Malebranche entered the Oratory, under the advice of his maternal uncle de Lauzon, in 1660. He was tonsured and received the four minor orders on March 28, 1660.⁷¹ Gouhier, quoting Lelong, suggests that Malebranche chose the Oratory over a canonship at Norte Dame because the Oratory satisfied his physical and spiritual needs.⁷² Its liberal conditions for membership—he could leave at any time and there were no fixed set of priestly duties—suited his weak physical condition, and allowed him the free time to pursue his spiritual and intellectual interests. In 1661, he spent a few months at the Oratorian school Notre Dame des Ardilliers at Saumar studying theology. The school vigorously competed with the prestigious Protestant Academy, but the rivalry was friendly, with students freely attending lectures at both school.⁷³ Around this time, Saumar was considered a hot spot for Cartesianism, particularly with the influence and popularity of Louis de la Forge and the earlier lectures of Louis

⁷¹ Gouhier (1926), pp. 19-21.

⁷² Gouhier (1926), p. 18.

⁷³ Gouhier (1926), pp. 22-23; Phillips, p. 187.

Thomassin from 1648 to 1654, but there is no evidence that Malebranche was taken in by Cartesianism at this time. It was not until his encounter with Descartes' *Treatise on Man* in 1664 that he switched his focus from mainly theological concerns and biblical exegesis—he worked with the controversial bible critic Richard Simon—to Cartesianism and mechanical physics.⁷⁴

We can conclude from this that the intellectual atmosphere that fundamentally influenced Malebranche's thought in the first four years at the Oratory was most likely its Augustinianism, not necessarily its Cartesian inclinations. Following Gouhier and Remsberg, I argue that the Oratory's intellectual tradition, based on Bérulle's Augustinianism and later articulated and developed by Oratorians such as Martin, shaped Malebranche's core beliefs about the epistemological unity of all knowledge, and the mind's ability to access the intellectual structure of the moral and physical realms through its union with God's eternal truths. These beliefs, accordingly, became the filter through which he understood Descartes' philosophy and developed his own particular brand of Cartesianism.⁷⁵ Malebranche's system can also be seen as the fulfillment of Bérulle's goal of developing a new and

⁷⁴ Gouhier (1926), pp. 39-48.

⁷⁵ Descartes' affinity with Augustine probably attracted Malebranche to his philosophy and confirmed his own Augustinianism.

improved Christian philosophy based on Augustinian and Cartesian principles that could replace Aristotelianism.⁷⁶ So Malebranche's ordination into the Oratory 1664, I believe, represents not only his commitment to the Oratory as an institution and its goals, but also to its Augustinian tradition. In the end, understanding the place of Oratorian Augustinianism in Malebranche's philosophy is vital for seeing how the major parts of his system fit together, since it is the linchpin that connects each part. For the rest of this chapter, however, I want to provide a rough outline of Malebranche's Augustinianism, particularly in relation to the basic principles of his philosophical system.

First of all, Oratorian Augustinianism is at the core of Malebranche's philosophical *persona*, that is, the cognitive and moral dispositions, practices, and goals by which he conducts and guides his life as a philosopher.⁷⁷ Malebranche's philosophical *persona* should be understood within the context of what John Cottingham calls the traditional model of philosophy, where philosophy is seen as a comprehensive enterprise whose twofold goal is to

⁷⁶ In fact, Gouhier (1978) purposely ends his study of the relationship between seventeenth-century Cartesianism and Augustinianism with Malebranche, who, he claims, synthesized the two and developed a whole new philosophy. "Jusqu'à ce moment, nous parlerons d'un *cartésianisme augustiné* et d'un *augustinisme cartésianisé*; désormais, un troisième terme entre dans le discours: le *malebranchisme*," p. 9.

⁷⁷ Conal Condren, Stephen Gaukroger, Ian Hunter (2006), p. 7.

provide, through the interior cultivation of the philosopher's intellectual and moral character, a complete summary of philosophical knowledge in all areas (e.g. metaphysics, physics, and morals) and use this knowledge to discover the best way to live.⁷⁸ This twofold goal is clearly expressed by the seventeenth-century Cartesian philosopher Antoine Le Grand in the first passage of the preface of his encyclopedic work, *An Entire Body of Philosophy According to the Principles of the Famous Renate Des Cartes*:

Philosophy, according to its etymology, is the love and study of wisdom; where by wisdom we understand such a disposition of the mind, by which Man is firmly inclined to have the right sentiments of the things that occur to his perception, and to make a just examination of the actions that belong to his life. For wisdom, doth not only direct the understanding, and guide the mind in the contemplation of truth; but also inclines it to honesty, and assists the will in the prosecution of virtue; So that wisdom is indeed nothing else but a perfect knowledge of all those things which is possible for man to know, and which may be both a rule to his life, and help to the inventing of all arts whatsoever. Whence philosophy may be defined as a habit of the mind, acquired by study and exercise from inborn ideas and self evident principles, enlightening the understanding in the knowledge of necessary things, and perfecting the will by honest and virtuous actions.⁷⁹

Philosophical knowledge, for Le Grand, is not the end of philosophical inquiry, but the means to properly ordering one's life, and for providing

⁷⁸ John Cottingham (2006), pp. 192-193. He argues convincingly that Descartes falls under this traditional view of philosophy as well.

⁷⁹ Antoine Le Grand (1694), Preface, p. 1.

universal happiness for all with discoveries in the mechanical arts. More importantly, he suggests that the philosopher must have the right dispositions and habits to acquire philosophical knowledge and to use it beneficially for the individual and common good. His description of the philosopher as one who exercises the intellect through a careful and methodical study of the mind's innate ideas and self-evident principles is clearly Cartesian, but it is also in line with the traditional philosophical *persona* that makes the acquisition and proper use of philosophical knowledge dependent upon the philosopher's own intellectual and moral character.⁸⁰ Even though there was a new philosophical *persona* developing alongside the traditional one in the seventeenth century, where knowledge acquisition, particularly in the field of natural philosophy, shifted *from* its dependence on personal character *to* scientific methods that anyone could use, whether intellectual scoundrel or saint, the traditional *persona* was still very much alive during this period.⁸¹ Malebranche, I believe, follows this tradition by advocating the interior cultivation of one's character, and arguing that such cultivation is necessary for the acquisition of philosophical knowledge and in the ability to act according to it.

⁸⁰ Peter Harrison (2006), pp. 202-210.

⁸¹ Harrison, 202.

Now Malebranche consistently expresses the traditional philosophical *persona* from an Augustinian perspective. The bedrock principle of his philosophy is the claim that all minds are united to God, and that this union is the most natural and essential to the mind because God, who can only act for himself (God is self-sufficient and desires nothing outside of himself), can create minds only to know and love him (OCM I 10, LO xxxiv).

The mind of man is by its nature situated, as it were, between its Creator and corporeal creatures, for, according to Augustine, there is nothing but God above it and nothing but bodies below it...the latter union [God-mind] raises the mind above all things. Through it, the mind receives its life, its light, and its entire felicity, and at many points in his works Saint Augustine speaks of this union as the one most natural and essential to the mind (OCM I 9, LO xxxiii).

It is through this union that all minds have access to the eternal truths that structure the physical and moral realms. Without knowledge of this rational structure, the mind would be unable to gain knowledge of the natural world and our proper moral obligations to other human beings.

The *Reason* which enlightens man is the *Word* or the Wisdom of God Himself. Though every creature is a particular being, the reason which enlightens man's mind is universal (OCM XI 17, CW 45).

In contemplating this Divine substance, I may see some part of that which God *thinks*. God sees all *truths*, and I may see some of them. Then, I am able to discover something of what God *wills*; for God wills only according to Order, and Order is not entirely unknown to me (OCM XI 18, CW 45).

For by contemplating the intelligible substance of the Word, which alone makes me reasonable and all other intelligent beings, I clearly see the *relations of magnitude* which exist between the intelligible ideas contained therein; and these relations are the same eternal truths which God sees. For God...sees as well as I that 2 and 2 are 4, and that triangles which have the same base and are between the same parallels are equal. I may also discover, at least confusedly, the relations of perfection which exist between these same ideas; and these relations are the immutable Order which God consults when He acts, the Order which also must govern the esteem and love of all intelligent beings (OCM V 19, CW 46).

God's Order is always present to the mind, but it is up to the mind itself to recognize it.

These truths cannot be erased from the mind, and they infallibly discover them when it pleases them to think about them (OCM I 13, LO xxxv).

The truth does not abandon them, it is they who abandon the truth. Its light shines in the darkness but does not always dispel it, just as the sun's light surrounds those who are blind or who shut their eyes, although it enlightens neither of them (OCM I 15, LO xxxvi).

The mind's recognition of God's order, however, is not as easy as it might seem. Even though the mind can, in principle, access and follow God's Order, its secondary union with the body seriously distracts and hinders the mind by bombarding it with sensible stimulation, and by constantly occupying it with things that relate to the body, from mere bodily preservation to material wealth and worldly reputation (OCM I 12, LO xxxv).

However, I admit that immutable Order is not easy to reach; it dwells within us, but we are always spreading ourselves out to the world around us. Our senses spread our soul out to all parts of the body, and our imagination and passions spread it out to all the objects around us, often even to a world having nor more reality than imaginary spaces; this is incontestable (*OCM XI 33, CW 56*).

Malebranche sees the body's dominance over the mind as evidence of the disordered union between the mind and body that was caused by the Fall, where Adam, out of pride, turned away from contemplating and following God's order to revel in the sensations and passions of his body (*OCM I 72, LO 579-580*). By doing this, Adam fundamentally switched around the mind-body power relation that he had before the Fall, where he had complete control over the movements of his body and the sensations and passions that are connected to them (*OCM V 95, PR 150-151*). Humankind inherited this disorder from Adam, and now all minds are dominated by bodily sensations and passions, which constantly distract the mind from contemplating God's order. Overcoming this predicament, for Malebranche, requires a constant effort on part of the mind's attention to focus and concentrate on God's order (*OCM XI 59-69, CW 75-82*).

By a general law which He constantly follows and all of whose consequences He has foreseen, God has linked the presence of ideas to the mind's paying attention: when we are masters of our attention and

make use of it, then without fail light is spread within us, in direct proportion to our effort (OCM XI 59, CW 75).

Man is free, presuming the necessary aids. Concerning Truth, he is able to search for it, in spite of his difficulty in meditating. Concerning Order, he is able to follow it in spite of the forces of concupiscence. He can sacrifice his peace of mind for the sake of Truth, and his pleasures for the sake of Order (OCM XI 22, CW 48)

Even though he believes that the mind must be aided in its endeavor by Christ's grace, whenever his grace so happens to touch it, the mind must, nonetheless, do the necessary preparatory work to receive and utilize it (OCM V 132, PR 182-183).

Given his understanding of the mind's dual union with God and the body, Malebranche, in line with the traditional philosophical *persona*, believes that one of the main goals of philosophy is to perfect the mind, that is, to maximize the mind's ability to successfully access, comprehend, and follow God's Order, while reducing the body's control over the mind. In fact, nothing is more important to Malebranche than the "science of man" (OCM I 22, LO xl). He typically describes perfection in terms of strengthening the mind's bond with God by submitting to, and following, his divine order. The degree to which the mind follows God's order determines the mind's level of

perfection, and in turn, its happiness. The more perfection the mind has, the more it resembles God.

We are rational creatures, therefore our virtue, our perfection is to love Reason, or rather, to love Order (*OCM XI 24, CW 49*).

In order to be happy we must be perfect. Virtue, or man's perfection consists in submission to the immutable Order, never following the order of nature (*OCM XI 17, CW 45*).

Thus anyone who works at his own perfection and makes himself to resemble God, works for his own happiness, works for his own dignity. If he does that which in some way depends on him to do, that is, if he earns merit by making himself perfect, God...will make him happy. For since God loves beings in proportion as they are lovable, and since the most perfect are the most lovable, the most perfect will be the most powerful, and most happy and the most content. Anyone who constantly consults reason and loves Order, thereby taking part in the perfection of God, will also take part in His happiness, His glory and His dignity (*OCM XI 23, CW 48*).

Without this cognitive ability, Malebranche believes that the mind would be unable to acquire knowledge in the fields of mathematics, physics, theology and ethics, since all knowledge is grounded in God's order.

[I]t is only by the mind's attention that any truths are discovered or any sciences acquired, because the mind's attention is in fact only its conversion and return to God, who is the sole Master, who alone teaches us all truth through the manifestation of his substance, as Saint Augustine says, and without the intervention of any creature (*OCM I 17-18, LO xxxviii*).

In his work *Dialogues on Metaphysics and on Religion* Malebranche illustrates, through the characters Theodore and his student Aristes, the cognitive process by which the mind can perfect itself. In the opening scene, Theodore suggests that he and Aristes should retreat to Theodore's study, away from the distractions of the world, so that they can consult God's order about certain metaphysical matters (OCM XII 29, JS 3). Over the next several days, Theodore helps Aristes, through a rational meditative process, to focus his mind's eye on God's order. He does this by guiding Aristes from simple truths to more complex ones, and by constantly admonishing Aristes when he uses his senses and imagination to defend particular claims or explicate certain concepts. It is through these cognitive exercises that Aristes strengthens his connection with God's order, thereby perfecting himself and giving him a rational starting point to acquire knowledge in other fields. So, for Malebranche, the mind's perfection is the *first* goal of any philosopher, and must be the necessary starting point for any successful attempt at providing a comprehensive account of knowledge that, in turn, can be used to better order our lives, including the material benefit that is gained through advances in the mechanical arts.

As we can see, the mind's union with God's Order and its perfection are at the center of Malebranche's philosophical enterprise. Since God's order grounds and unifies all knowledge, the philosopher's mind must tap into it in order to know the rational structure of the physical and moral realms. Based on his theological understanding of the mind's disordered union with the body, however, he believes that the mind has a serious epistemological deficit, and the only way to recover from it is to cultivate and perfect our intellectual and moral character by turning the mind's attention away from the senses and imagination towards God's order. By participating in God's order, the mind also participates in God's happiness (*OCM XI 22, CW 48*).

As I mentioned in the introduction, Malebranche's theory of the mind's perfection has not been at the forefront of Anglo-American scholarship. The focus has been on the mechanics of his divine illumination theory, primarily in terms of visual perception, and his causal theory of occasionalism. Given the historical and philosophical evidence presented in this chapter, Malebranche's Oratorian Augustinianism is central to his philosophy, and must be given due consideration if we have any chance of providing a complete account of his system, and in reconciling the apparent difficulties between its parts, particularly between his occasionalism and theory of freedom. The rough

outline provided here can be seen as a roadmap, with its directions and signposts, by which we can engage in a more detailed and complex discussion of Malebranche's Augustinianism and the theory of perfection that it entails. In order to this, we must first examine Augustine's own theory of the mind's perfection, limiting our discussion to Augustine's early works on knowledge, and then, within this context, explicate Malebranche's theory of perfection, incorporating elements of his Cartesian metaphysics and physics. These are the goals of the second and third chapters respectively.

2. Augustine and the Mind's Perfection

2.1 Introduction

In chapter one, I argued that Malebranche, as an Oratorian, is fundamentally an Augustinian, specifically in terms of Augustine's theory of knowledge and the soul's perfection. This brand of Augustinianism is at the core of his philosophical *persona*, that is, the belief that philosophers must cultivate their intellectual and moral character in order to acquire philosophical knowledge. This, I argue, puts the mind's perfection at the heart of his philosophical system and that the other parts of his system must be understood in terms of

it. In order to understand his theory of perfection, we need to examine Augustine's own theory for comparison. Though the two theories differ in some details, the method and stages of perfection are relatively the same.

2.2 Perfecting the Soul

Augustine's method for perfecting the soul is closely connected to the ancient tradition of intellectual eudaemonism, whereby the soul, through the attainment of wisdom, achieves happiness. As he explains in his *Confessions*, Augustine, at the young age of nineteen, was introduced to this tradition by reading Cicero's *Hortensius*, where Cicero exhorts his reader to practice philosophy, that is, to become a lover of wisdom. After reading this book, Augustine explains that he was "inflamed by such a great love of philosophy that I considered devoting myself to it at once" and "by its call I was aroused and kindled and set on fire to love and seek and capture and hold fast and strongly cling not to this or that school, but to wisdom itself" (*De beata vita* 1.4; *Conf.* 3.4.7). Augustine believed that his burning search for truth was essentially the same as his search for God; seeing God as the source of truth. His desire was to come to an accurate understanding of the nature of God, his own soul and the relationship between the two (*Sol.* 1.2.7).

Thee I invoke, O God, the Truth, in, by and through whom all truths are true; the Wisdom, in, by and through whom all are wise who are wise; the True and Perfect Life, in by and through whom live all who live truly and perfectly...the Intelligible Light, in, by and through whom all intelligible things are illumined...(Sol. 1.13)

Impassioned with the desire for wisdom—"O Truth, Truth, how the deepest and innermost marrow of my mind ached for you"—Augustine struggled to find the content of this wisdom, spending nine years as a devotee of the aberrant Christian sect Manichaeism, subscribing to its material conceptions of God, the soul and evil. Finding problems with the Manichees's understanding of the physical universe, particularly in relation to their astronomical calculations, and discovering that their assertions of intellectual certainty were empty after his unsatisfying encounter with the Manichee leader Faustus of Milevius, Augustine, despairing that he would never discover the truth, briefly flirted with Academic skepticism (*Conf.* 3.6.10, 5.3.3-5.7.13, 5.10.19). Though skepticism provided consolation for his despair, it also taught him that the search for wisdom is a difficult journey that must be taken with intellectual courage, and is not instant and prepackaged as the Manichees proclaimed.⁸² It also helped clear the way for Augustine to explore other philosophical paths that might lead to his goal. When he finally settled in

⁸² Brown, p. 80

Milan, after brief stays in Carthage and Rome, Augustine discovered Neoplatonism. There, he encountered the intellectual cosmopolitan Ambrose, the powerful bishop of Milan, who, through his sermons, indirectly introduced him to Neoplatonism by using Platonist language and concepts to present a sophisticated and intellectually rigorous understanding of Catholicism and the scriptures that went far beyond the primitive and superstitious Catholicism he was taught, and outright rejected, in his native North Africa. His authority and teachings made Catholic doctrine palatable to Augustine, moving him from skepticism to belief (*Conf.* 5.14.24, 6.3.3-6.5.8). Around the same time, he was directly introduced to Neoplatonism through Plotinus, whose works were given to him by his friend Manlius Theodorus, a devotee of Plotinus.⁸³ As Ambrose gave Augustine the justification he needed to believe in Catholic doctrine without fully understanding it, Neoplatonism gave Augustine the philosophical framework and intellectual discipline he needed to develop a new understanding of the Christian universe that was based on immaterial conceptions of God, the soul and evil. This new vision helped him overcome the contradictions between the Manichee's materialistic understanding of God and evil, and his own axiomatic beliefs about God's

⁸³ Menn (2002), pp. 75-79; Brown, pp. 125-126.

immutability, inviolability, goodness, and omnipotence (*Conf.* 7.2.3-7.5.7).⁸⁴ Neoplatonism, in this sense, gave Augustine the philosophical support he needed to move from his belief in Catholic doctrine, instilled by Ambrose, to rationally understanding and accepting it. In turn, this process helped prepare him to receive Christ's redemptive grace and finally to commit himself to God and Catholicism.

Augustine believed that both philosophy, in his case Neoplatonism, and Christianity served the same goal of achieving wisdom, that is, actively contemplating God's Truth (or Christ understood as the Word), but each provided a different, yet complementary, way of achieving it. Each served different therapeutic functions for repairing and strengthening the soul. Christianity, through faith, hope and charity, fortifies the soul's moral character so that it can turn away from concupiscent desires and maintain its focus on God. Philosophy, by strengthening the soul's cognitive powers, provides the soul with a rational method by which it can comprehend, and act in accordance with, the Truth. Both practices are expressed in Augustine's famous formula, succinctly expressed by Anselm, *credo ut intelligam*: "I believe

⁸⁴ Menn (2002), pp. 138-140.

so that I can understand".⁸⁵ By coordinating these practices, and with the help of God's grace, he believed that the soul could achieve perfection and wisdom, and therefore a happy life.

Of course it must be mentioned that the compatibility between Neoplatonism and Christianity was not perfect. Firstly, Neoplatonism did not speak to some fundamental truths of Christianity, such as the incarnation of the Word or Truth in the person of Jesus Christ, and the knowledge gained from scripture and Catholic doctrine (*Conf.* 7.9,13-15). And secondly, there was a serious tension between Neoplatonism's claim of spiritual autonomy, wherein the soul, under its rational powers alone, can achieve wisdom, and Christianity's emphasis on the soul's dependence on God.⁸⁶ This tension is clearly seen, as we saw in chapter one, in Augustine's own writings, particularly between the rather optimistic Neoplatonic works of his early period in which he demonstrates the soul's rational powers in gaining knowledge of God and the soul, and his more pessimistic works after 410 CE, with the start of the Pelagian controversy, where he changes his focus from the soul's ability to acquire knowledge to discussing the soul's severe moral

⁸⁵ Etienne Gilson (1938), p. 24.

⁸⁶ Brown, pp. 102-103.

weakness and the need for God's grace.⁸⁷ Given our discussion in chapter one of André Martin's narrow focus on Augustine's early work on knowledge, and in turn, Malebranche's reliance on Martin for his understanding of Augustine, we will focus most of our attention on these early works to see how Augustine understands the soul's rational powers in relation to his methods for knowledge and the soul's perfection. While acknowledging the necessity of God's grace in this process, we can, justifiably, bracket the thorny interpretive difficulties of how Augustine, in the end, understood the relationship between the soul's autonomy and God's grace. Nevertheless, we can say, as we will see in the next section, that Augustine believed that the soul has the power and ability, given the right training, to prepare itself effectively to receive and comprehend God's illumination. In fact, Augustine's method for perfecting the soul necessarily presupposes it. With this being said, we can focus most of our attention on the philosophical, or more specifically, the modified Neoplatonist therapeutic practices that Augustine advocated.

So, for Augustine, the natural desire, and ultimate goal, of every rational soul is happiness, that is, the affective contemplation of God through

⁸⁷ See fn. 41 above.

the Word or Truth. "The life of blessedness and repose for man consists in the harmonious rationality of all his activity" (Markus 381; cf. *Conf.* 10.23.33; *De lib. arb.* 2.8, 2.18). By constantly contemplating the Truth, and consistently acting in accordance with it, the rational soul comes to imitate God as best it can, ordering its life in relative harmony with God's order. As a result, the soul gains wisdom (*sapientia*), perfection, and ultimately, happiness (*De beata vita* 4.35; *De Trin.* 12.22 quoted above).

The wise man is so closely united with God in his mind that nothing can come between to separate them. God is truth, and no one is wise if he has not truth on his mind. We cannot deny that man's wisdom is a kind of intermediary placed between the folly of man and the pure truth of God. The wise man, so far as it is given to him, imitates God (*De util. cred.* 15.33; cf. *De Trin.* 12.10).

Augustine believes that the soul has a unique position in the middle of God's created hierarchy, and can exercise its rational powers in both the material and intellectual realms, with the ability to direct and focus its attention on either realm. In order to be happy, the soul must primarily focus its attention on the intelligible realm, while minimizing the desires, cares, and demands of its body (*De vera relig.* 12.24). Pre-lapsarian Adam is an exemplar of this perfect state, being in full control of his body and undisturbed by its concupiscent desires while focusing maximum attention on God. As a soul-

body composite, Adam was in perfect harmony, ordering his thoughts and actions according to God's eternal order (*De civ. Dei* 14.10). Adam's sin, however, was the result of a prideful act, whereby Adam freely turned his attention away from God and towards his body and its desires, which he wants to possess and govern according to his own self-interested laws (*De civ. Dei* 14.13; *De vera relig.* 15.29; *De Trin.* 12.14). This greed to satisfy concupiscent desires acts like a weight that drags the soul down from its intelligible heights to the material realm below, from which the soul cannot escape on its own (*Conf.* 7.17.23). As a result of this downward movement, the soul is "heaved out of happiness", losing direct contact with God's eternal truths, and therefore, the knowledge to act in accordance with it (*De Trin.* 12.14). Ultimately, Adam disrupted the perfect harmony he had with his body and God, surrendering control over his body, leaving him vulnerable to its concupiscent desires. Now this disordered state, according to Augustine, has been hereditarily passed down to all human beings, putting them at the mercy of bodily passions and pleasures. They overwhelm the soul's attentive powers, forcing the soul to turn away from God and towards the material realm (*De civ. Dei* 14.10). With its attention divided amongst bodily desires and carnal habits, the soul has little time to contemplate and act in accordance with God's

eternal order, leaving the soul in a constant state of disharmony, qualitatively far away from the happiness it naturally desires.

The soul's damaged state and its repair is of the utmost importance to Augustine. This is portrayed in the *Confessions*, where he passionately describes, through his own difficult conversion and the spiritual challenges he subsequently faced, the soul's constant struggle to control its concupiscent desires and to turn its attention back towards God's eternal order. But all is not lost for Augustine. He believes that the soul, though seriously damaged, has the power, with the help of God's grace, to repair itself and partly regain the harmony and order experienced by pre-lapsarian Adam (*De vera relig.* 15.29). Augustine believes, as I mentioned above, that the soul could achieve this with a prescription of Christian faith and authority on the one hand, and the regular practice of intellectual and moral exercises to refocus the mind's attention on God on the other. Both, used in conjunction, prepare and develop the soul's intellectual and moral character so that it can receive God's wisdom. Before we get into the specifics of this prescription, we need to see how Augustine conceives of the soul and its powers in terms of its relationships to both the body and God.

2.2.1 The Augustinian Soul

The best place to start is Augustine's account of the relationship between the soul and body. For Augustine, the soul in the most general and fundamental sense is the life-principle of all living things. In the case of human beings, the rational soul is the dynamic active force that controls the vegetative and sensitive operations of the body, and the rational operations of the mind (*De quant. anim.* 70ff.). Augustine describes the union of soul and body as a mixture in which the soul is temporally present throughout the entire body and is aware of the changes in the body through what he calls vital "attention" or "concentration" (*intentio*).

The soul is not of a bodily nature, nor does it fill the body as its local space, like water filling a bottle or a sponge, but in wonderful ways it is mixed into the body it animates, and with its incorporeal nod, so to say, it powers or steers the body with a kind of concentration, not with any material engine (*quadam intentione, non mole*) (*De Gen. ad litt.* 8.21.42).

The soul's vital attention also controls the inner workings of the body, and actively uses the sense organs to make contact with the material world. Since the body is inferior to the soul and cannot act on it, the sense organs are merely an instrument for the soul activities (*De Musica* 6.5.9-10). "It is not the body, you see, that senses, but the soul through the body, using it as a kind of messenger in order to form in itself the message being brought in from

outside" (*De Gen. ad litt.* 12.24.51). Augustine speaks of the sense organs as windows through which the soul senses the external world.⁸⁸ In the end, he compares the soul's relationship to body as that of master ruling his servant (*De Musica* 6.9).

Augustine explains the soul's interactions with the sense organs in the following way. He believes that the brain has three ventricles that are located in the front, middle and back of the brain (*De Gen. ad litt.* 7.13.20-18.24). The front ventricle controls the sensations, the middle houses the memory, and the back ventricle controls the movements of the body. From the center of the brain, tiny tubes are distributed throughout the body and are connected to the sense organs. These tiny tubes, which contain a fiery corporeal medium, transmit stimuli to the brain. But, the fiery corporeal medium manifests itself differently according to the nature of each sense organ and their corresponding objects (*De Gen. ad litt.* 3.4.6, 7.13.20). Light is the medium for eyes, air for the ears, mist for the nose, dampness for the mouth, earth or mud for the skin (i.e. touch) (*De Musica* 6.10). Now the soul controls the sense organs by activating the various mediums of each organ. Augustine suggests that since light is closest in nature to the incorporeal nature of the soul, the

⁸⁸ Gerard O'Daly (1987), p. 81.

soul uses light to interact, by mixing, with the grosser elemental mediums of the sense organs (*De Gen. ad litt.* 7.20.26, 12.16.32; *De Musica* 6.8.24). In this context, he describes sensation as the product of the motion and counter-motion of the medium by external stimuli and the soul (*De Musica* 6.15). This motion and counter-motion attracts the *attention* or *concentration* of the soul. Thus, sensation, for Augustine, is the result of physiological processes and the soul's attentive or concentrated activities (*De Musica* 6.10). Augustine's most detailed explanation of the soul's activities in sense perception is found in his account of visual perception or what he calls corporeal vision.

Visual perception consists of both physical and psychological processes. In terms of the physical process, Augustine argues for a ray theory of vision where the soul animates the visual organs in such a way that a sheath of rays project from the eyes and touch the object within its visual field (*De quant. anim.* 23.43; *De Gen. ad litt.* 7.13.20; *De Trin.* 11.2). The rays, in this case, become a sentient medium between the object and the visual organ. When the rays touch the object, the object disturbs the sentient medium in such a way as to stimulate the visual organ. The visual organ, in turn, forms a corresponding sensible (corporeal) image of the object. At this point, the psychological process takes over. Once the visual organ is stimulated and put

into motion, the soul, through sensory counter-motion, becomes aware of this motion, and simultaneously produces a corresponding non-corporeal image (*phantasia*) that is stored in the memory. Once the image is produced, the soul “sees” the external object. Note that the body does not *cause* the soul to produce an image, it merely provides the *occasion* for the soul to produce it.

It must also be noted that the memory, in this process, is not merely a recipient of the spiritual image, but plays an active role in the production of it. Since sense perception is a temporal process, it requires the memory to collect and organize the spatio-temporal parts of the image in such a way that it forms a complete image (*De Gen. ad litt.* 12.16.33). In *De Musica*, Augustine uses the sensation of hearing to illustrate this point.

For any syllable, no matter how short, since it begins and stops, has its beginning at one time and its ending at another. Then it is stretched over some little interval of time and stretches from its beginning through its middle to an end. So reason finds that spatial as well as temporal intervals have an infinite division and so no syllable’s end is heard with its beginning. And so, even in hearing the shortest syllable, unless memory help us have in the soul that motion made when the beginning sounded, at the very moment when no longer the beginning but the end of the syllable is sounding, then we cannot say we have heard anything (*De Musica* 5.8.21).

Since time intervals are infinitely divisible, the beginning of a syllable does not temporally coincide with its end; therefore, memory is needed to retain each

temporal part in order for the soul to hear the entire syllable. Similarly, since space is infinitely divisible, the soul cannot perceive an extended body simultaneously in its entirety without the aid of the memory. So, memory is not only used to store the perceptual image, it is necessary for the production of the image itself. As we will see, memory plays a vital role in the higher cognitive and rational activities of the soul.

For Augustine, corporeal vision is considered a low-grade activity that human beings have in common with the animals. A higher-grade activity is the imaginative activity or what Augustine calls spiritual vision. Spiritual vision is a purely psychological activity that consists in the rational soul turning its attention away from the body and towards the memory where it can consciously recall images (*phantasms*), strengthens associations with other images, and stitches together new images from the parts of other images. In the simple case of recalling images from memory, the soul actually produces an exact copy of the image stored in the memory. The stored image is a template from which the soul can print-off, as it were, a copy of the image. When the soul directs its attention to other thoughts, the copy is automatically erased and replaced by other images, but the original image is still retained in the memory for later use (*De Trin.* 11.6). The rational soul also has the power

to collect, combine and manipulate images in such a way as to produce entirely new images (*De Trin.* 11.13). These new images can also be retained in memory for recall later. Augustine describes this power of *cogitatio*—to push together, collect—in the following way.

Enormous wonder wells up within me when I think of this [power of the memory], and I am dumbfounded. People go to admire lofty mountains, and huge breakers at sea, and crashing waterfalls, and vast stretches of ocean, and the dance of the stars, but they leave themselves behind out of sight. It does not strike them as wonderful that I could enumerate those things without seeing them with my eyes, and that I could not ever have spoken of them unless I could within my mind contemplate mountains and waves and rivers and stars (which I have seen), and the ocean (which I only take on trust), and contemplate them there in space just as vast as though I were seeing them outside myself (*Conf.* 10.15).

Expanding this beyond sensible images, Augustine believes that the memory also stores other things such as past experiences, emotions and learned crafts that the soul can recall, combine, and manipulate at will. This higher cogitative power is restricted to human beings (*De Trin.* 12.2; *Conf.* 10.11.18). Animals, on the other hand, are limited to retaining and recalling sensible images and cannot consciously combine and manipulate images into new ones. Augustine believes that these activities are good enough for animals to survive in their environment and procreate (*De quant. anim.* 33.71; *De Trin.* 12.2).

So far we can see that Augustine believes that the soul has a variety of powers that are responsible for a human being's basic life functions, sensitive capacities, and imaginative activities. In his account of corporeal vision, the soul is not only responsible for animating the visual organ and directing it towards particular objects, but also for the production of non-corporeal images that correspond to the material objects. In the case of spiritual vision, the rational soul can actively recall, combine, and produce new images at will. The evidence presented so far clearly indicates that the Augustinian soul is by its very nature *active*. As we will see, this is also the case for the highest activities of the rational soul, namely, reason and knowledge acquisition.

2.2.2 Augustine's Theory of Divine Illumination

For Augustine, following his own interpretation of Neoplatonism, reality and knowledge are two parallel hierarchical structures that are intimately related to each other with God at the top. God, in terms of reality, created a perfect world that consists in a hierarchy of diverse beings that is patterned according to his divine order (*rationes aeternae*) (*De nat. boni c. Man. ii*). At the top of this created hierarchy, are incorporeal rational souls (humans and angels) and at the very bottom are material objects. In the middle, participating in both

realms, are human beings, which, as we have seen, are soul-body composites.⁸⁹ Given the unique position of human beings in this hierarchy, they are confronted with two objects of knowledge that correspond to different degrees of the reality: the mutable, temporal objects of the material world and the immutable, eternal truths or forms in God's mind. The rational soul has access to both areas of knowledge through two rational processes: the *ratio inferior* (or lower reason), which is concerned with sensible knowledge (*scientia*), and the *ratio superior* (or higher reason), which is concerned with the intellectual knowledge (*sapientia*) achieved through the mind alone (*De Trin.* 12.22). The end of the former is practical action in the material world and the end of the latter is ultimately the contemplation of God and the happiness derived thereof (*De vera relig.* 29.72; *De quant. anim.* 76; *Conf.* 10.23.33). So, for Augustine, not only is intellectual knowledge or wisdom (*sapientia*) superior to practical knowledge (*scientia*) in the sense that intellectual objects have a higher degree of reality than material objects, but also in the fact that in the act of contemplating eternal truths the soul turns its attention away from the sensible world and towards God.

⁸⁹ R.A. Markus (1980), p. 359

The rational soul's acquisition of practical knowledge and wisdom consists in its innate rational powers and God's divine illumination. Unfortunately, the relationship between the soul's rational powers and God's illumination is difficult to assess. Ronald Nash bluntly acknowledges that "no other important aspect of Augustine's philosophy has proved as difficult to understand and to explain as this notion that God in some way illumines the mind of man".⁹⁰ There are two main difficulties. The first difficulty is figuring out how the rational soul accesses or acquires God's eternal truths (*rationes aeternae*). The second difficulty is trying to demarcate the contributions of God and the rational soul in the acquisition of knowledge. After working out these difficulties, we will see that Augustine's theory of illumination is not a supernatural invasion of the rational mind, but a natural activity of the mind that is made possible by God.

Concerning the first difficulty, Augustine suggests that the immutable truths are both in God and rational souls (*mens*). In *De libero arbitrio*, Augustine provides an argument for the claim that immutable truths must be in God. He argues that truth, by its nature, is eternal, immutable and common amongst all

⁹⁰ Ronald Nash (2003), p. 93.

minds. It is the standard by which the rational soul judges material objects, right actions, and the moral quality of other souls.

We make these judgments *in accordance with* the inner rules of truth, which we perceive in common; but no one makes judgments *about* those rules. When someone says that eternal things are better than temporal things, or that seven plus three equals ten, no one says that it ought to be so. We simply recognize that it is so; we are like explorers who rejoice in what they have discovered, not like inspectors who have to put things right (*De lib. arb.* 2.12).

Since truth is the measure rather than that which is measured, truth must be superior to those things that it measures, including the rational activities of souls. Moreover, given that something superior cannot originate from something inferior, Augustine concludes that immutable truths must originate from something that is equal or superior in nature, namely God. Moreover, if they are not distinct from the mind, then they will suffer the same temporality and mutability as the soul, which is contrary to their nature.

Yet, Augustine does not believe that the mind accesses immutable truths by “seeing” them in God, but suggests that God somehow impresses these truths on the mind (*De Trin.* 12.2).⁹¹ Again, in *De libero arbitrio*, Augustine speaks of how the eternal moral law (justice), number, wisdom and happiness

⁹¹ Cf. John Rist (1994), p. 31.

are stamped on the mind (*De lib. arb.* 2.6.15; cf. *De ord.* 2.8.25, 2.8.20, 2.9.26).

Specifically, they are stamped on the memory.

Then where are these standards written down, where can even the unjust man recognize what being just is, where can he see what he ought to have what he does have himself? Where indeed are they written but in the book of that light which is called truth, from which every just law is copied, and transferred into the heart of the man who does justice, not by locomotion but by a kind of impression, rather like the seal which both passes into the wax and does not leave the signet ring? (*De Trin.* 14.21).

The memory also stores countless truths and laws of mathematics and mensuration, no single one of which was impressed upon it by bodily sense, for they have no color, sound or smell, nor have they been tasted or handled (*Conf.* 10.12.19).

The memory, according to Augustine, does not start out as an empty storehouse that is gradually filled up with sensory images, past experiences, and personal actions, but is stocked full of immutable truths from the very beginning. From this, it follows that these truths are not derived or abstracted from material objects; rather, they are in the mind prior to experience (*De civ. Dei* 8.16).

For Augustine, these truths constitute the mind's rational structure. God, making the mind in his own image, patterned the mind's rational structure after his divine order. God's divine order is reflected in the material

world as well. Augustine explains the parallel patterns of God's divine order in the mind and in material world with the following analogy.

Light and heat are both perceived consubstantially, as it were, in the same fire; they cannot be separated from each other. Yet the heat affects only the things that are nearby, while the light is radiated far and wide. In the same way, the power of understanding that inheres in wisdom warms the things that are closest to it, such as rational souls; whereas things that are further off, such as material objects, are not touched by the heat of wisdom, but they are flooded with the light of numbers (*De lib. arb.* 2.11).

The fire, in this case, is God's divine order. God's divine order "heats" or endows the mind with a rational structure that is of a higher reality than the order the material world reflects from the "light" of God's divine order (cf. *De vera relig.* 36). The mind's position between the parallel patterns of order in God and the material world gives it the ability not only to contemplate the intelligible world of God's divine order, but also to acquire knowledge of the material world.

Augustine describes the mind's perception of these truths in terms of intellectual vision. As corporeal and spiritual vision refers to the mind's perception of sensible objects, intellectual vision refers to the mind's perception of impressed truths that are stored in memory (*De Gen. ad litt.* 12.31.59). This activity involves the mind turning its attention away from

sensible images and focusing on the intellectual objects that God impressed on it. This is not an easy task. Augustine believes that these truths are latent in the mind, buried deep in the hidden depths of the memory. The mind can elicit these truths from the memory by its own volition or through skillful questioning and learning (*Conf.* 10.10.17; *De Trin.* 12.22). He considers this an activity of higher reason or *ratio superior*. The end result, for Augustine, is wisdom or *sapientia*.

The mind's knowledge of the material world is an activity of lower reason or *ratio inferior*. At one level, this activity involves the mind using truth as a criterion for judging material objects, such as judging whether an object should be sought or avoided. At another level, the mind uses it to act appropriately in the world, for example, applying the ideas of virtue in order to act courageously in a dangerous situation or act justly towards a friend. Augustine argues that, "without knowledge (*scientia*) one cannot have the virtues which make for right living and by which this woeful life is so conducted that one may finally reach the truly happy life which is eternal" (*De Trin.* 12.22). For him, the end result of these activities is practical knowledge.

From this discussion, we can see that the mind is actively involved in the acquisition of knowledge and wisdom. The second difficulty is

Augustine's insistence that God's illumination is necessary for the mind's rational activities. I believe, however, that God's illumination is necessary only insofar as it makes knowledge possible, but not sufficient for the mind to acquire knowledge. Augustine explains this in terms of visual perception. Just as sunlight is necessary for the eyes to see material objects, God's illumination is necessary for the mind's inner eyes to see intellectual objects.

The mind has, as it were, eyes of its own, analogous to the soul's senses. The certain truths of the sciences are analogous to the objects which the sun's rays make visible, such as the earth and earthly things. And it is God himself who illumines all (*Sol.* 1.12).

But the light itself is something else, the light by which the soul is enlightened in order truly to understand and observe all things either in itself or in this light. For this light is now God himself, while the soul is a creature, even though a rational and intelligent one made in his own image. So when it strives to gaze upon that light it blinks and shivers in its weakness, and quite simply lacks the power to do so. Yet that light is what enables it to understand whatever is within the range of its power (*De Gen. ad litt.* 12.31.59).

In these two passages, Augustine clearly distinguishes the mind's activities from God's illumination and acknowledges that both are necessary for knowledge. God's illumination is necessary for the mind to see truth, but the mind must also have the cognitive and rational capacities to "see" truth. Just as the rational soul is active in corporeal vision and spiritual vision, it is similarly active in intellectual vision.

Augustine's theory of divine illumination does not deprive the mind of its cognitive abilities. Knowledge does not involve God supernaturally invading the mind, like a divine agent intellect, but consists in the mind actively acquiring knowledge through its own powers.⁹² It is true that the mind is passive insofar as God impresses truths on the mind, but the mind is active in eliciting these truths from the hidden recesses of the memory and applying them to the material world. God made the mind in his own image not only by endowing the mind with a rational structure that is patterned after his divine ideas, but also by giving it the power to acquire knowledge and wisdom.

2.3 Three Stages of Perfection

Even though Augustine believes that the soul has the requisite cognitive ability or power to receive God's illumination, this ability is severely damaged by the soul's disordered relationship with its body that was inherited from Adam. The soul's cognitive attention is fragmented and divided among the body's needs, desires and habits, effectively clouding the mind's "eye" and, thereby, blocking God's illumination. In this state, the soul's intellectual and

⁹² Ronald Nash (2003), pp. 104-109.

moral character is in desperate need of repair. Without it, the soul will never have the right dispositions and habits to “see” God’s truths and become wise. Augustine’s therapeutic method for repairing the soul is partly based, just as his metaphysics and epistemology, on Neoplatonism. Augustine’s method is obviously different in substantial ways given its Christian inflection, but it appears to have the same general procedural method as Neoplatonism, beginning with purification, moving to illumination, and ending, at least fleetingly in Augustine’s case, in unity (*Conf.* 7.17.23). To fully understand Augustine’s therapeutic regime for the soul, we need to examine the Neoplatonic method that most likely influenced him, namely, the method of Plotinus, and see how he customized this method to suit the particular needs of Christianity.⁹³

2.3.1 Plotinus

Plotinus’s method is a program of ascent, one that attempts to turn the soul inwards, away from its bodily life, and upwards towards a higher intellectual (contemplative) life, and higher still, towards a unified existence in the One. The One, for Plotinus, is the transcendent source out which all things come to

⁹³ On the philosophical influence of Plotinus on Augustine see Menn (2002), pp. 73-184.

be and where the soul naturally desires to return (E IV.8,6,6). All things flow from the One through a necessary, yet free, eternal process of successive emanations whereby higher levels of reality produce lower levels. In this case, the One, without diminishing itself, begets the Intellect, which in turn, begets the Soul, and from the Soul emanates the Body (or material realm). So the soul, according to this model, is situated in an intermediate position between the lower material reality of bodies and the higher intelligible reality populated with Platonic forms, which reside (exist) in, and are eternally contemplated by, Intellect or *Nous*, which in turn, emanates from the One. Specifically, the soul itself exists in the intelligible realm, which Plotinus calls the higher soul, and merely participates in the material realm, called the lower soul (E IV.8,6,4; E IV.8,6,8). The soul, contrary to Plato's account in *Phaedo*, is not metaphysically entombed in its body, but is "projected" onto the body and is only *attentively* imprisoned to the degree that it is concerned with the body and its needs (E IV.8,6,4). In fact, Plotinus describes the soul's relationship with its body as one where the soul is not in the body, but the body is in the soul (E IV.3,27,9). The soul's participatory descent into the body comes from the soul's natural desire to live a life different from one it lives in the Intellect, where it eternally contemplates the Forms, to one that orders and governs the

material realm below it (E IV.8,6,4-5).⁹⁴ Given this, there is a natural tension within the soul between its desire for contemplative unity with the Intellect and its wish for individuality and independence through the governance of bodies.

Plotinus believes that the soul's descent is not necessarily good for the soul. The soul, in concern for its body, can become so immersed in its wants and needs that it comes to identify itself with it, forgetting its true nature and higher self. In this case, the soul's attention becomes fragmented and dispersed amongst the body's many desires, eventually losing contact with the Intellect. In this situation, the soul becomes ugly and identifies itself with this ugliness.

If someone is immersed in mire or daubed with mud, his native comeliness disappears; all one sees is the mire and mud with which he is covered. Ugliness is due to the alien matter that encrusts him. If he would be attractive once more, he has to wash himself, get clean again, make himself what he was before. Thus we would be right in saying that ugliness of soul comes from its mingling with, fusion with, collapse into the bodily and material: the soul is ugly when it is not purely itself (E I.6,1,5).

⁹⁴ See A.H. Armstrong (1980), pp. 251-252.

For Plotinus, however, it is not the body *per se* and its governance that is bad, rather it is the mind's obsessive concern for it that is evil.⁹⁵ The body, in this case, is a self-imposed prison.

Thus comes about what is called "loss of wings" or the "chaining" of the soul. Its no longer the ways of innocence in which, with the Soul, it presided over the higher realms. Life above was better by far than this. A thing fallen, chained, at first barred off from intelligence and living only in sensation, the soul is, as they say, in tomb or cavern pent. Yet its higher part remains. Let the soul, taking its lead from memory, merely "think on essential being" and its shackles are loosed and it soars (E IV.8,6,4).

At the end of this passage, Plotinus intimates that the soul, through its own powers and abilities, can repair itself by returning to the Intellect and reuniting with its higher self. For him, this requires a fundamental reorientation of the soul's attention by turning it away from the body, focusing it inward on the soul, and finally upward towards the Intellect.

Plotinus's program of the soul's recovery and ascent can be divided into three progressive stages: purification, illumination, and unification. Plotinus provides an outline of these stages in his early work *On Beauty*. Here he shows how the soul can move from recognizing beauty in material objects to higher levels of beauty, culminating in the direct contemplation of Beauty

⁹⁵ Pierre Hadot (1993), p. 31.

itself, and if lucky, uniting with the One. In order to reach Beauty itself, the soul must go through a transformative process whereby it sheds its sensual desires and gains the intellectual and moral virtues that will enable it to contemplate Beauty and reunite with the higher soul.

The first step in the purificatory stage is the soul's recognition of its own internal beauty through the contemplation of visible or material beauty. This begins by the soul's sudden pleasure when it sees a beautiful object, recognizing and finding kinship with the object's beauty (E I.6,1,2). Not only does the beautiful object trigger the soul's memory of its higher self, but it also makes it confront the ugliness of its lower, sensual self. Once the soul can acknowledge the ugliness of its lower self it can begin the purificatory process of beatifying and strengthening the soul. "When the soul begins to hate its shame and puts away evil and makes its return, it finds its peace" (E VI.9,9,9). The soul's pleasurable kinship moves it to consider the *source* of the object's beauty. The soul, at first, strips away material particularities of the beautiful object and sees that beauty cannot be reduced to material symmetry or harmony, but that the material object must participate in something higher and immaterial (E I.6,1,1-3). The soul's kinship with the object's beauty also makes the soul turn inwards in search of the cause of this kinship, which is its

own beauty. Even though the soul may see a hint of its own beauty at first glance, it, nonetheless, has to cultivate this beauty. Plotinus compares the soul's beautification (or perfection) to sculpting a statue.

“How can one see the beauty of a good soul?” Withdraw into yourself and look. If you do not as yet see beauty within you, do as does a sculptor of a statue that is to be beautified: he cuts away here, he smooths it there, he makes this line lighter, this other one purer, until he disengages beautiful lineaments in the marble. Do you this, too. Cut away all that is excessive, straighten all that is crooked, bring light to all that is overcast, labor to make all one radiance of beauty. Never cease “working at the statue” until there shines out upon you from it the divine sheen of virtue, until you see perfect “goodness firmly established in a stainless shrine (E I.6,1,9)

Sculpting or perfecting one's soul concerns the cultivation of intellectual and moral virtues. Without it, the soul will have no chance of contemplating the Intellect and reuniting with the higher self. In fact, it's a necessary condition for the soul's return. As A.H. Armstrong points out, “Plotinus, like most Greek philosophers, thought that a philosopher ought to be extremely good as well as extremely intelligent man, and did not believe that true intelligence was possible without virtue, or virtue without intelligence”.⁹⁶ So, for Plotinus, the soul must have proper moral and intellectual dispositions to contemplate

⁹⁶ Armstrong, p. 228.

the Intellect. As we will see, this attitude is preserved in Augustine and deeply informs Malebranche's philosophy.

The soul's cultivation of these dispositions or virtues is the second step in the purifying process. The first thing the soul must do is to imitate the behavior of those who are virtuous. Eventually the imitation of virtue will turn into genuine virtue.

Like anyone just awakened, the soul cannot look at bright objects. It must be persuaded to look first at beautiful habits, then the works of beauty produced not be a craftsman's skill but by the virtue of men known for their goodness, then the souls of those who achieve beautiful deeds (E I.6,1,9).

Practicing virtue helps the soul to separate itself from the concerns of the body.

In what sense does virtue purify our being, our desires, and all our other affections, our griefs, and the like? To ask this is to ask how far the soul can separate itself from the body. In separating itself it withdraws into itself, into—as it were—its own place above the passion and affection, the unavoidable pleasures of sense mere medication and assuagement lest it be disturbed (E I.2,19,5).

To begin the process of the soul's separation, it must start with the social virtues, such as prudence, temperance, justice and courage, which help the soul restrain and control its sensual desires and bodily satisfactions. If the soul can regularly practice these virtues, it can withstand the necessary hardships

of life by not letting the pains and sorrow of life get the upper hand, and by promoting friendly and nurturing relationships between other human beings (E I.2,19,5). Additionally, the soul uses these virtues to help collect the soul's fragmented attention, and to refocus it on the soul's own interior nature.

Social virtues, however, make up the lowest set of virtues for Plotinus because they still concern the soul's relationship with its body and other people. The higher, purificatory, virtues, which are the ultimate source of the social virtues, help the soul to separate itself from the body. These virtues cultivate the soul's rational powers by fostering the soul's natural desire to contemplate the Intellect, unifying the mind's attention so that it can focus exclusively on the Intellect without distraction from the body, and more importantly, instilling intellectual habits, such as mathematical study and philosophical discourse.⁹⁷ By practicing the purificatory virtues, the social virtues are sublimated and, therefore, exercised at a higher level. Temperance, for instance, is no longer considered the control or restraint of bodily desires, but the soul's complete isolation from the body and complete focus on the Intellect (E I.2,19,7). Courage is no longer understood as bravery in the face of death, but as steadfast concentration in contemplating the Intellect. As the

⁹⁷ Hadot, pp. 69-73; Armstrong, pp. 229-230.

social virtues are directed towards the body and the material world, the higher virtues are directed inwards, towards the soul's interior, and upwards, towards the Intellect.

He who possesses the higher virtues...arrives a higher principles and measures, and will act in accordance with these. For example, he does not postulate temperance as moderation; rather he detaches himself completely, insofar as this is possible. He does not live the life of a man, even a good man, as the latter is defined by civic virtue. He leaves this kind of life being, and chooses another: the life of the gods (E I.2,7, 22-28).

At this higher level, the soul is no longer modeling itself on the good man and his actions in this world, but on the source that makes these actions virtuous, the virtues as Forms (E I.2,19,7).

At this step in the purificatory stage, the soul, by "sculpting" and perfecting itself, comes to recognize a higher, and more refined, beauty in its own nature than it perceived in the material realm. This beauty not only manifests itself in the exercise of the social and purificatory virtues, but also in the higher cognitive activities of the mind. By constantly exercising its intellectual powers, either through its lower power of discursive reasoning, or its higher power of contemplation, the soul "polishes" the best part of itself. The more it does this, the more beautiful it becomes and the closer it comes to

merging with the Intellect. By exercising the intellect, it becomes *like* the Intellect, which eternally contemplates the Forms.

Purified, the soul is wholly Idea and reason. It becomes wholly free of the body, intellectual, entirely of that intelligible realm whence comes beauty and all things beautiful. The more intellectual it is, the more beautiful it is. Intellection, and all that comes from intellection, is for the soul a beauty that is its own and not another's because then it is that the soul is truly soul (E I.6,1,6).

At this juncture, the soul moves from the purificatory stage to the illuminative stage, whereby, the soul comes to understand its own divine nature (E VI.9,9,9). It no longer identifies itself with the body, but with its higher, rational self. The soul also discovers that the source of its own beauty is Beauty itself, that simple, eternal, and immutable Form that exists in the Intellect, and that pours forth beauty to the lower realms (E I.6,1,6).

Up to this point, the soul, as an autonomous being, has been responsible for its own perfection. It has done everything it can do intellectually and morally to enable it to be *like* the Intellect and merge itself with the One.

The One is absent from nothing and from everything. It is present only to those who are prepared for it and are able to receive it, to enter into harmony with it, to grasp and to touch it by virtue of their likeness to it, by virtue of that inner power similar to and stemming from The One when it is in that state in which it was when it originated from The One (E VI.9,9,4).

The soul, however, has to wait patiently, like a lover waiting for his beloved, for its final passage to the One, the source and principle of all things, including Beauty itself (I.6,1,9).⁹⁸ The One, as the source and cause of the soul's desire to return, must *raise* the soul up to itself, and even then, the soul may only catch a fleeting glimpse of the One. This fleeting glimpse is not one of perceiver and perceived, but the merging of the two, or in the words of Plotinus, "he [the soul] did not "see" it but rather was "oned" with it" (E VI.9,9,10). Or again,

The man who obtains the vision becomes, as it were, another being. He ceases to be himself, retains nothing of himself. Absorbed in the beyond he is one with it, like a center coincident with another center. While the centers coincide, they are one (E VI.9,9,10).

For Plotinus, the vision described here cannot be rationally comprehended, but only experienced.⁹⁹ As Pierre Hadot eloquently states, "In mystical ecstasy, the soul leaves behind all forms, including her own, and becomes this formless reality, this pure presence which is the center of the soul, as it is of everything else".¹⁰⁰ But, the soul's individuality is not utterly extinguished in the One. It still retains its "center" and is ineffably "coincident" with another

⁹⁸ See Armstrong, p. 261.

⁹⁹ Plotinus achieved unity four times in his life. See Porphyry (1991), pp. cxxi-cxxii (23.15-16).

¹⁰⁰ Hadot, p. 58.

center, that is, the One.¹⁰¹ After this brief mystical encounter with the One, the soul, unable to maintain its identity with the higher self, loses its focus and falls back down to its lower self. The soul, still involved in the body's governance, cannot completely isolate itself from the body for very long (E VI.9,9,10). Only through prolonged and difficult preparation, can the soul hope to achieve complete identity with its higher self, and if lucky, experience again the mystical union with the One.

2.3.2 Augustine

Augustine, in his therapeutic regime for the soul's repair and perfection, follows the basic Plotinian program of turning the soul inwards, away from the body and its desires, and upwards towards God's eternal truths by moving through the stages of purification, illumination and unity. Although Augustine rejects some of Plotinus's metaphysical beliefs such as the soul's divinity, its complete autonomy, and that it can potentially merge, in unity, with the One (or as he understands it, God), his program provides similar moral and intellectual strategies and tools to prepare the soul to receive God's illumination as best it can. While following Plotinus's basic method, however,

¹⁰¹ Hadot, p. 34.

Augustine modifies it by incorporating practices that are particular to Christianity. As I mentioned earlier, the two pillars of Augustine's method of perfection are Christianity, specifically faith and authority, and the virtues, that is, the ancient cardinal virtues that fortify the soul's moral character so that it can turn away from the sins of bodily desires and maintain its focus on God, and the intellectual virtues, which strengthen the soul's cognitive powers by providing a rational method by which it can comprehend and act in accordance with God's eternal truths. Each pillar is designed to cultivate what Augustine believes to be the two faculties that pertain to the soul's perfection: the will and intellect. As we will see, both faculties must work in conjunction in order for the soul to perfect itself.

Augustine's program of perfection remains relatively the same throughout his works, although it is expressed in very different ways according to the length of the discussion and the context in which it presented (cf. *Sol.* 1.6.12ff; *De quant. anim.* 33.70-76; *Conf.* 7.17.23, 9.10.24; *De Musica* 6.13-53; *De civ. Dei* 2.7.9-11; *De Trin.* 14.1-5). The most detailed presentations of his method are in chapter 33 of *De quantitate animae* (387/388 CE), sections 26.8ff in *De vera religione* (389/391 CE), and Book II of *De libero arbitrio* (388-395 CE).

Taken together, with some supporting materials from other texts, they should provide us with a comprehensive account of his program.

In *De vera religione*, Augustine suggests that the soul potentially lives two lives, which he calls the “outer” (exterior, earthly, old) and “inner” (interior, heavenly, new) man. Each life corresponds to the soul’s various powers, with the lower, bodily powers, referring to the outer man, and the higher, cognitive powers pertaining to the inner man. Which life the soul leads at any given time depends upon the level of attention and care it gives to each set of powers (*De vera relig.* 26.48-49). Augustine recognizes, however, that the soul naturally begins its life with the body, in infancy, using its nutritive and organizational powers to maintain, promote, and protect its body. As the soul’s relationship with the body develops, the soul exercises the higher sensitive powers as it navigates its environment, shunning that which harms the body and pursuing those things that help it. When the soul moves from adolescence to adulthood, the soul uses the higher powers of language, memory, and practical reason (*ratio inferior*) to build and maintain the material and institutional structures of society. It uses the practical arts to cultivate land and construct cities; the theoretical arts are used to develop civil and ecclesiastical administrations and to make progress in the fields of

mathematics, astronomy, rhetoric and history, and, finally, the classical arts to produce painting, sculpture, and poetry. As we can see, the soul, at this stage, is exercising distinctively human powers, although they are still directed to the body and the external world. Hence, the soul, from infancy to adulthood, is predisposed to focus its attention on its outer, bodily life, which is concerned with the pleasures, pains, desires of the body, and also with praise and glory that it can receive from society. The soul's predisposition towards its body is also exacerbated by the Fall, putting the soul in a dangerously dependent relationship with its body. As a result, only society, through its laws and social duties, regulates the soul's concupiscent desires and shape its moral character.¹⁰² This means that the soul is governed externally, according the laws and customs of society, not internally by its own rational powers, through which it has access to God's eternal laws. Most souls live such an outer life throughout their terrestrial existence.

Augustine admits that some souls that are fortunate enough to live a well-ordered outer life can achieve a modicum of happiness, but he believes that true happiness is found in the inner life, where the soul turns its attention inwards, away from the body, to its own higher rational powers, and then

¹⁰² In *De vera religione*, Augustine calls this the "outer man" and it corresponds to the first three stages in *De quantitate animae*.

upwards to God and his illumination. Though the soul is necessarily born into an outer life, it can, nonetheless, take the necessary steps to be reborn into an inner life.

Some live thus [the outer life] from the beginning to the end of their days. But some begin in that way, as they necessarily must, but they are reborn inwardly, and with their spiritual strength and increase of wisdom they overcome "the old man" and put him to death, and bring him into subjection to the celestial laws...this is called "the new man", "the inward and heavenly man," whose spiritual ages are marked, not according to years, but according to his spiritual advance (*De vera relig.* 26.49).

Augustine, agreeing with Plotinus, believes that the path to wisdom, through the inward life, must first be paved with the soul's purification and moral edification, and only after this can the soul advance towards wisdom. He outright rejects the counter claim that reverses the order, making truth necessary for purification and virtue.

To wish to see the truth in order that you may purge your soul is a perverse and preposterous idea, because it is precisely in order that you may see, that it has to be purged (*De util. cred.* 16.34).

Augustine believes that in order for the mind to "see" the truth, the mind's eye must be healthy and correctly used. In his *Soliloquia*, where he has a dialogue between himself and Reason, Augustine discusses what it takes to have a healthy mind's eye and what the soul needs to use it properly.

I, Reason, am in minds as the power of looking is in the eyes. Having eyes is not the same thing as looking, and looking is the same as seeing. The soul therefore needs three things: eyes which it can use aright, looking and seeing. The eye of the mind is healthy when it is pure from every taint of the body, that is, when it is remote and purged from desire of mortal things. And this, faith alone can give in the first place (*Sol.* 5.12).

Reason is the power of the soul to look, but it does not follow that every one who looks, sees. Right and perfect looking which leads to vision is called virtue. For virtue is right and perfect reason (*Sol.* 5.13).

Augustine, however, recognizes an obvious problem with his method.

If the soul must first purify itself of its concupiscent desires and acquire virtue *before* it can see the truth and become wise, rather than the other way around, it must have some way of knowing how to proceed that is not based on *first* perceiving the truth. But how can an impure soul become pure and virtuous if it cannot perceive the truth about how to be virtuous? How does the soul know it is on the right path? Augustine's solution is based on his famous principle *credo ut intelligam*, which is based on the Christian virtues of faith and authority.

For Augustine, faith is not merely blind adherence to doctrine, but is *belief* based on reason and evidence. Belief, in this case, is the intermediate epistemological state between opinion and knowledge, the former being mere presumption (the acceptance of a claim without evidence) and the latter being

the direct knowledge of a claim, where the acceptance of a claim is based on reliable or authoritative sources. Beliefs make up the majority of our judgments, and they provide a legitimate source of justification for our actions.

...how innumerable were the things I believed and held to be true, though I had neither seen them nor been present when they happened. How many truths were of this kind, such as events of world history, or facts about places and cities I had never seen; how many were the statements I believed on the testimony of friends, or physicians, or various other people; and indeed, unless we did believe them we should be unable to do anything in this life (*Conf.* 6.5.7).

Understanding the nature of belief was an important turning point in Augustine's own struggle for wisdom. For example, before encountering Ambrose's authoritative exegesis of scripture, Augustine could not accept the truth of the scriptures given their apparent inconsistencies. In fact, he thought he needed certain knowledge before he could accept them.

I longed to become as certain of those things I could not see as I was that seven and three make ten. I was not so demented as to think that even this simple truth was beyond comprehension; but I wanted to have the same grasp of other things, both material entities not immediately present to my senses and spiritual realities of which I did not know how to think in any but a materialistic way. The possibility of healing, was ironically, within my reach if only I had been willing to *believe, because then I could with a more purified mind have focused my gaze on your truth...* (*Conf.* 6.4.6) [my italics].

It was only after accepting Ambrose's authority concerning the scriptures that Augustine was able to intellectually engage them and attempt to understand them. His belief was not based on blind faith, but on his reasoned assessment of Ambrose's exegetical abilities. Without Ambrose's framework, Augustine would have struggled to find the right interpretative strategy. Belief, in this case, was the necessary link between Augustine's ignorance and refusal, and understanding. By providing guideposts and directions for the soul, beliefs become, for Augustine, the means by which the soul can move towards understanding, and eventually, wisdom.

Augustine makes clear in the passage above and the one below that belief is necessary for the soul's moral and intellectual purification.

For my part I judge that believing before reasoning, if you are not able to follow reasoning, and cultivating the mind by faith in order to be ready for the seeds of truth, is not only wholesome, but is indeed the only way by which health can return to sick minds (*De util. cred.* 14.31).

Since the soul's path to wisdom is the contemplation and application of God's eternal truths, the first thing the soul must believe is that there is a God, and that he is the source of eternal truths (*De lib. arb.* 2.2). Secondly, the soul must believe that in order to contemplate the eternal truths it must purify itself through moral edification. The soul, accordingly, must have the Christian

virtues of faith to believe that the mind must be healed in order to see God, hope that the mind can be purged, and love to desire God and his illumination (*Sol.* 30-31). The soul's purification also includes accepting the teachings of Christ and the authority of Catholic Church through the overwhelming evidence provided by the history of the former's life and the spread of latter's influence.

Christ, therefore, bringing a medicine to heal corrupt morals, by his miracles gained authority, by his authority deserved faith, by faith drew together a multitude, thereby secured permanence of the tradition, which in time corroborate religion (*De util. cred.* 14.32)

With these basic beliefs in hand the soul can now actively foster the cardinal virtues, particularly temperance and fortitude, by following the example of those who possess them. By practicing temperance and fortitude, the soul can begin to restrain and control the desires, drives and passions of its body, and then through prudence understands its place in the hierarchy of being, with material objects below and God above, which also helps it to move inwards and upwards to God. Next the soul can begin to cultivate the virtue of justice by attempting to order its life according to God's order and treating things according to their metaphysical and moral worth. At this stage, the soul does not *understand* these virtues, but believes that following the examples of

morally upright persons in the past and present can lead it in the right direction. Only after direct cognitive contact with, and understanding of, the eternal moral truths can it be said that the soul possesses virtue. This, as we will see, ultimately requires the practice of the intellectual virtues.¹⁰³

Moral virtue is not only preventative insofar as it controls and blocks the alluring power of concupiscent desires, but it also strengthens the soul's will. The will, in relation to the soul's perfection, is the soul's inner force that is responsible for directing the mind's eye and maintaining its focus or attention on the objects under its purview. Augustine calls the driving force of the will love or the desire for the good. Now what the soul loves is dependent on what the soul perceives as good. So the attentive will of the outward man is directed towards material, or lower goods, as the inward man's is focused on intelligible or higher goods. Whether the soul's love is good or bad is determined by *how* it loves the objects of its desire. So neither the soul's desires nor the objects themselves are essentially good or bad, it is only the *relations* between the desires and the objects that are considered good or bad (*De lib. arb.* 1.15). For instance, a soul could use God's eternal truths for its own

¹⁰³ This is the fourth stage in *De quantitate animae*.

selfish advantage or love material objects rightly according to their metaphysical and moral worth.

The challenge for the unpurified soul is to unify and channel the will's attentive love towards the inner, higher goods of the soul, and even higher still to the eternal truths. This is not so easy. The will is easily divided. Augustine, during the struggle of his conversion, describes his own inner difficulties to unify his will and commit himself to the Christian life.

My body was more ready to obey the slightest whim of my soul in the matter of moving my limbs, than the soul was to obey its own command in carrying out this major volition [conversion], which was to be accomplished within the will alone...Evidently, then, it [the will] does not want this thing with the whole of itself, and therefore the command does not proceed from an undivided mind. Inasmuch as it issues the command, it does will it, but inasmuch as the command is not carried out, it does not will it...hence it cannot be identical with that thing which it is commanding to come into existence, for if it were whole and entire it would not command itself to be, since it would be already. This partial willing and partial non-willing is thus not so bizarre, but a sickness of the mind, which cannot arise with its whole self on the wings of truth because it is heavily burdened by habit. There are two wills, then, and neither is the whole: what one has the other lacks (*Conf.* 8.8.20-8.9.21).

Here, Augustine identifies the common problem faced by all souls, that is, the disconnection between *wanting* to do something and *willing* to do it, what the Greeks call *akrasia*. The soul may want to do the right thing, but cannot bring itself to do it. The moral virtues are needed to rectify this internal conflict

through reconnecting, unifying, and directing the will towards the higher goods. So, for the soul to “arise with its whole self on the wings of truth” it must practice, and eventually rationally acquire, the moral virtues. In the end, a perfectly virtuous soul is one that transforms the will’s brute love into the highest virtue: charity, a virtue that, in the words of Etienne Gilson, “consummates all virtues” by rightly loving the highest good: God.¹⁰⁴

With its concupiscence under control and its will strengthened and unified the soul can now move to next stage of perfection, that of illumination. Since the mind’s eye is healthy and strong at the end of the purification stage, the soul can now begin its transition from belief to understanding by honing its intellectual capacities through rational means. This will help the soul use its cognitive eye with precision, direct it towards God’s eternal truths, and accurately understand them.

For, it is one thing to have the eye of the soul so clear that it does not look about idly or incautiously and see what is unseemly, and another thing to protect and strengthen the health of the eye; and it is another thing, again, to direct a calm and steady gaze upon that which is to be seen. The soul must be pure to do this, if not, then the soul will misinterpret what it sees (*De quant. anim.* 33.75).

¹⁰⁴ Gilson (1960), p. 141.

Given his intellectual eudaemonism, Augustine believes that the royal road up through the inward life and to wisdom is paved with rational arguments and traversed by reason. "Indeed, it is not by faith alone, but by trustworthy reason, that the soul leads itself little by little to the most virtuous habits and the perfect life" (*De ord.* 19.49). With this process the inward or new man "is no longer kept in the bosom of human authority, but step by step by the use of reason he strives to reach the highest unchangeable law" (*De vera relig.* 26.49). As we learned in section 2.1.2 above, these "unchangeable laws" or immutable truths are stamped, as it were, on the soul and constitute its rational structure. Consequently, the soul, whether purified or not, already uses these immutable truths as standards for making judgments about such things as the number and beauty of material objects, the morality and justice of human actions, and the very rationality of these judgments (*De lib. arb.* 2.10; *De Trin.* 14.21). At the illumination stage, the goal of the inward man is to have unfiltered, direct access to this rational structure, understand its nature, and the role it plays in the soul's quest for wisdom.

The soul's rational movement inwards begins by discovering its own nature and, consequently, recognizing its place in the hierarchy of being. By doing this, the soul will see that the intelligible realm, and its participation in

it, is of higher value in comparison with its activities in the temporal, material realm. "The yearning to understand what things are true and best, is the soul's highest vision. Beyond this it has nothing more perfect, more noble, and more true" (*De quant. anim.* 33.74). Now the first step is for the soul to see that there are three basic created perfections: being, life, and reason. All created things have being, but only a small subset of beings have life (i.e. souls), such as plants and animals, and only a very small subset of living things, namely rational souls, have reason. Obviously, the creature that possesses all three is clearly superior to those that only possess one or two of these perfections (*De lib. arb.* 2.3; *De vera relig.* 29.52). In fact, one soul is greater than all material things, including the stars, sun and moon (*De lib. arb.* 35.77). Next, the soul, using the self-evident principle that that which judges is superior to that which is judged, examines its own powers and comes to understand that reason, an immaterial faculty, is its highest power. Accordingly, reason is not only superior to material objects, but also its own sensitive powers (*De lib. arb.* 2.4).

So in the human mind the most excellent part is not that which perceives sensible objects but that which judges of sensible objects. Many animals see more sharply and have a keener sense of corporeal objects than men have. But to judge of bodies belongs not to life that is merely sentient, but to life that has also the power of reasoning...it is

easy to see that which judges is superior to that which is judged. For living reason judges not only of sensible things but also of the senses themselves. It knows why the oar dipped in water must appear crooked though it is really straight, and why the eyes must see it in that way. Ocular vision can only tell us that it is so but cannot judge. Wherefore it is manifest that as the life of sense excels the body, the life of reason excels both (*De lib. arb.* 19.53; cf. *Conf.* 7.17.3).

The soul, through a detailed examination, sees that an act of visual perception is a complex activity that involves, at every level, some form of judgment, or at least something analogous to it. The senses judge, so to speak, whether objects are beneficial or harmful by communicating pleasant or unpleasant feelings to the soul. The inner sense, which can be considered the “control center” that receives information from the five senses and combines them in such a way as to make single object, judges whether or not the senses are properly performing their operations (*De lib. arb.* 2.5). Reason, as Augustine mentions in the passage above, knows why an object must appear as it does. So as the senses judge that something *is* so, reason judges that it *ought* to be so. Reason, accordingly, judges the inner sense and its objects, making reason the highest power of the soul.

The third, and final step is for the soul to examine reason and its operations. First, it comes to understand that even though its rational power is mutable, the standard by which it judges is immutable. Such an immutable

standard cannot come from a mutable source, but from an immutable one; one that is superior to material objects and the soul, that is, God. Next, it discovers that this standard judges reason itself and, moreover, *constitutes* the soul's rational structure. It follows that truth is the measure rather than that which is measured, so it must be superior to those things that it measures, in this case, the soul's rational activities. The soul realizes that it had, as an outward man, intuitively judged things according to these truths and experienced regret and remorse when it violated them (*De Trin.* 14.21). The soul, now purified, can contemplate and *understand* these truths without distraction. It comes to realize the superior value of truth and virtue over temporal knowledge and idle pleasures, and sees that the universe is but a temporal manifestation of these truths. As a result, the soul, through reason's participation in God's eternal truth, can discover the mathematical and moral structure of the universe. Moreover, if it orders its life according to these truths, it will be in harmony with God's eternal order.

At this point, the soul moves to the highest stage: unity.¹⁰⁵ Augustine describes this stage as "not really a step, but a dwelling place to which the previous steps have brought us" (*De quant. anim.* 33.76). The soul, at this stage,

¹⁰⁵ In DQA, this is the seventh stage of the soul.

first recognizes that truth is incomparably more valuable than material things (*De quant. anim.* 34.77). Truth is common to all rational souls and is inexhaustible. One can keep going back to the well of truth and always find it overflowing. Furthermore, truth is intransient and cannot be taken away like temporal objects and the pleasures derived from them. A wise soul can, therefore, feel secure with this most valuable possession, unlike outward looking souls who are in perpetual fear of losing their material possessions. With such security, the wise soul can achieve true happiness (*De beata vita* 4.33; T 13.8).

Breaking with Plotinus, Augustine does not believe that the soul is metaphysically identified with the Intellect, and can momentarily merge with the One. Rather, he believes that soul becomes unified with God only insofar as it can *imitate* God as best it can, by ordering its life according to God's order. If it can do this, it will achieve wisdom.

Let it [i.e. the soul] then remember its God to whose image it was made, and understand and love him. To put it in a word, let it worship the uncreated God, by whom it was created with a capacity for him and able to share in him. In this way it will be wise not with its own light but by sharing in that supreme light, and it will reign in happiness where it reigns eternal. For this is called man's wisdom in such a way that it is also God's (*De Trin.* 14.4.15).

To conduct its life according to God's Order, the soul must not only act in accordance with God's Order, but also *understand* why it must act in this way. Since the wise soul understands its place in the hierarchy of being in comparison with other beings, it can treat them appropriately according to their metaphysical worth. It will no longer give more value to material objects than to other living things, and in turn, will value truth and God over all things. Accordingly, the wise soul loves things as they ought to be loved, using them appropriately and understanding why it must do so. Since it values truth above all, the wise soul will not easily submit to concupiscent desires and temporal pleasures. By doing this, the soul acts harmoniously with God's creation, fulfilling its designed role within it. This is perfect virtue. The wise soul will also fulfill the promise of Christian faith and "realize how full of truth are the things we are commanded to believe, how excellently and healthfully we were nourished by Mother Church" (*De quant. anim.* 13.34). As a result, the wise soul will have repaired some of the damage caused by Adam's sin.

3. Malebranche and the Mind's Perfection

3.1 Introduction

In chapter one, I argued that Malebranche, like other Oratorians, is fundamentally an Augustinian, specifically in terms of Augustine's theory of knowledge and the soul's perfection. This brand of Augustinianism is at the core of Malebranche's philosophical *persona*, that is, the belief that philosophers must cultivate their intellectual and moral character in order to acquire philosophical knowledge in both the intellectual and moral realms, and in turn, act according to it. Given this, I argued that the mind's perfection is at the heart of his philosophical system and that the other parts of his system, particularly his vision in God and occasionalism, must be understood in terms of it, rather than the other way around. In chapter two, we studied Augustine's philosophy in relation to his own theory of perfection where we discovered an Augustinian soul that is cognitively and volitionally active, whose goal is to imitate God as best it can by moving up the stages of perfection: purification, illumination, and unity. With this study in hand, we can now use it as a philosophical guide to our discussion of Malebranche's own theory of perfection, which, though different in some important ways, is

very similar in its general structure in terms of its goal and the process for achieving it.

The methodology of the next three chapters diverges from the previous two. As chapters one and two took the shape of a historical and philosophical narrative, the next three chapters will be more philosophically argumentative. The main goal of this chapter is to provide a detailed and philosophically plausible account of Malebranche's theory of perfection. In order for it to be plausible, however, it must satisfy three conditions. The first condition is that the Malebranchean mind must be cognitively and volitionally active. Without these two activities, his theory would be empty because any such theory necessarily implies *self*-perfection. This, in turn, entails a second condition that the mind is responsible, and thus metaphysically free, in some way for its own perfection. The third, and most challenging, condition is that first two conditions must be compatible with his vision in God and occasionalism. As I mentioned in the introduction, it has been generally accepted amongst commentators that Malebranche cannot satisfy these conditions.¹⁰⁶ I believe, however, that he can. In this chapter I show how, through his theory of perfection, Malebranche satisfies the first condition, and part of the third, by

¹⁰⁶ Susan Peppers-Bates (2009) is the exception.

explicitly attributing cognitive and volitional resources to the mind, and arguing that his divine illumination theory does not exclude this possibility. In chapters four and five, I attempt to satisfy the second condition, and the second part of the third, by arguing for a particular interpretation of his occasionalism that makes metaphysical room for the mind's perfection. So for the next three chapters, I argue for, and defend, a particular interpretation of Malebranche's system that successfully integrates his theory of perfection with his divine illumination and occasionalism.

3.2 Malebranche's Theory of Perfection

Surprisingly, relatively little has been written about Malebranche's theory of perfection in Anglo-American scholarship compared to other aspects of his system.¹⁰⁷ One reason could be that commentators just don't see it. As I argued in the introduction, this may not be a problem of neglect, but simply one of perspective. Given their predilection for examining Malebranche's system in terms of its Cartesianism, commentators can only see his system, and its problems, from this perspective. In order to see his theory of perfection, they must undergo something akin to a Gestalt shift, changing their focus from

¹⁰⁷ The only exception is Craig Walton's book *De La Recherche Du Bien: A Study of Malebranche's Science of Ethics* (1972).

particular aspects of Malebranche's Cartesianism to his Augustinianism. By doing this, they will see that it is in plain sight. In fact, Malebranche devotes an entire work to the mind's perfection, namely his *Treatise on Ethics*. With this work, coupled with support from his other works, we can develop a comprehensive interpretation of his theory. We will see that the Malebranchean mind follows the same basic stages of perfection as the Plotinian and Augustinian soul, that is, the stages of purification, illumination and unity.¹⁰⁸

In the *avertissement* to the 1707 edition to the *Treatise*, Malebranche states that the subject matter of his treatise concerns the mind's acquisition and preservation of virtue, specifically the virtue on which all the other virtues rest. This virtue, he argues, "consists precisely in the habitual and dominant love of immutable Order" (OCM XI 4). From this love, Malebranche believes, comes happiness. As we saw in chapter one, Malebranche, following Augustine, believes that both the possession and exercise of this virtue are necessary for the mind's perfection. In fact, he divides this work along these lines. In the first part, titled "Virtue", he attempts to prove that following

¹⁰⁸ I purposefully change the language from "soul" to the "mind" here. As Plotinus and Augustine believe that the human soul is responsible for its cognitive and volitional capacities as well as the life functions of the body, Malebranche, as a Cartesian, limits the responsibilities of soul to cognitive and volitional capacities, explaining bodily functions in purely mechanistic terms.

God's immutable order *is* the principal virtue, and then explains how the mind can acquire and preserve it, with the ultimate goal of perfecting itself. The mind can do this, he argues, by first coming to understand its dual relationship with God and its body, and how the body's concupiscent desires negatively affect the mind. With this knowledge, the mind can then start to learn how to control these desires and train itself to perceive God's Order. The mind can do this, in conjunction with God's grace, through the effective use of its own *powers*, or what he calls "*la force and la liberté de l'esprit*" (OCM XI 4). These two powers give the mind the ability to focus and maintain its attention on God's Order. They also help the mind develop the right disposition so that it can receive two aspects of God's grace: enlightenment (*la lumière*) and feeling (*la grâce de sentiment*) (OCM V 100, PR 153). As the former illuminates (or reveals) God's Order to the mind, the latter offsets the influence of concupiscent desires that naturally distract the mind from this order. In part two, titled "Duties", he shows how the mind can act according to Order by carrying out its proper duties to God, family, society, sovereigns, and itself (as mind-body composite). What is telling about part two is that Malebranche saves the last chapter for his discussion of the duty to oneself, thereby giving

it a preferred place in the treatise. In fact, he claims that all the other duties can be reduced to this one.

The duties everyone owes to himself, as well as those we owe to our neighbor, may be reduced in general to working for our happiness and perfection: for our perfection, which consists principally in a perfect conformity of our will with Order; for our happiness, which consists only in the enjoyment of pleasures, I mean pleasures solid and capable of satisfying a mind made to possess the sovereign good (OCM XI 269, CW 220).

He ends this chapter, thus the treatise, with a summary of what the mind can do to perfect itself. From this brief *avertissement*, we can see that this work addresses the two conditions that Augustine deems necessary for the mind's perfection, that is, the moral and intellectual cultivation of the mind so that it can access God's order, and the mind's ability to apply this order in the conduct of its terrestrial life. More importantly, by devoting a separate treatise to his theory of perfection, Malebranche is clearly indicating that it is a very important part of his philosophy. In fact, one could argue, without hyperbole, that it is *the* most important. He does this for no other part of his philosophy.

The outline Malebranche presents in the *avertissement* is a good guide for our own discussion, and we will be following it closely throughout the chapter. As we saw in chapter one, Malebranche believes that the mind is united to both God and its body. As the mind's union with the body

“infinitely debases man and is today the main cause of all his errors and miseries”, its union with God is the source of “its life, its light, and its entire felicity” (*OCM I 9, LO xxxiii*). As the mind’s union with the body entices and distracts the mind away from God with its own needs and desires, its union with God gives it access to Order and the means to act according to it.¹⁰⁹ Given this dual union, however, the mind’s attention is divided, as it were, between God and its body.

The mind has two capacities, the understanding and will, and they participate in both realms. The mind’s understanding is a passive capacity that perceives God’s order and, through its body, the material objects that populate the world. The understanding perceives things in three ways. One way is through pure understanding, whereby it perceives intellectual objects, which do not rely on corporeal images, such as God’s eternal truths. A second way is through sensations, by which it can perceive, via the sense organs, sensible objects and feel such things as tickles and pains. The third way is through the

¹⁰⁹ In fact, for Malebranche, through its union with God the mind participates in, and is a reflection of, the divine Trinity. It is through its union with the Father that it participates in, and is made subject to, God’s power, through its union with the Son (or Wisdom), that it has access to the eternal truths that structure the physical and moral realms, and through its union with the Holy Spirit that it can will and love Order. Or as Malebranche succinctly puts it, “man is *subject* to His power, *united* to His wisdom, and perfectly *likened* to him in all movements of the heart” (*OCM XI 157, CW 145*). Even though the mind is made in the image of God, it, nonetheless, has to fulfill the promise of it by properly exercising what God has given it.

imagination by which the mind perceives corporeal images that it represents to itself (OCM I 65-68, LO 16-17). The first way is made possible by the mind's union with God, as the last two are possible by its union with the body.

The will, for Malebranche, is the natural and invincible (or necessary) movement of the mind towards the good in general, that is, towards God. The will, however, is not an innate power of the mind, but is God's continuous movement of the mind towards himself. This movement is none other than God's *love* for himself. Just as the mind's essential union with God's Order makes the mind capable of rational thought, its union with God's self-love makes the mind capable of loving particular goods, since God contains in himself all goods, thereby making him the measure of all goods (OCM V 117-118, PR 169-170; OCM I 47, LO 5; OCM II 314, LO 449). Unlike the mind's invincible movement towards the good in general, the mind's movement towards particular goods is not invincible, because God wants the mind only to love him, not the particular goods the mind encounters in the world. So, even though the mind has a natural tendency towards, and desire for, particular goods, it is never satisfied by them. The mind, in this case, does *not* have freedom of indifference in terms of willing or not willing the good in general, but it does have the ability to stop its search for particular goods and

move beyond them. It is this non-invincible movement towards particular goods that Malebranche calls the “liberty” or free will of the soul (OCM V 118-119, PR 170-172). This dual union between God and the body divides the mind insofar as God continuously pushes the mind towards the good in general, and the body, through the sense organs or through the mind’s own imagination, drives it towards particular goods.

Given this dual union, the mind is receptive to God’s immutable Order and love along as well as the desires, pleasures, and passion of the body. Given the mind’s finite and therefore limited capacity for thought, it must properly manage the objects it attends to. Its proper management is determined by God’s purposes for establishing the dual union, which is for the mind to perfect itself through the free love of God and his Order, and for it to control and preserve its body. God designed the mind’s dual union so that it could achieve these goals without being overwhelmed. Malebranche discusses God’s design and its proper management by examining Adam before the Fall. For him, prelapsarian Adam represents the ideal model of perfection for all minds. This examination will give us a rough sense of how he understands the mind’s perfection.

3.2.1 Adam's Prelapsarian Perfection

The dual union of prelapsarian Adam was in perfect order. His union with God enabled him to devote his full attention and love to God, and act according to his Order. With respect to mind-body union, Adam had perfect control over his body and could essentially stop the bodily movements of his sense organs and their corresponding sense impressions (*OCM I 75, LO 22*). Adam could “eat without pleasure, look without seeing, sleep without dreaming those useless phantoms which unsettle the mind and disturb our rest” (*OCM XII 103, JS 65*). To make sure that Adam could devote his full attention to God, God designed the mind-body union in such a way that the mind could quickly and easily detect what was good and bad for its body, without having to have exact knowledge of the objects.

The goods of the body do not deserve the attention of a mind, which God made only for Him. The mind, then, must recognize this sort of good without examination, and by the quick and indubitable proof of sensation...I grant, then, that pleasure and pain are the natural and indubitable characteristics of good and evil [of the body] (*OCM I 73, LO 21*).

By correlating objects that are good for the body to pleasures, and those that are bad for the body to pains, God provided a heuristic or short-cut, as it were, for the mind to detect those objects that could preserve or harm the body. “He

[God] leads us to these things [e.g. bodies] by instinct, i.e., by pleasant or unpleasant sensations” (OCM I 73, LO 21). In his perfect state, Adam used, as God intended, the knowledge gained through mind-body union only for the preservation of his body. This afforded him the opportunity to devote his full attention to God and act according to God’s Order.

More importantly, God designed Adam’s union with himself in such a way that Adam could love him by a *free choice*, not by a prevenient pleasure given to him by God. To do the latter would necessarily limit Adam’s freedom and merit.

Adam cannot be said to have been brought to love of God and to his duty by a prevenient pleasure, because his knowledge of God, like that of his good, and the joy he unceasingly felt as a necessary result of the perception of his happiness in being united to God could have sufficed to attract him to his duty and to make him act more meritoriously than if he had been determined, as it were, by some prevenient pleasure. Thus he was fully free (OCM I 73-74, LO 21).

Adam’s was able to make his free choice by *attending* to God’s Order. By devoting his full attention to God, Adam, through a pure perception of the understanding, clearly perceived that God was the true cause of his happiness. This clear perception, unlike the pleasurable and painful sensations occasionally caused by bodies, did not determine Adam to love God, but merely made him *aware* of God’s wisdom and goodness, and provided him

with reasons to love God. So the act of loving God and his Order came from Adam alone. As a necessary consequence of loving God, Adam received intellectual joy (*OCM III 45-46, LO 563*). So Adam's joy is the consequence of his love, not the cause of it; thus, Adam was not sustained in his love of God by prevenient pleasures, but by a free choice and the experience of joy that followed. Malebranche believes that this is a necessary condition for the mind's perfection (*OCM XI 47, CW 65*).

As we can see, the mind can either love by reason (illumination) or by instinct (pleasure). The difference between the two is that the former is free and the latter is not.

For if we begin to love an object, we do so either because we know through reason that it is good or because we experience through sensation that it is pleasant. Now there is quite a difference between illumination and pleasure. Illumination enlightens our mind and makes us aware of the good without actually or efficaciously leading us to love it. Pleasure, on the contrary, both moves us and efficaciously determines us to love the object seeming to cause it. Illumination does not lead us by itself; it merely permits us to lead ourselves, freely and by ourselves, to the good it presents to us when we already love it...Pleasure, on the contrary, precedes our reason; it prevents us from consulting it and makes us love by instinct; it does not leave us entirely to ourselves and weakens our freedom (*OCM III 45, LO 563*).

Given God's design, the mind can freely love only through reason while instinct determines the mind to love an object before it can reason about it

(OCM III 73, LO 580). Illumination, guided by the mind's attention, provides the mind with reasons so that it can freely make determinations or judgments about objects. In fact, the amount of illumination or knowledge that the mind receives from God is based on the degree to which it *attends* to God's universal reason (OCM XI 60, CW 75). In the case of instinct, however, the mind, as a result of the correlations between objects and sensations, naturally loves or avoids an object before it can attend to the object. But, after the initial determination, the mind, given will's non-invincibility towards particular goods, is not forced to continue to love or avoid an object, rather, it can attend to the object and discover through God's illumination (via reasons) whether or not it is a true good (OCM I 50-51, LO 8; OCM XII 289-290, JS 227). So instinct, if not tempered by illumination, weakens our freedom insofar as it determines the mind's love without its attention and free consent. Note that in case of Adam, however, he was able to control the motions of the sense organs and their corresponding sensible pleasures. Thus, prelapsarian Adam had control over his body and could suppress or ignore the pleasures of the body and attend to God's Order.

Recall from chapter one that even though Adam's mind was in perfect harmony with God and his body, he was, nevertheless, able to sin. If Adam

could freely love God, then he could also freely decide not to love him. Adam's sin was ultimately the result of him turning his mind away (*aversio*) from God. Malebranche argues that there are three reasons for Adam's sin.

Happy would he, and we, have been...had he not voluntarily turned himself away from the presence of his God by allowing his mind's capacity to be exhausted by the beauty and anticipated sweetness of the forbidden fruit, or perhaps by the rash joy excited in his soul by the contemplation of his natural perfections, or finally by his natural fondness for his wife and the inordinate fear of displeasing her, all of which apparently contributed to his disobedience (*OCM I 75, LO 22*).

Malebranche, however, believes that the main cause of sin was Adam's decision to turn away from God and his Order, and attend to his own natural perfections. Adam *knew* that God was the true cause of his happiness, but *sensed* that his own perfections were the cause. But Adam, by a free choice, turned away from God and focused his attention on his body in order to relish in the pleasures of admiring his own perfections. By doing this, he succumbed to sensible pleasures and allowed them to overwhelm his mind and distract him from God, which violated God's Order (*OCM III 45-48, LO 563-65*). This resulted in Adam forever losing control over the movements and sensations of his body, upsetting God's design and causing a permanent disorder in his relation to God and his body. It is this disorder that is inherited by all human beings.

So given Adam's fall, the mind finds itself in a state of disorder. The mind, though superior in being to the body, is now dependent on the body and cannot control the movements of its sense organs and their corresponding sensations. As a result, the mind is constantly under siege by the sensations and passions of the body, which, at times, overwhelms the mind's capacity for thought, and distracts it from God (*OCM V 95, PR 150*). Since sensible pleasures and their objects are loved instinctively, according to God's design, the mind's dependence on the body makes it that much more difficult for the mind to reason about them. This constant barrage of uncontrollable sensations weakens the mind's ability to judge whether particular goods are true goods or not. "The more the reason is weakened, the more the soul becomes sense-governed, and judges promptly and falsely concerning sensible goods and evils" (*OCM V 126, PR 177*). Consequently, the mind, given its corrupted and disordered state, is led to believe that the material world is the source of truth and the cause of its happiness (*OCM I 15, LO xxxvii*). This belief is the source of the mind's errors in judgment, concupiscence, and moral failure.

Malebranche's intellectual and moral plan for the perfection of the mind is designed within the context of the mind's disordered state. Even though the mind is forcibly turned towards the body and its sensations,

Malebranche believes it can, with effort, turn back (*converso*) to God and regain some semblance of perfection it had before the Fall. In doing so, the mind can once again attend to God, and follow, through its own free will, his immutable order. Unfortunately, the mind's corrupted state makes it that much more difficult for the will to act freely, that is, rationally. For instance, God's "short-cut" design by which the mind can detect material objects that are good for the body without having to reason about the objects, now works against free will, since the mind, given its dependence on the body, cannot easily stop the natural love it has for objects so that it can reason about them and freely decide whether to love them or not. The mind's dependence on the body is so strong that, as we will see later, the mind alone cannot overcome its corrupted state, but needs God's grace to counterbalance concupiscence so that it can act freely according to God's immutable order. We must keep these things in mind as we examine Malebranche's prescription for moral perfection.

3.2.2 Liberty and Concupiscence

Malebranche believes that the first stage to perfection is for the mind to purge itself of its concupiscent desires so that it can unify its attention and then turn

back (*conversio*) to God and focus its full attention on his Order. The most virtuous mind is the one that can do this most effectively. “[W]hoever goes back into himself most deeply, and who listens to the inner truth in the greatest silence of the senses, imagination and passions, is the most solidly virtuous” (OCM XI 35, CW 57). Following Augustine, he believes that faith, understood as Augustinian belief, is a precondition for perfection, but the mind’s rational effort is the key to its perfection.¹¹⁰

Evidence, or understanding is preferable to faith. For faith will pass away, but understanding will live eternally. Faith is truly a good, but this is because it leads us to an understanding of certain necessary and essential truths, without which we can acquire neither solid virtue nor eternal felicity. However, faith without understanding (I am not speaking of the mysteries here, for we cannot have a clear idea of them)—faith, I say, without any light (if that is possible) cannot make us solidly virtuous. It is light that perfects the mind and governs the heart (OCM XI 34, CW 57).

Given his emphasis on reason, Malebranche believes that the first step of the purification stage is to *understand* the mind’s relationship to its body and recognize the ways in which concupiscence can weaken the mind’s liberty, and how God’s grace of feeling can increase it. In order to be perfect, “we must study man; we must know ourselves, our dignity and weaknesses, and our perfections and inclinations...” (OCM XI 84, CW 93). With this

¹¹⁰ Gilson (1938), p. 22.

knowledge, the mind can then attempt to increase its liberty while reducing its concupiscence. By strengthening its liberty, the mind can better focus its full attention on God and receive his illumination. With God's illumination, the mind will see that God is the true cause of its happiness, thereby enabling it to *freely* choose to love him and his Order, just like prelapsarian Adam. By freely choosing to love God and act according to his Order, the mind naturally strengthens its union with God (OCM XI 22, CW 48). But before we explicate the latter stages of illumination and unity, we need to examine the purification stage.

For Malebranche, the counterweight to liberty is concupiscence. As liberty gives the mind the ability to move *beyond* particular goods, concupiscence, on the other hand, moves the will *towards* particular goods. Since concupiscence makes the mind falsely believe that particular goods are the true causes of its happiness, it naturally works against liberty. Malebranche describes perfect and imperfect liberty within this context.

Thus the most perfect liberty is that of minds which can at every moment surmount the greatest pleasures; it is that of minds in respect to which no movement towards particular goods is ever invincible; it is that of man before sin, before concupiscence troubled his spirit and corrupted his heart. And the most imperfect liberty is that of a mind with respect to which every movement towards a particular good,

however small it seems, is invincible in all kinds of circumstances (OCM V 123-124, PR 175).

In the end, the forces of liberty and concupiscence are in constant conflict, both struggling for the supremacy of the mind. In fact, the mind's degree of concupiscence is inversely related to its degree of liberty. The more it has of one, the less it has of the other.

The struggle between concupiscence and liberty is not the same for every mind. Even though each mind starts out with an equal share of liberty and concupiscence, the particular characteristics of each mind-body composite, natural and acquired, determines a mind's degree of liberty and concupiscence. This means that the mind's degree of concupiscence and liberty differs over time, and is different from one mind to another. Concupiscence and liberty, Malebranche believes, is determined by three factors: (1) the natural structures, dispositions and motions of the body, (2) the habits formed by the mind-body composite through its interactions with external objects, and (3) the mind's degree of grace in terms of both illumination and feeling (OCM V 123-126, PR 175-177). As the first two will either increase or diminish liberty depending on the particular characteristics of the mind-body composite, the third will naturally increase liberty if the

mind is receptive. In order to understand the ways in which these factors affect the mind's freedom, a brief account Malebranche's Cartesian physiology is needed.

3.2.3 Cartesian Physiology

Malebranche believes the sense-organs are composed of numerous fibers or filaments (which are bundled into nerves) that originate in the principal part of the brain and spread out, without interruption, into all the members of body and extends to the exterior portions of the body (i.e. skin).¹¹¹ These fibers are hollow and filled with the most refined and agitated parts of the blood: the animal spirits. The animal spirits are generated by the heart through a complex process of fermentation in which the blood entering the heart is refined and agitated by the heart's heat and movements. The newly generated animal spirits exit the heart, along with the rest of the blood, and travel through the arteries to the principal part of the brain, where they are, in turn, distributed to every part of the body through a complex system of fibers. This system of fibers, along with the animal spirits that flow through them, is responsible for the material aspects of sensations.

¹¹¹ Malebranche thought there were three possible theories about which part of the brain is united with the mind (corpora striata, pia mater, and the pineal gland), but does not fully support any of them, see *OCM I* 193-194, LO 89.

Sensing, in its material aspect, begins with an external object, such as light in visual perception, striking the sense organs with enough force to displace the impacted fibers or vibrate the corresponding animal spirits in such a way that they communicate the impact, by forming traces in the brain fibers, to the principal part of the brain. The principal part of the brain responds to the impact by distributing a determined amount of animal spirits to the affected area so that the body can adjust itself in the appropriate way. The animal spirits accomplish this by inflating the fibers in the affected area in such a way that the muscles, to which the fibers are joined, will either contract or expand.

The mental side of sensing is the actual "felt" sensation that is experienced by the mind when the material side of sensing is satisfied. This means that every sensation corresponds to a pattern of brain traces. These correlations not only link sensations with brain traces, but also connect the qualitative and quantitative character of sensations with the agitation or motion of the animal spirits. The intensity of a sensation, such as the sharpness of a pain or the perceptive vividness of a tree, is determined by the amount of animal spirits flowing through the brain fibers and their degree of agitation and motion. The more agitated the animal spirits are the more

intense the corresponding sensation is, and vice-versa. This also accounts for some of the differences between sensing and imagining, the former corresponding to a higher degree of animal spirit agitation than the latter (OCM I 192, LO 88).

Now, sensations and images produce corresponding passions. Passions, in general, reinforce sensations and images and sustain the body's natural response to the sensed or imagined object. As a consequence, they maintain and fortify the mind's attention on the sensed object. Malebranche describes this process as "nothing but a continual circulation of feelings and movements which sustain and produce themselves" (OCM XI 146, CW 135). Just as in the case of sensations, the degree of animal spirit agitation will determine the intensity of the passion.

God establishes these basic correlations between sensations and brain traces in order to unite the mind and body, and to help the mind preserve the body (OCM I 216-217, LO 102-3). The mind is not united to the body by being "immaterially" spread out, so to speak, to every part of the body, but by being aware of the changes that go on in the principal part of the brain. Since all the sense organ fibers originate in this area of the brain, the mind can be aware of the activities of each sense organ. Thus, the principle part of the brain is, as it

were, a control center that manages the activities of the sense organs and other parts of the body, and is the central point of mind-body interaction.

Regarding the body's preservation, these basic correlations connect sensations to particular brain traces so that the mind and body can easily navigate, and interact with, the external world. As noted above, pleasures and pains accompany these sensible perceptions so that the mind can quickly judge whether an object is helpful or harmful to the body. These natural judgments are instinctive and usually concern the preservation of the body, as the free judgments that usually follow them have to do with the true welfare and happiness of the mind, that is, with whether the objects are true goods or not. If a needle, for instance, pricked the hand, the mind would naturally judge that the "pain" is in the hand. But after consulting its knowledge of Cartesian physiology the mind would judge that "pain" is really a modification of the mind and that it corresponds to a particular set of brain traces. In both cases, the mind judges that the pain is bad for the body, but the free judgment is mostly concerned with finding out the true cause of the pain, which was not really the needle, but the occasional union that God set up between the mind and body. These judgments are based on free acts of the mind, and have nothing to do with the body. Mistakenly, the mind often

believes that what is good for the body is also good for the mind because it conflates natural judgments with free ones (*OCM I 130, LO 52-3*).

With his Cartesian physiology, Malebranche explains the inverse relation between concupiscence and liberty. He argues that even though human bodies are physically similar to each other and have the same core set of mind-body relations, they also differ in many ways according to their individual physical composition and environment, and the habits they form through their interactions with the world. In the case of physical composition, Malebranche believes that the mind's character is determined by the animal spirits' degree of agitation and the malleability of brain fibers and their susceptibility to brain traces.

For it is easy enough to explain all the different characters encountered among the minds of men, on the one hand by the abundance and scarcity, by the rapidity or slowness of agitation, and by the density and lightness of the animal spirits, and on the other hand by the delicacy or coarseness, the moistness and dryness, and the malleability of the brain fibers; and finally, by the relation the animal spirits might have to these fibers (*OCM I 194-195, LO 89*).

Here he suggests that the body's physical composition determines, to some degree, the mind's character or disposition. For instance, if someone is born with an unusually hot heart and very delicate and malleable brain fibers, his body will naturally produce an abnormal amount of very refined and

lively animal spirits that can easily create deep and permanent brain traces in the delicate brain fibers. This will result, given the correlations between mind and body, in more intense sensations, images and passions that can potentially overwhelm the mind's finite capacities and distract it from its true good. Consequently, a mind with this type of body is much more susceptible to concupiscence than a mind that is joined to a body that is more moderately constructed and disposed (OCM I 196-197, LO 91).

Even with a moderately constructed body, the body still faces environmental factors that can severely alter its composition and lead to an increase or decrease in concupiscence. Consider the air that the body breathes. The heart needs air to ferment the blood and produce animal spirits. So the quality of the air, just as the heart's degree of heat, determines the character and amount of animal spirits produced. The more refined the air, the more lively the animal spirits are, and obviously, the coarser the air is, the less lively they are.

Other notable examples are food and wine. The amount and quality of the food ingested by the body is directly related to the amount and quality of chyle that is produced in the intestines by the actions of the bile and pancreatic juices (the digestive enzymes) on the chyme (the semi-fluid mass of partly

digested food that the stomach expels into the first part (duodenum) of the small intestines). The chyle, Malebranche contends, mixes with the blood that enters the heart and affects the quality of the animal spirits that are produced. Thus, if the chyle thickens the blood, the animal spirits will be coarse and less lively. This will naturally reduce the amount of animal spirits entering the brain, which will in turn, decrease the production of brain traces and their corresponding sensations and imaginings. So, after a heavy meal, the mind's imagination becomes less active and the body typically succumbs to lethargy.

Wine, like animal spirits, is very spirituous in nature. But unlike animal spirits, wine spirits are not easily controlled by the will. So after much drinking, the mind usually loses control of its body's movements and their corresponding sensations and passions. The mind's attention, in this case, is at the mercy of its sensations.

Malebranche uses these environmental factors to explain the different temperaments of people living in different regions and countries.

Thus, it is certain that the most refined air particles we breathe enter our hearts; that together with the blood and the chyle there, they maintain the heat that gives and movement to our body, and that, according to their varying qualities, they cause great changes in the fermentation of the blood and in the animal spirits.

We recognize these facts every day through the various humors and mental characteristics of persons in different countries. The Gascons [Gascony is a former province in south-western France], for example, have a much more lively imagination than the Normans...But if we consider the people of more remote lands, we shall encounter even the stranger differences, as between an Italian and a Fleming or a Dutchman (*OCM I 202-203, LO 95*).

Air, food and wine are just some examples of how the environment can affect the mind's ratio of freedom and concupiscence. A highly agitated body, along with a poor diet, can make a powerful concupiscent cocktail that can overcome the mind's attention, and force it to turn away from its true good, and hurt its chances at perfection.

Another factor determining the mind's ratio of liberty and concupiscence are voluntary and involuntary habits formed by the interactions of the mind and body with the environment. Habits, described in mechanistic terms, are formed and fortified by repeated acts of the same kind that produce deep and lasting traces on the brain and occasion their corresponding sensations in the mind. These traces allow the animal spirits to pass easily through the fibers of the body to the principal part of the brain where they can be distributed swiftly to other parts of the body. This explains, according to Malebranche, skills acquired by training such as learning a language, playing an instrument, and more importantly, acquiring and

conserving virtue (*OCM I 227-228, LO 108; OCM XI 51-52, CW 69*). The more one speaks a language or plays an instrument, the deeper the imprint on one's brain fibers and the easier the animal spirits flow. By the same reasoning, habits can be effaced through inactivity. If brain traces are not fortified and maintained by repeated acts, the brain traces will heal and revert back to their normal state. So unlike natural brain traces, which are natural and permanent, acquired brain traces can, in principle, be formed, fortified and effaced. As Malebranche uses natural traces as a physical explanation for natural instincts and behavior, such as self-preservation, he uses acquired traces to explain social behaviors, such as language, customs, and duties (*OCM I 250-251, LO 121*). Malebranche encapsulates this nicely in the phrase: "acts produce habits, and habits produce acts" (*OCM XI 51, CW 69*).

Now the formation of habits begins, for Malebranche, during a fetus's gestation in its mother's womb. The fetus, given its dependent condition, is intimately connected or united with its mother. In fact, the connection is so intimate that the fetus, given its very malleable brain fibers, actually shares in its mother's sensations and passions.

And although their soul [fetus] be separated from their mother's, their body is not at all detached from hers, and we should therefore conclude that they have the same sensations and passions, i.e., that exactly the

same thoughts are excited in their souls upon the occasion of the motions produced in her body. Thus, children see what their mothers see, hear the same cries, receive the same impressions from objects, and are aroused by the same passions (*OCM I 234, LO 112-113*).

From this, Malebranche concludes that a mother's acquired habits can be imprinted on the fetus's brain fibers, and could affect the child into adulthood unless it is effaced. This explains how a child inherits its mother's peculiar dispositions, such as a weak or strong imagination, a fear for dogs or a desire for particular foods (*OCM I 241-242, 245, LO 117, 119*). More importantly, it shows that the child will inherit a similar degree of concupiscence from its mother. So if a child has a mother with a high degree of concupiscence, then it will have a higher degree of concupiscence than a child whose mother was moderately disposed during pregnancy.

It must follow from this that since all the traces of the mothers are engraved and imprinted in the brains of the children, they must be born with the same habits and other qualities as their mothers, and even normally retain them throughout their lives, since the habits one has from the earliest youth are the one preserved the longest, which nevertheless is contrary to experience (*OCM I 249, LO 121*).

Thus, a newborn, when it first comes into the world, has already acquired habits that could potentially alter its ratio of concupiscence and liberty.

Interestingly, Malebranche also uses this to give a physiological explanation for the soul's inheritance of Original Sin (*OCM I 247-248, 71-118*,

LO 120-1, 579-606). The mind-body disorder caused by Adam and Eve's sin, which turned the mind away from God and made it dependent on the body, is passed down to the child through the mother. Essentially, the concupiscent habits, acquired by Eve after sin, were passed down to her offspring, and then in turn, passed down to her descendents through the woman. Thus, every child is born into sin and, as a result, has a concupiscent disposition. So the question is not whether an infant has concupiscence, but to what degree it has it, and this depends on the mother and her concupiscent habits. However, unlike other acquired habits, Original Sin cannot be effaced because, according to Malebranche, the habits are reinforced by the mind's constant interaction with the world through its body. In the end, Malebranche uses this account to release God from responsibility, making the mother solely responsible for the sinful disorder of her child.

The acquisition of habits does not stop at birth, but continues throughout the child's life. The particular habits that a child acquires are determined by the environment and the people that care for the child, and later, the people with which it interacts. So, the way a child is raised and interacts with the world affects its degree of liberty and concupiscence. If the child acquired concupiscent habits in the womb, then they could efface those

habits with a proper education and moderate lifestyle. Yet, as the child grows older, it becomes more difficult to acquire and efface habits because the brain fibers harden and become less flexible and malleable over time (*OCM I 227-228, 230, LO 108, 110*). The reason for this, according to Malebranche, is that the animal spirits, through their continuous agitation, gradually dry up the brain fibers, just as the wind dries the earth it blows over (*OCM I 231, LO 111*). So if concupiscent habits are not effaced by late adulthood, they can become permanent dispositions. This not only affects the acquisition of habits and the vigor (vivacity) of the imagination, but also the mind's ability to acquire knowledge and attend to particular truths (*OCM I 270, LO 132*).

With its inherited concupiscence and the many physical and habitual factors that affect it, the mind is not in a good position to exercise its liberty; especially if it has a strong predisposition for concupiscence. But all is not lost. Malebranche believes that the mind can combat concupiscence with the help of God's external aid and from its own internal resources. A detailed account of each resource is necessary for a proper understanding of the mind's freedom and perfection.

3.2.4 Jesus Christ and the Grace of Feeling

God's aid consists in gifts of grace that are given to the mind. For Malebranche, there are two species of grace that pertain to the mind's freedom and perfection: grace of enlightenment and grace of feeling.¹¹² Each has plays a unique role and has a different occasional cause. As I mentioned earlier, the first pertains to the mind's intimate union with God's immutable order, the second directly combats and counterbalances concupiscence. Saving grace of enlightenment for our discussion of the mind's ability to perfect itself, let's turn to grace of feeling and the role it plays in counterbalancing concupiscence.

As we have seen, the mind's will is constantly being moved by prevenient concupiscent desires towards particular goods (*OCM* V 98-99, PR 151). Given its fallen disordered state, the mind cannot control these concupiscent desires and is easily distracted and overwhelmed by them, resulting in a severe loss of liberty. Without any control over these prevenient desires, the mind needs something, similar in kind, to counterbalance them. Malebranche believes that this counterbalance comes from the grace of Jesus

¹¹² There is also habitual grace, or what he sometimes calls grace of charity, but this does not directly relate to our discussion

Christ as the redeemer of humankind. Accordingly, Christ redeems the mind by helping it overcome its dependence on the body and its concupiscent desires so that it can turn towards God. In order to counterbalance the mind's disordered state caused by the first Adam (sinful and terrestrial Adam), it was necessary for the second Adam, Jesus Christ (innocent and celestial Adam) to dispense desires in the mind that are contrary to concupiscence, such as prevenient pleasures that support and augment the mind's love for God and his immutable order, or distaste for the objects that give rise to concupiscent desires. He can also diminish the mind's attraction towards particular goods by directly weakening concupiscent desires (*OCM V 95, PR 150*).

Now, Christ dispenses grace of feeling to particular individuals not as a productive or efficacious cause, but as an occasional cause that delimits the application of God's general laws of grace. Specifically, he *occasions* the dispensation of grace of feeling to individual minds through his own thoughts and desires.

At the present he (Jesus Christ) is the sovereign priest of future goods, and by his different desires he prays ceaselessly to his Father on behalf of men. And since his desires are occasional causes, his prayers are always granted; his Father refuses him nothing, as Scripture teaches us. However, it is necessary that he pray and that he desire in order to obtain: because occasional, natural, physical causes (these three signify the same thing) do not have, by themselves, the power to do anything,

and because all creatures, and Jesus Christ himself considered as a man, are by themselves nothing but weakness and impotence (*OCM V 72, PR 142-3; cf. OCM XII 320, JS 253*).

Christ, limited by his finite and impotent human nature, cannot dispense grace simultaneously or uniformly to all minds at all times, but must dispense it according to his successive thoughts and desires, which are limited to particular individuals or groups of people that share the same dispositions (*OCM V 73, PR 144*). Since Christ is limited in the number of persons or dispositions he can think about at any given time, he must constantly change his thoughts and desires in order to dispense grace of feeling to all the minds that he desires. Furthermore, the amount of grace of feeling a mind receives is determined by the intensity of Christ's desires at any given time. So not only does Christ's thoughts and desires change, but also their intensity. This is no different from the way the mind acts on its body.

The different desires of the soul of Jesus diffusing grace, one sees clearly how it is that it is not diffused equally in all men, and that it falls on the same persons more abundantly at one time than at another. For the soul of Jesus Christ not thinking at the same time of all men, it does not have at one time all the desires of which it is capable. Such that Jesus Christ does not act on his members in a particular way except by successive influences. In the same way our soul does not move, at one single time, all the muscles of our body: for the animal spirits are diffused unequally and successively in our members, according to the different impressions of objects, the different movements of our

passions, and the different desires which we freely form within ourselves (*OCM V 74-75, PR 145*).

Now, Christ dispenses grace of feeling according to two kinds of desires: those that are passing and particular, and those that are stable and permanent. Passing and particular desires are usually reserved for minds that are unprepared to receive grace of feeling, as stable and permanent ones concern those who regularly receive the sacraments, and love God and his immutable order. Hence, Christ regularly dispenses grace of feeling, with different degrees of intensity, to devout hearts, but he also, at times, gives grace of feeling to those who may not be receptive to Christ's grace.

The feelings of charity which he has for the faithful are more frequent and more durable than those which he has for libertines and for the impious; and since all the faithful are not equally disposed to enter the Church of the predestined, the desires of the soul of Jesus are not, with respect to all of them, equally lively, frequent, and lasting (*OCM V 92, PR 147*).

At first glance, it seems that Christ, at least when it comes to passing desires, dispenses grace irregularly, merely dispensing grace of feeling according to the particular dispositions of a person or group without following any sense of order. But in fact, Christ dispenses grace of feeling according to God's plan for the construction of his eternal Church (*OCM V 74, PR 144*). Consequently, Christ does not dispense grace according to individual needs or

merit, by only in terms of his need to construct his Church. Wanting to provide the most diverse Church possible, Christ dispenses grace of feeling not only to those that have received the sacraments, but also to those who do not, such as misers or those with hardened hearts. So Christ's dispensation of grace of feeling, though determined by his particular thoughts and desires, follow God's immutable Order.

Now, turning back to the mind, Malebranche describes the effects of grace of feeling on finite minds in terms of a scale with two bowls on each side with a sliding fulcrum. The scale represents the will, the two bowls grace of feeling and concupiscence, and the sliding fulcrum the mind's dispositions (*OCM V 132-133, PR 182*). According to this scheme, the "weight" of grace of feeling and concupiscence in each bowl will determine the balance of the mind's will, either in favor of God or particular goods. However, the "weight" of grace of feeling and concupiscence is determined by the three physical and environmental factors mentioned above that structure the mind's disposition. Given that no two minds have the same dispositions, the same quantity of grace of feeling and concupiscence will affect minds differently.

Thus the grace of feeling is always efficacious by itself: it always diminishes the effect of concupiscence because pleasure naturally brings about love for the cause which produces it, or which seems to

produce it. But although this grace is always efficacious by itself, it depends, or rather the effect depends, on the actual dispositions of him to whom it is given (*OCM V 132-133, PR 182*).

The effects of pleasure and of all the feelings of the soul depend in a thousand ways on the actual dispositions of the mind. The same weight does not always produce the same effects: it depends, in its action, on the construction of the machine by which it is applied to the contrary weight. If a balance is unequally suspended, the force of the weights being unequally applied, the lighter ones may outweigh the heavier (*OCM V 144, PR 192*).

So if one mind were more susceptible to material wealth than another mind, and they were both presented with the same pot of gold, the concupiscent “weight” of the gold would be relatively heavier in the former and lighter in the latter. In this case, the mind’s dispositions determine the position of the fulcrum on the scale, which in turn, affects the influence on concupiscence and grace of feeling.¹¹³ Consequently, a mind that has suitably disposed itself to receive grace of feeling will be in a better position to utilize it than a mind that has not done the proper preparatory work. Just as a farmer needs to prepare his fields so that he can utilize rain to grow his crops, the mind needs to prepare itself to receive grace of feeling, if and when it comes.

Why do they [sinners] not prepare themselves to receive the rain from heaven? They cannot merit it, but they can augment its efficacy with respect to themselves. Can they not...avoid occasions for sin, deprive

¹¹³ See Andrew Pyle’s (2003) detailed discussion, pp. 224-227.

themselves of pleasures (at least those they have not already tasted) by which they will not be enslaved in consequence? Thus they can remove some impediments to the efficacy of grace, and prepare the ground of their heart, such that it becomes fruitful when God pours rain according to the general laws that he has prescribed to himself (*OCM V 54, PR 132*).

However, Malebranche's scale analogy seems to suggest that the mind is determined to act according to which bowl on the scale is heavier, thereby stripping the mind of its responsibility. But this is not the case. Even though the scale is tip one way or another, the mind can still freely decide what to do, although the dominant influence of grace of feeling or concupiscence will make it more or less difficult for the mind to decide. However, if the scale is extremely imbalanced in favor of either pleasure, it may be practically impossible to avoid its influence.

Since concupiscence has not entirely destroyed liberty in man, the grace of Jesus Christ, however efficacious it may be, is not absolutely invincible. One can defeat sensible pleasure if it is weak; one can suspend the judgment of one's love, when one is not carried along by some passion that is too violent; and when one succumbs to the allure of this false pleasure, one is guilty because of the bad use of one's liberty. In the same way the delectation of grace is not ordinarily invincible. One can fail to follow the good feelings which it inspires...This grace does not fill up the soul in such a way that it carries it towards the true good without choice, without discernment, without consent (*OCM V 134, PR 183-184*).

In the end, Malebranche believes grace of feeling is an aid but not a cure for concupiscence. If grace of feeling were a cure for concupiscence, then the mind would be determined to love true goods by prevenient pleasures (or instinct) and not by its own free rational choice (*OCM* V 133-134, PR 183-184). This would make Christ solely responsible for the mind's perfection; essentially stripping the mind of its responsibility to love God and act according to his immutable order. Accordingly, grace of feeling is necessary for combating concupiscence, but it can never be the ultimate source of the mind's freedom and perfection. Perfection can only come from the mind's own internal resources.

3.2.5 Interlude: Jolley and Efficacious Ideas

Knowing the mechanics behind mind-body union, along with the effects of liberty and grace of feeling on the mind, puts the mind in the position to purify itself by developing the right habits and dispositions to resist concupiscent desires so that it can turn inwards and then upwards to God. Malebranche's account, presented thus far, seems to imply that the mind, in order to perfect itself, must have its own internal resources. That is, it must be cognitively and volitionally active in some way. Yet this contradicts the

generally accepted opinion that the Malebranchean mind does not have these resources, and even if it did, they would be inconsistent with his vision in God.¹¹⁴ The best representative example of this is Nicolas Jolley's argument that Malebranche, in his mature writings, rejects the idea that the mind has its own cognitive and volitional resources to apprehend God's Order and makes God solely responsible for the mind's intellectual or pure perceptions.¹¹⁵ If the mind does not have the internal resources to perceive God's Order, then it is clear that the mind cannot perfect itself. Given the evidence presented below, however, it should become obvious that Jolley's interpretative argument misses the mark because he fails to take into account key parts of Malebranche's theory of perfection where Malebranche explicitly attributes native resources to the mind. Jolley's interpretation, though inaccurate, is nonetheless informative because it provides us with the context we need to understand how the mind can perfect itself through God's illumination, and how the mind's cognitive and volitional resources are compatible with Malebranche's vision in God.

¹¹⁴ See Susan Peppers-Bates (2005) and (2009) for a pointed attack on this consensus, and her suggestion that the mind's attention plays a critical role in knowledge acquisition. I agree with Peppers-Bates and provide additional arguments and a more detailed analysis on the mind's attention and the epistemological and volitional role it plays in the mind's perfection.

¹¹⁵ Given the topic, our discussion of Malebranche's divine illumination or vision in God is limited to its cognitive aspect, not the role it plays in sense perception.

Jolley argues that Malebranche presents two very different accounts of divine illumination in his writings. In his early writings, Malebranche gives an account that retains the mind's cognitive faculties to acquire knowledge and merely transfers ideas (immutable truths) from the mind to God. This means that the mind's cognitions, or what Malebranche calls pure perceptions, are *intentionally* related to God's ideas in such a way that the mind actively "sees" them, as it were, *in* God. God's job is merely to "reveal" ideas to the mind. In his later and more mature writings, Malebranche gives another account that does not just transfer ideas from the mind to God, but also strips the mind of its cognitive capacities, leaving the mind utterly passive. In this case, the mind's pure perceptions are more than just intentionally related to God's ideas, they are *causally* related to his ideas insofar as the ideas themselves *cause* the perceptions, that is, the mind's perceptual (or cognitive) *acts*.¹¹⁶ In this case, the mind does not *actively* "perceive" ideas *in* God, but *passively* perceives ideas in that the idea *causes* the mind's *entire* cognitive act, without any active cognitive contribution on the mind's part.¹¹⁷ So as the earlier account retains the mind's cognitive role in acquiring knowledge, insofar as the mind actively

¹¹⁶ I agree with Alison Simmons (2009) that Malebranchean perceptions are purely intentional, not representational, p. 116-118. The mind, in this case, does not receive a perceptual packet with representational content; rather, it directly sees the ideas that God reveals to it.

¹¹⁷ Jolley (1994), p. 216.

contributes, in some way, to the perceptual act of seeing God's ideas, the later account replaces the mind's cognitive faculties with causally efficacious ideas, essentially reducing the mind to a mere passive recipient of knowledge. In the end, Jolley argues, Malebranche rejects the first account in favor of the second. By doing this, Malebranche abandons the fundamental Cartesian doctrine of the pure intellect, whereby the mind acquires knowledge through its own internal resources.

Jolley believes that Malebranche's dramatic anti-Cartesian shift reflects a strict interpretation of Augustine's theory of divine illumination that is based on the tenet that the mind is a *lumen illuminatum* (illuminated light), not a *lumen illuminans* (illuminating light).¹¹⁸ Malebranche, according to Jolley, thinks that Augustine's theory implies that the mind is not only completely dependent on God for all of its knowledge, but also that it is devoid of all cognitive activity.¹¹⁹ This puts Augustine's theory of divine illumination in direct conflict with the Cartesian doctrine of the pure intellect. It is this conflict, with Malebranche siding in the end with Augustine, that is at the heart of Malebranche's account of the mind and its intimate relationship with God. To suggest that the mind has such resources is tantamount to rejecting

¹¹⁸ Jolley (2000), p. 33.

¹¹⁹ Jolley (1994), pp. 212-215; Jolley (1990), pp. 97-98.

this principle. Jolley provides ample textual evidence to support his interpretation. Here are two representative passages.

Created reason, our soul, the human mind, the purest and most sublime intellects, can indeed see the light; but they cannot produce it or draw it from their own resources, nor can they engender it from their substance. They can discover eternal, immutable, necessary truths in the divine Word, in eternal, immutable, necessary Wisdom; but in themselves they find only sensations which are often very lively, yet always obscure and confused, i.e. modalities full of darkness (OCM XII 64-64, JS 32-33).

I cannot reiterate too often that we must consult not the senses and their respective modalities, which are sheer darkness, but Reason which enlightens us by its divine Ideas, by ideas that are immutable, necessary, eternal (OCM XII 72, JS 47).

For Jolley, these passages suggest that Malebranche has moved away from a Cartesian pure intellect and towards a more radical theory of divine illumination in which the mind is totally dependent on God for all of its knowledge.

The second reason is more philosophical in nature. Jolley suggests that Malebranche's new theory may have been motivated by his deep distrust of ascribing powers or faculties to the mind. He pays particular attention to a passage in Elucidation 10 of *The Search after Truth* where Malebranche compares those Cartesians who ascribe productive faculties to the mind to the scholastics who talk of powers, forces and natures.

I am astonished that these Cartesian gentlemen, who rightly have such aversion to the general terms *nature* and *faculty*, so willingly use them on this occasion. They dislike it if one says that fire burns by its nature or that it changes certain bodies into glass by a natural faculty; and some of them are not afraid to say that the mind of man produce in itself the ideas of all things by its *nature*, because it has the faculty of thinking. But, whether they like it or not, these terms are not more meaningful in their mouths, than in those of the Peripatetics. It is true that our soul is such by its nature that it necessarily perceives that which affects it: but God alone can act in it... Just as it is false that matter although capable of figure and motion, has in itself a force, a *faculty*, a *nature*, by which it can move itself or give itself now a round figure, now a square, thus, though the soul is naturally and essentially capable of knowledge and volition, it is false that it has any *faculty* by which it can produce in itself its ideas or its impulse toward the good, because it invincibly wants to be happy (OCM III 144-145, LO 622).

Jolley acknowledges that, in this passage, Malebranche is explicitly attacking the Cartesian claim that the mind can produce its own ideas. But, Malebranche also makes the claim that the terms “nature” and “faculty” are meaningless. Jolley believes that this claim, coupled with the thesis that the mind is not a light to itself, shows that Malebranche is actually making the stronger claim that the mind is utterly devoid of cognitive abilities.

In order to fill the gap left by the mind’s cognitive impotence, Jolley suggest that Malebranche argues for a theory that makes God’s idea *causally* responsible for mind’s cognitive states. Again, according to this interpretation, the mind does not actively perceive ideas *in* God rather the mind’s pure

perceptions are *caused* by God's ideas. Jolley takes this to mean that divine ideas must "act directly on the mind; [so that] they thereby cause cognitive states to arise in a substance which is devoid of all genuine cognitive capacities on its own".¹²⁰ In this case, the mind participates in the acquisition of knowledge only in the sense that it passively receives it. For Jolley, the mind "has no active, native faculty for attending to such objects of thought".¹²¹ Hence, divine ideas are responsible not only for the content of the mind's pure perceptions, but also the perceptual acts themselves.

Admittedly, Jolley's strong interpretation of efficacious ideas fits in nicely with other important aspects of Malebranche's system, especially his theory occasionalism. Recall that, according to occasionalism, God alone is causally efficacious, and the regularities of nature are grounded in God's divine and lawful decrees. Created substances and their modalities, are causally inefficacious and merely provide the *occasion* for God to dispense his power in particular ways. In this case, the mind cannot act on its body, and more importantly, it cannot produce its own modifications, in this case, its own cognitive states. The mind is causally impotent and must totally rely on God. For Malebranche the mind's union with God is the cause of "its life, its

¹²⁰ Jolley (1994), p. 216.

¹²¹ Jolley (2000), p. 37.

light, and its entire felicity" (OCM I 9, LO xxxiii). That is, the mind needs God's continual presence in order to stay in existence, receive knowledge, and desire God.

In comparison with Augustine, Malebranche's conception of the soul is rather bleak. As we saw in chapter two, Augustine believes that the rational soul is actively involved in the vegetative, sensitive processes of the body, and is responsible for its own imaginative and rational activities. Though God must constantly be present to the mind in order to keep it in existence, the Augustinian mind has its own rational structure or impressed ideas from which it can acquire knowledge. In fact, Augustine is much closer to a Cartesian conception of mind than Jolley account implies, making Malebranche not only anti-Cartesian, but anti-Augustinian as well. In contrast, the Malebranchean mind does not causally interact with the body or have its own rational structure or storehouse of ideas from which it can acquire knowledge. As we have seen, the mind, through its intimate union with God, has direct access to God's Order, that is, the numerically same Order that God uses to govern the intellectual and moral realms. "In contemplating this Divine substance, I may see some part of that which God *thinks*. God sees all *truths*, and I may see some of them" (OCM XI 18, CW 45). Understood within

the context of Jolley's theory of efficacious ideas, the mind can do nothing but wait for God to give it pure perceptions. There is nothing the mind can do on its own to elicit knowledge from God or even attend to the knowledge that God gives it. The mind is nothing but an empty receptacle that God cognitively activates when he sees fit.

The problem with this picture is that it ignores Malebranche's claim that the mind is, in fact, cognitively and volitionally active. This claim is not limited to Malebranche's earlier writings, it can also be found throughout his mature work, particularly in *Treatise on Ethics* (1684) and *Dialogues on Metaphysics and on Religion* (1688). In the latter work, where Jolley finds evidence for the mind's cognitive inactivity, Malebranche explicitly states the opposite.

The human mind is also united to God, to eternal Wisdom, to the universal Reason which enlightens all intellects. And it is also united to Him through the general laws of which our attention is the occasional cause which determines their efficacy. The disturbances excited in my brain are the occasional or natural cause of my sensations. But the occasional cause of the presence of ideas to my mind is my attention. I think about what I will. (OCM XII 288-289, JS 226; cf. OCM XII 289, 319, JS 227, 252; OCM XI 169-170, CW 153).

In his discussion of how God governs his creation by general laws, Malebranche lists the general laws that govern the mind's union with God's Order among the five key categories of laws.

The laws of the union of the soul with God, with the intelligible substance of universal Reason, for the laws of which govern our attention is the occasional cause. It is establishment of these laws that the mind has the power to think what it wills, and to discover the truth (OCM XII 319, JS 252-253).

Malebranche could not be clearer about the importance of the mind's attention in knowledge acquisition in this passage from the *Treatise on Ethics*:

Only God spreads light in minds...But we need search nowhere except in ourselves for the occasional cause which determines Him to communicate it to us. By a general law which He constantly follows and all of whose consequences He has foreseen, God has linked the presence of ideas to the mind's paying attention: when we are masters of our attention and make use of it, then without fail light is spread within us, in direct proportion to our effort (OCM XI 59-60, CW 75; cf. OCM V 102, PR 155).

In these three passages, Malebranche argues that the mind's attention, as an occasional cause, *determines* the efficacy of God's illumination. Given the laws of God-mind union, God reveals, on the occasion of the mind's attentive desire, a part of his Order. An attentive desire is a product of both the mind's will and understanding insofar as the will's desire for knowledge elicits God to reveal the requisite ideas so that the understanding can perceive or attend

to them. For instance, by concentrating its attention on an apparent good, the mind triggers, as it were, God to reveal more information about that apparent good so that the mind can properly examine it and decide whether it is a true good that should be pursued or a false good that must be avoided. And if the mind decides to pursue it, it can attend to God's Order to see how the good should be regarded and what duties follow from it. Of course, the mind's attention also plays a crucial role in self-perfection. Without it, the mind could not actively attend to God's Order and then conform its actions to it.

In contemplating this Divine substance, I may see some part of that which God thinks. God sees all truths, and I may see some of them. Then, I am able to discover something of what God wills; for God wills only according to Order, and Order is not entirely unknown to me. It is certain that God loves things in proportion as they are lovable, and I may discover that there are some things more perfect, more estimable, more movable than others" (OCM XI 18, CW 45).

Note that the mind does not produce its own ideas and it does not have an innate power to *cause* God to reveal ideas to it. Rather the mind is merely controlling its attention and, as it were, petitioning God to reveal his Order. Malebranche speaks of this activity in terms of a natural prayer that God grants to minds (OCM XI 60, CW 76). For God to "reveal" an idea to the mind is to place the idea in an intentional relation to the understanding, thereby "causing" the mind to perceive it. According to this interpretation, God does

not give the understanding a perceptual packet that consists in a representation and the cognitive power to perceive it. Both God and the mind contribute to the perception insofar as the mind is responsible for eliciting and perceiving the idea, as God is responsible for the content by intentionally relating the mind to the corresponding idea. Clearly, Jolley's claim that the mind "has no active, native faculty for attending to such objects of thought", does not hold up to the textual evidence.¹²²

3.2.6 The Mind's Internal Resources: Strength and Freedom of Mind

Malebranche provides more details about how the mind actively contributes to its perfection in his *Treatise on Ethics*. Here, he identifies two mental activities, namely *strength* and *freedom of mind* (*la force* and *la liberté de l'esprit*). Each plays a distinct, yet collaborative, role in the mind's perfection. Let's examine each in turn. *Strength of mind* has to do with the mind's level of control over its own attentive desires. The strength and intensity of these desires determines the amount of knowledge God gives to the mind at any one time, and helps it think about other objects. The mind's control over its attention is made possible by the will's invincible movement towards the

¹²² Jolley (2000), p. 37.

good in general. This movement provides the mind with the natural desire to examine whether an object is good or not, and if it's not, then to move beyond it by thinking of other goods (*OCM III 22, LO 550*). Accordingly, strength of mind helps the mind to examine an object by eliciting God to reveal more information about it. It also fortifies the mind against false goods, along with the concupiscent desires they invoke, by allowing it to freely pursue other goods in its constant search for the good in general. Malebranche believes that the will, in relation to particular goods, is a "blind power" that can be put under the mind's directive control.

But it must be carefully noted that insofar as a mind is thrust toward the good in general, it cannot direct its impulse toward a particular good unless that same mind, insofar as it is capable of ideas, has knowledge of that particular good. In plain language, I meant that the will is a blind power, which can proceed only toward things the understanding represents to it. As a result, the will can direct both the impression it has for good, and all its natural inclinations in various ways, only by ordering the understanding to represent to it some particular object. The power our soul has of directing its inclinations therefore necessarily contains the power of being able to convey the understanding toward the objects that pleases it (*OCM I 47, LO 5*).

This is not to say that the mind can freely control what objects are presented to it at any given time, since the mind is constantly bombarded by, and naturally led to, particular objects through its union with the body. But it can direct the "blind power" of the will by petitioning God to present new intellectual,

imaginative or sensible objects to the understanding, thereby moving the will towards new objects.¹²³

So for Malebranche, the mastery of the attention, by maximizing its strength, is one of the mind's most important virtues (*OCM XI 61, CW 76*). Such mastery helps the mind to purify itself by avoiding false goods and the concupiscent desires they invoke, helping it advance to the illumination stage of the perfection process.

Now, God had to establish us as the *occasional* cause of our knowledge, for several reasons, the chief of which is that otherwise we would not be able to be masters of our wills. For since our wills must be enlightened in order to be excited, if it were not in our power to think, then it would not be in our power to will. Thus, we would not be free with a perfect freedom nor, for the same reason, would we be in any condition to merit the true goods for which we are made (*OCM XI 60, CW 75*).

Sin, however, has made it much more difficult for the mind to use its attention to gain knowledge because now the attention is dominated and controlled by concupiscent desires. This divides the mind's attention and leaves it with little opportunity to focus its attention on God's Order. And when it actually does, the attention is easily distracted and overwhelmed by

¹²³ Some commentators argue that this is not Malebranche's mature view and thus reject the idea that the mind has directive control over the will. I believe that Malebranche held to this position throughout his works. I will defend this interpretation in chapter four.

sensible pleasures. Accordingly, the mind's attention varies according to the mind's ratio of concupiscence and liberty. Thus, it is not equal in all minds.

And if our prayer were not interrupted, if our attention was not troubled, if we had some idea of what we ask, we would never fail to receive, in so far as we are capable of receiving. But our prayers are ceaselessly interrupted...our senses and imagination throw all our heads into trouble and confusion; and although the truth which we consult responds to our requests, the confused sound of our passion keeps us from hearing its answers, or makes us speedily forget (*OCM V 102, PR 155*).

This is why grace of feeling is so important for the mind's freedom. Grace of feeling dissipates or reduces concupiscent desires, giving the mind the opportunity to focus its attention on God's Order and come to love it through reason, not instinct. But, even with the help of Christ's grace, the mind is still responsible for the direction, focus, and strength of its attention. But strengthening the mind is not so easy.

The mind's attention is thus a natural prayer by which we obtain Reason, which enlightens us. But because of sin, the mind often finds itself in frightfully barren spells; it cannot pray, i.e., the effort of attention fatigues and discourages it. In fact, this effort is at first very great, and the reward quite mediocre. Furthermore, we continually feel the attraction, the pressure and the agitation of the imagination and passions, whose inspiration and movement would be so easy to follow. However, attention is a necessity; we must call upon it in order to be enlightened. There is no other way to obtain light and understanding than by the effort of attention. Faith is a gift of God, which we do not merit. But ordinarily understanding is given only to those who merit it. Faith is pure grace, in every sense; but understanding of Truth is a sort

of grace which must be merited by effort, by cooperation with grace (OCM XI 60, CW 76).

But through its knowledge of Cartesian physiology, God's dispensation of grace, and the inner experience of its own levels of concupiscence and liberty, the mind can, with difficulty, purify itself and strengthen its attention so that it can advance to the illumination stage of perfection, and eventually unify itself with God by rationally loving his Order and by imitating him as best it can by acting in accordance with it.

The mind gains strength by forming habits through constant mental exercises. These exercises mainly consist of meditative exercises wherein the mind attempts to calm its concupiscent desires, by avoiding those objects, foods, environment, and activities that stoke the flames of desire for such things as wealth, power and fame, while spending time each day contemplating God's Order until the mind can sustain its attention on it for ever longer periods of time (OCM XI 64-65, 81-82, CW 77-78, 91). Through these mental exercises, the mind will receive the knowledge it needs to love Order through reason. In addition, it will also realize that its momentary desires and passions pale in comparison to the true happiness it can receive from following Order. By consistently avoiding objects that give rise to

concupiscence, the deep traces in the brain formed by such objects will eventually heal since there are no animal spirits to sustain them. In fact, this is the only way to heal brain traces. Not even God's enlightenment or grace of feeling can do this.

They [minds] obtain from God those aids needed for battle, but do not deliver us from our misery unless by strength of combat and resisting we should naturally make the spirits take another route so that our wounds would be healed and closed. In order to heal the wounds of the brain, just as we those of other parts of our bodies, it is sufficient that nothing prevent the separated fibers from being rejoined (*OCM XI 88-89, CW 96*).

Thus, the mind, through its own effort, must contribute to the eradication its old concupiscent habits and form new virtuous habits that conform to God's order.

In order for the mind to use its attention to apprehend God's Order, it needs *freedom of mind* so that it can stop and withhold consent when confronted with apparent goods and examine them according to Order, seeing if they are true goods (*OCM XI 70, CW 83*). Without it, concupiscent desires would take over the mind's judgment and determine its consent.

But no matter how much strength of mind we acquire, we cannot make that effort without pause, constantly. Thus, in order for man not to fall into error, it is not enough that he have a mind strong enough to support the effort required. In addition we must have another virtue...*Freedom* of the mind, by which man always withholds his

consent until he is invincibly carried to the giving of it (*OCM XI 70, CW 83*).

Therefore nothing is more necessary than freedom of the mind, if we are to love only true goods, live according to order, obey reason inviolably, and acquire true and solid virtue (*OCM XI 79, CW 89*).

Freedom of mind originates from the same source as liberty, namely the mind's non-invincibility towards particular goods. Since the mind is not compelled to love any particular good, it can give or withhold consent when confronted by these goods. Thus, the power to give or withhold consent is a consequence of the indeterminate impression God gives the mind towards the good in general.

God does not lead us either necessarily or invincibly to the love of this [particular] good. We feel that we are free to halt this love, that we have an impulse to go farther—in short, that the impression we have for the universal good (or to speak as others do, our will) is neither constrained nor necessitated to halt at this particular good (*OCM III 18-19, LO 548*).

Recall that the will's degree of non-invincibility is directly related to the mind's liberty, which is, in turn, determined by the mind's level of concupiscence. So the mind's freedom is not a faculty that all minds equally possess, but a virtue that must be acquired. In the end, strength and freedom of mind are not given, but earned.

But it is up to man, or has been up to man, to conserve his strength and freedom of mind and not let his imagination be corrupted such that

even if grace were given to him, it would be fruitless. For if his imagination is corrupted, then spiritual delight in true goods will just barely be felt because of the abundance, vivacity and strength of the sensible pleasures which disturb and captivate it (*OCM XI 83, CW 92*).

The most important way, according to Malebranche, to augment the mind's freedom is to constantly use it. "To make us of freedom AS MUCH AS WE CAN, that is essential and indispensable precept of Logic and of Ethics" (*OCM XI 71, CW 83*). Since acts produce habits, the mind's constant use of its freedom will produce a strong habit in the mind, making it routine to stop and examine all objects that confront it. The mind, by doing this, will favorably dispose itself to the graces of Christ and God, which in turn, can be used to combat concupiscence and discover true goods, respectively. Without forming such habits, the mind is less likely to overcome its concupiscent desires and rationally consent to true goods. Moreover, the mind will not be able to perfect itself by consistently following God's Order.

As we can see, strength and freedom of mind work in conjunction to produce rational judgments. First the mind, when confronted by an apparent good, must stop and withhold its consent. Next it must use its attention to petition God to reveal more information about the object or action in question. After it receives enough evidence about the object, it can then rationally

consent to it or not. Malebranche clearly states this earlier on in *The Search after Truth*.

Now its [the mind's] freedom consists in the fact that not being fully convinced that this honor [particular good] contains all the good it is capable of loving, it can suspend its judgment and love, and then...by its union with the universal being...it can think about the other things and consequently love other goods. Finally, it can compare all goods, love them according to order to the extent to which they ought to be loved, and relate them all to that which contains all goods and which, being alone capable of fulfilling our total capacity of loving, is alone worthy of limiting our love OCM I 48, LO 5-6).

In this case, a perfectly free mind will rationally consent to, or love, an object only if there is enough evidence in support of it or no remorse in loving it (OCM XI 71-72, CW 84; cf. OCM I 54-55, LO 10). Thus, the mind is using its illumination to put itself in accord with God's order; thus, harmonizing its actions with God's will.

Unlike the mind's attention, however, freedom of mind does not produce, or *occasion* God to produce, anything in the mind, even though giving or withholding consent is an activity of the mind. This activity, in terms of withholding consent, merely gives the mind's attention the *opportunity* to examine any particular good or turn towards other goods. It is the attention that *occasions* new modifications in the mind, not the mind's act of withholding consent. When we resist temptation, Malebranche contends,

We can be said to give ourselves a new modification in this sense, that we actually and freely will to think of things other than the false goods that tempt us, and we will not rest in their enjoyment (OCM III 25, LO 551).

The new modification, in this case, is not occasioned by withholding consent, but by the mind's attention to "freely will to think of things other than the false goods that tempt us." So, withholding consent does not produce or occasion any new modifications in the mind.

Freedom of mind, in terms of giving consent to an apparent good, is the mind's ability to end its examination of a particular good and settle its attention on it. This can happen in a couple of ways. The mind could exhaust its examination of an apparent good and see indubitably that it is a true good, or it could succumb to the demands of its concupiscent desires and settle on the good without comparing it to other goods; thereby failing to love the good as it ought to be loved, that is, according to God's Order (OCM III 20, 25, LO 549, 551). Malebranche describes this as an act of *stopping* or *resting*. In relation to sin he argues,

We love a false good that God does not make us love through and invincible impression. We give up seeking the true good and frustrate the impulse God impresses in us. All we do is stop and rest. This is certainly done by an act, but by an immanent act that produces nothing material [real] in our substance—by an act that in this case does not even require of the true cause [God] some material effect in us, neither

new ideas nor sensations, in short, that is, by an act that does nothing and makes the general cause do nothing insofar as it is general, disregarding His justice, for the soul's inactivity, like the body's, has no force or material efficacy. Now when we love a particular good by itself or contrary to order, we receive from God as great an impression of love as if we did not pause over this good (OCM III 24, LO 551).

The mind's "immanent act", in this case, is ultimately the mind's failure to use its attention to examine the false good, by occasioning God to reveal his Order, or use its liberty to move beyond a false good. So, in this case, the mind is not producing or occasioning anything new, it is simply *not using* what God has given it. In relation to merit, the mind *is using* what God has given it, and consents to the good only *after* it has conducted an exhaustive examination, or if time is short, a limited examination that yields a reasonable degree of probability about the good (OCM XI 76-77, CW 87; OCM I 57, LO 11). Hence, the mind rests in the sense that it stops using, or does not use, its attention to examine the good in question. The difference between merit and sin, in this context, is simply the difference between the mind using or not using its freedom and strength of mind before giving consent. Note that Malebranche is willing to admit that if the act of consent does in fact "materially" modify the mind, then the mind has real power.

[I]f our consent, which I view as inactivity or voluntary suspension of seeking and examining, is taken to be a material reality, then I agree

that in this sense the mind can modify itself in different ways through the action or desire to be happy that God places in it, and that in this sense it has a real power (*OCM III 25-26, LO 551*).

Even though Malebranche believes that the mind's immanent act has no physical or real aspect, he does believe that it has a moral aspect. This pertains to the relation between the consenting act and God's order.

But it seems to me that there is no more reality in the consent we give to good than in that we give to evil, that that which is a consequence of a true judgment is right and that which depends on a false judgment is disordered, and that the morality of our consent is derived solely from objects. The soul's repose in God is just, for He is the true good, the true cause of happiness. The same repose in some created thing is unjust, because no creature is a true cause of happiness. But I do not see that our inactivity, whether ordered or disordered, which makes us either just or criminal, of itself materially changes the substance of our soul (*OCM III 26, LO 551*).

The moral quality of the mind's consent is determined by its conformity to God's moral Order. For instance, if the mind consents to a false good, then the act does not conform to God's Order and is therefore considered disordered and sinful. So the act of consent does not change the mind's modifications, it only changes the mind's external relation to the moral Order. Such an external relation, for Malebranche, does not have real being; thus, it cannot result in any real change in the mind. This claim is similar to Malebranche's discussion of non-real relations between ideas.

Thus, we do not claim, as does Saint Augustine, that we see God in seeing truths, but in seeing the *ideas* of these truths—for the ideas are real, whereas the equality between ideas, which is the truth is nothing real. When we say, for example that the cloth we are measuring is three ells long, the cloth and the ells are real. But the equality between them is not a real being—it is only a relation found between the three ells and the cloth. When we say that twice two is four, the ideas of the numbers are real, but the equality between them is only a relation (*OCM I 44, LO 234*).

In this passage, Malebranche seems to distinguish that which is true from that which is real. It is true that the length of cloth is equal to the three ells, but this truth is a mere relation that changes nothing about the ells or the cloth. Similarly, it could be argued, that the mind's act of consent and God's Order are real, but the moral relation between the two is not; thus, nothing changes in the mind or God's order.¹²⁴ So, for Malebranche, some external relations, such as the mind's external relation to God's Order, change nothing about the internal modifications of a substance. Therefore, the moral aspect of consent does not produce, or occasion God to produce, any new modifications either in the mind or any other thing.

¹²⁴ Such an external non-real relation seems analogous to Malebranche's contention that a body's relative position to other bodies changes nothing about its size, shape or quantity of motion. See Tad Schmaltz's (1994) argument for this interpretation, p. 43 fn.100. See Elmar Kremer (2000) for an objection to this position, pp. 213-214. Kremer argues that Malebranche violates the basic principle that a change must mean a change in something, in this case God or the mind's consent. If God changes, it would violate his immutability, if the mind changes, then it violates Malebranche's full-blown occasionalism. One way to get around this objection is to reject the assumption that Malebranche is a full-blown occasionalist. I present my case in chapters four and five.

Bring the pieces of our discussion together, the mind must use its strength and freedom together in order to make free rational choices about particular goods, and combat concupiscent desires. When the mind, aided by Christ's grace, is confronted by an apparent good, it must first withhold its consent, and then use its attention to examine the good by occasioning God to enlighten the mind. The mind should consent only if the examination has established that it is a true good and reveals the proper relations it has to other goods. By doing this, the mind can love the good according to reason and God's Order (*OCM XI 155, CW 144*). In order to augment the mind's strength and freedom, Malebranche believes that the mind must mortify the senses by avoiding objects that excite it and by controlling its imaginations and passions by subordinating and subjecting them to reason and Order. This will help the mind to acknowledge that these things pale in comparison to God and his Order. Moreover, it must use its strength and freedom of mind as much as it can so that it can form the proper habit of consulting Order in all things (*OCM XI 150-152, CW 138-139*). This forces the mind to stop and think before it instinctively consents to false goods.

If the mind, in cooperation with Christ's grace, uses its strength and freedom in this way, it will gain merit. If the mind is determined to give

consent by concupiscent desires or Christ's grace of feeling alone, it will not gain merit even if it correctly consents to a true good. This follows from Malebranche's contention that the mind must love true goods according to reason, not instinct (*OCM V 134, PR 184*).

One must conclude from weighing everything I have just said, that one always merits when one loves the true good through reason; and that one merits not at all when one only loves it through instinct. One always merits when one loves the true good through reason, because order will have it that the true good be loved in that way, and that enlightenment all alone does not transport us at all, when one only loves the true good through instinct, or in so far as pleasure transport or invincibly determines the mind—because order will have it that the true good, or the good of the mind, be loved by reason, be loved by a free love, by a love of choice and of discernment, and that the love which pleasure alone produces is a blind love which is natural and necessary (*OCM V 138, PR 187*).

In the end, a mind that loves by reason, not instinct, is one that uses its reason to advance beyond prevenient delectations, whether concupiscence or Christ's grace, and freely loves the good according to God's order, not according to mind's own needs and desires. As a result, the mind recovers some of the order that was lost by Adam's sin, and increases its perfection, thereby, fulfilling the duty it has to itself. Moreover, the mind fulfills its duties to God

by properly using the power, reason, and will that God has given it (OCM XI 153-192, CW 143-162).¹²⁵

Thus, contrary to Jolley's claim that the mind is cognitively impotent, this account clearly shows a Malebranchean mind that has its own cognitive and volitional resources by which it can actively apprehend God's order and conform its judgments according to it. Obviously, God did not endow it with its own rational structure or a corresponding cognitive capacity to produce pure perceptions on its own, but it is responsible, through its attentive desires, for petitioning (or occasioning) God to reveal his order. What Jolley sees as Malebranche's later theory of efficacious ideas, as opposed to an earlier one that grants cognitive abilities to the mind, I see as one theory. Malebranche is not expounding two *theories*, but two *aspects* of the same theory, emphasizing one aspect over another depending on the context of his discussion. If he is discussing the causally productive side of cognition he will emphasize God's power and the efficacy of ideas. For instance, he uses the causal efficacy of ideas to argue that all ideas must be in God (OCM I 442, LO 232). Yet, if he is discussing the mind's own cognitive resources, he speaks of the mind's

¹²⁵ Malebranche, believing that the mind is made in the image of God (Trinity), states that the mind's free rational love of an object (Holy Spirit) is the consummation of the mind's proper use of its power (Father) and reason (Son or Wisdom) (OCM XI 157, CW 145). Rational love, in this case, is the mind's fulfillment of this image. In this way, the mind unites itself with God insofar as it imitates God as best it can.

strength and freedom of mind, as we saw above. Jolley presents us with an either/or situation, where either God or the mind is cognitively responsible, when in fact Malebranche believes that *both* play important roles in knowledge acquisition. Thus, Jolley's account, as a representative example of the supposed incompatibility of the Malebranche's divine illumination theory and mind's internal resources, is unlikely given the textual evidence and the alternative interpretation presented above.

3.3 Conclusion: Summary of Malebranche's Theory of Perfection

With the habitual use of meditative exercises, and the subsequent increase of its strength and freedom, the mind can effectively purify and inoculate itself from concupiscence. When it does this, the mind can unify its attention and focus it on God's Order, receiving his illumination. With God's illumination the mind can now act according to Order, properly fulfilling its duties to society as well as to itself. As with Augustine, the mind's final stage of perfection is to unify itself with God by recognizing him as the true cause of happiness, and then following his Order as best it can. This recognition culminates in the mind's rational love for God, which can be sustained by constantly pledging to obey God's order (*OCM XI 83, CW 91*). At this stage,

the mind has acquired the highest virtue what Malebranche calls “the habitual and dominant love of immutable Order” (OCM XI 4). In the end, even though the mind depends on God for its happiness, the mind, nevertheless, is responsible for its own happiness. It can do this only by perfecting itself and meriting God’s love.

Thus anyone who works at his own perfection and makes himself to resemble God, works for his own happiness, works for his dignity. If he does that which in some way depends on him to do, that is, if he earns merit by making himself perfect, God will do that in him which in no way depends on him—He will make him happy (OCM XI 23, CW 48).

With Malebranche’s theory of perfection in hand, and dispelling the general consensus amongst commentators that the Malebranchean mind has no cognitive and volitional resources, we can now turn to the more difficult question of how these resources are compatible with his brand of occasionalism. If we can successfully answer this question, we will be able to unify Malebranche’s philosophical system. The next two chapters will be devoted to completing this task.

4. Divine Causation and Malebranche's Occasionalism

4.1 Introduction

In chapter three, I presented Malebranche's theory of perfection and argued that, *contra* Jolley, the Malebranchean mind has the cognitive and volitional resources to perfect itself, and that these resources are integral to his divine illumination theory. Malebranche describes these resources as the mind's strength and freedom, both of which are grounded in the mind's liberty, that is, the will's non-invincibility towards particular goods. Freedom is the mind's ability to withhold consent when confronted by a particular object, and the mind's strength is its level attentive power to focus on that object and elicit from God more information about it so that the mind can properly assess its relationship to the object and respond appropriately, that is, in accordance with God's Order. Strength and freedom of mind, however, are not equally distributed to all minds. In fact, a mind's degree of strength and freedom depends on its ratio of liberty and concupiscence, which is determined by the mind's own natural dispositions, environment, and acquired habits, along with the amount of grace of feeling that it receives from Jesus Christ. The mind, on its own, can offset its concupiscence, and thereby increase its liberty,

by habitually performing mental exercises that can help reduce its concupiscent desires, augment its strength and freedom, and prepare itself to receive and utilize Christ's grace of feeling. By increasing its strength and freedom, the mind can more easily elicit, and focus on, God's illumination. With God's illumination, the mind can now order its life according to reason, not instinct. This enables the mind to perfect itself by unify itself with God by rationally following the same Order that he does.

At first glance, his account of the mind's perfection appears diametrically opposed to another central principle of his philosophical system, that is, his occasionalism. As I mentioned in the introduction, occasionalism is the idea that God alone is causally efficacious, and that the regularities of nature are grounded in God's divine and lawful decrees. Created substances and their modalities are causally inefficacious and merely provide the *occasion* for God to dispense his power in particular ways. If God alone is causally efficacious, then the mind's cognitive and volitional resources appear to be excluded, essentially ruling out the mind's ability to perfect itself. That is, if the mind cannot causally contribute to its own perfection, then the mind cannot be genuinely responsible because responsibility seems to demand some kind of causal contribution on its part. So given Malebranche's

occasionalism, is there any meaningful way to attribute responsibility to the mind without ascribing genuine causal powers to it? Or, turning it around, can Malebranche consistently ascribe self-perfecting powers to the mind while also being an occasionalist? If the answer to both questions is no, then Malebranche's philosophical system is clearly undermined.

Typically, most commentators analyze this problem strictly in terms of the first question. That is, they examine the mind's freedom and responsibility from the perspective of occasionalism, assuming that occasionalism is the immovable point of his system and that all other aspects of his system must conform to it. From this, they try to figure out how Malebranche could attribute responsibility to the mind without ascribing causal powers to it. Such examinations, though insightful and resourceful, fail to do this. A better way to deal with the problem is to examine it in terms of the second question. That is, we need to change our perspective from occasionalism to perfection and try to reconcile the former with the latter rather than the other way around. This makes better sense given that his theory of perfection, not his occasionalism, is at the center of his system, and that his occasionalism is more moveable than we might think. It is clear that Malebranche, throughout his writings, consistently argued that the mind has self-perfecting powers, but it is not clear

that he was a full-blown occasionalist in terms of the mind's modifications. In fact, I believe that Malebranche's brand of occasionalism leaves metaphysical room for the mind's self-perfecting powers.¹²⁶ As we saw in chapter three, these powers are not independent powers, but derivative ones that naturally result from the will. The mind, in this case, merely harnesses God's invincible movement of the mind to the good in general so that it can stop and examine particular goods, and potentially move beyond them by thinking about other goods. The mind, then, is responsible for two things: suspending or giving consent, and the directive control over its attention. Even though the mind's consenting and attentive control are derivative powers, there is still a question of how the mind can *harness* these powers and makes them its own without violating his occasionalism. For example, at one level, the mind's attentive control over the "blind power" of the will in relation to particular goods means that the mind petitions God to present new intellectual, imaginative or sensible objects to the understanding, which in turn, attracts the will and moves it towards new objects (OCM I 47, LO 5). The mind's attention, in this case, is not the true cause of the will's change of direction, as it were, but it

¹²⁶ Again Susan Peppers-Bates (2009) is the exception to this general consensus and also she argues that Malebranche's occasionalism leaves metaphysical room for the mind to produce some of its own attentive desires, pp. 105-112. Generally, we appear to agree on this basic point, but we differ on how we understand Malebranche's particular brand of occasionalism and the role attentive desires play in his occasionalist system. This will be discussed in more detail in chapter five.

nevertheless *occasions* God to *cause* the directional change. Yet, at a deeper level, the causal origin of the mind's petitions or attentive desires appears to be the mind itself, just like the mind's ability to suspend or give consent. In this case, the mind *causes* its own attentive and consenting acts, but they, in turn, do not *cause* any new modifications; they merely *occasion* God to produce new modifications in the mind, such as new perceptions or sensations. Interestingly, Malebranche never unequivocally denies that the mind is causally responsible for its attentive and consenting acts, and his arguments for, and explications of occasionalism do not necessarily exclude this possibility. Of course, he adamantly denies that the acts themselves cause new modifications in the mind, but he does not deny that the mind is causally responsible for these acts. Malebranche circumscribes a very narrow set of activities for the mind, leaving the rest to God. In the end, attributing causal powers to the mind is the only meaningful way to give responsibility to mind for its own perfection. So my answers to the two questions posed above are "no" and "yes" respectively.

Given the inherent difficulties of the problem, and the rather controversial nature of my solution, the best way to proceed is to first provide the necessary context in which to examine his arguments for occasionalism

and then determine their scope. But unlike his theory of perfection, which is Augustinian in origins, Malebranche's occasionalism has scholastic and Cartesian roots. So in order to understand his brand of occasionalism we need to study the ways in which scholastic and Cartesian philosophers incorporate divine causation into their causal theories of the world. We will use the scholastics to help us understand the assumptions and arguments behind the need for God's causal intervention in the created world and demarcate possible divine causal models according to the level of God's intervention, and then use the Cartesians to study the assumed need for occasionalism within their metaphysics and mechanistic physics. Within this context, we can then properly examine Malebranche's own arguments for occasionalism and delimit their scope. Next, in chapter five, I defend a particular interpretation of Malebranche's occasionalism that accommodates the mind's self-perfection, while also entertaining objections to this interpretation and the potential problems that follow from it.

4.2 Scholastic Accounts of Divine Causation

To be clear, Malebranche's use of divine causation in his causal theory of the world is not unique. In fact, divine causation figures centrally in seventeenth-

century theories of causation. It is used to account for such things as the motion of bodies, the causal interactions between immaterial minds and material bodies, and grounding the laws of nature. The reasons for this were not only theological, but philosophical as well. With the slow erosion of Aristotelian scholastic philosophy, and the growing acceptance of Descartes' mechanical philosophy, came new philosophical challenges, especially in the area of natural causation. Descartes' desire to construct a more parsimonious ontology without the various 'occult' powers of scholastic metaphysics, left him and his fellow Cartesians with difficult problems concerning causation. They attempted to solve these problems by incorporating, in some way, God's divine power into their causal theories. Their rejection of scholastic metaphysics, however, did not bar them from utilizing many assumptions that were deeply rooted in scholastic tradition, such as God's creation and conservation of the world, and his immediate cooperation with the actions of his creatures. So, a proper understanding of scholastic theories of divine causation is vital for interpreting seventeenth-century theories of divine causation, particularly Malebranche's occasionalism.

4.2.1 Scholastic Metaphysics and Efficient Causation

Before we begin this section, a few preliminary remarks are in order. The scholastic account I present here is general in nature and does not attempt to tackle the many philosophical differences amongst the scholastic schools, such as the Thomists and Jesuits, or between individual philosophers. It merely provides an outline of key metaphysical principles, and presents the majority opinion on certain philosophical issues, ignoring the disagreements over the details. It also uses the demonstrations of Thomas Aquinas and Francisco Suarez to illustrate the general lines of argument for certain philosophical positions. In the end, the main purpose of this account is to provide the necessary philosophical background for our examination of Malebranche's occasionalism.¹²⁷

The natural world, for scholastics, is a dynamic system of causally interacting substances (animate and inanimate), each with its own individual nature or essence that makes it a member of a natural kind, and determines the active and passive powers it has. This brute fact of nature, experienced through observation, is not in need of argument. Francisco Suarez contends

¹²⁷ I am indebted to Alfred Freddoso's (2002) lucid introduction for clearly up some philosophical puzzles concerning scholastic accounts of efficient and divine causation.

that nothing is more evident than natural change. “For what is better known to the senses than that the sun gives light, fire produces heat, water cools?” (*DM* 18.1.6). To deny this fact, according to Luis de Molina, is downright “stupid”.¹²⁸ This conviction is the empirical basis for the Aristotelian account of natural substances and the changes they undergo.

A natural (or material) substance is a unified entity that has three layers of composition, each referring to a particular metaphysical layer of substance. The most basic layer is that of substantial form and primary matter. A substantial form is an active principle of a substance that determines what that substance is (a “this-such”), whereas matter is the subject of substantial form or the “that out of which” a substance comes to be. Matter, at this level, can be seen as primary or proximate; the former being pure potentiality or possibility, the latter being elemental or lower order structures of matter that can fall under different physical descriptions (e.g. earth, air, fire, water or chemical compounds). In both cases, substantial form gives structure and unifies matter, and in the case of proximate matter, it subsumes lower order entities or substances into a higher order of substantial unity that has its own substantial being and distinctive properties, which are irreducible to the

¹²⁸ Freddoso (2002), p. xlix.

properties of its lower order components. Simply put, substantial form is that which structures and unifies, as matter is that which is unified and structured. This composition constitutes a substance's nature or essence, which in turn, makes the substance a member of natural kind and determines its active and passive powers (*De ente* 30-31; *DM* 15.5.1). The active powers of a given substance are the possible effects that it can produce, and its passive powers are the possible effects that can be produced in it. So for the Aristotelian scholastics, substances are the basic ontological entities of change (rather than events).

The next layer composition is that of substance and accident. Accidents are formal perfections or modifications of substance, which are either inseparable or separable. Inseparable accidents, such as a substance's active and passive powers, are necessary to a substance in such a way that it cannot exist without them. For example, fire is no longer fire if it loses its active power to burn. Separable accidents are contingent to a substance such as color and local motion, or a fire's quantity of heat. In addition, accidents have their own

accidental being or *esse* compared to the substantial being or *esse* of substance.

Aquinas explains this distinction in the following way.¹²⁹

Properly and truly, therefore, *esse* is attributed only to whatever subsists in itself. To this thing a twofold *esse* is attributed. One *esse* comes from those factors from which the unity of being arises, and this is the person's proper, substantial *esse*. The other *esse* is attributed to the person in addition to the factors comprising it, and this is an added or accidental *esse*, as we attribute "to be white" to Socrates when we say "Socrates is white" (*Qq. disp.* IX, q.2, a.2, c and ad. 2).

With these two layers of composition in hand, the third layer, *esse* and *essentia*, can now be explained. The concept of *essentia* can be construed in either a narrow or broad sense. In the narrow sense, it is the *essentia* derived from substantial matter and form, but in the wide sense, it includes the accidental forms of substance as well. Being or *esse*, for scholastics, has two levels of meaning. At one level it denotes existence in general or *esse commune*. It is that in virtue of which a substance is something rather than nothing. At the other level, *esse* is understood as an act-of-existing that admits of degrees or levels. A substance's degree of existence is in proportion to its *essentia*. So such things as humans, dogs, plants, and carbon molecules all have different acts-of-existing. Aquinas calls this such-*esse* (*ST* I, q.44, a.2.c). Such-*esse* is usually described in terms of participation. A created substance is said to

¹²⁹ Note that his use of accident here is limited to separable accidents. Aquinas makes the distinction between inseparable and separable accidents at (*De ente*. 57).

“participate in” *esse* in proportion to what kind of thing it is, with God being Pure or Unparticipated *Esse*. This entails that a substance’s act-of-existing is dependent on God’s pure being. According to Suarez, “only the First Cause is *esse-itself-through-its-essence*; but every other *esse* is a participation in that *esse* and so by its intrinsic necessity, they require that cause in order to exist” (*DM* 21.1.9). So act-of-existing expresses not only the delimited *esse* of substances, but also their dependence on God for *esse* at both levels. As we will see, this dependence on God is essential for scholastic accounts of creation *ex nihilo* and the continuous conservation of substances.

The scholastics use these three compositions to account for genuine change and divine creation. Let’s consider each in turn. Genuine change has three basic principles: matter, form, and privation. Matter is the subject that perdures through, and is modified by, a change, whereas the form is the result of a change. Privation is the state of the subject before change, and denotes not just the absence of the form that is gained as the result of change, but the contrary form. The scholastics explain this process in terms of actuality and potentiality. Matter signifies the potential modifications that a subject can undergo, whereas the form denotes the actualization of a potential modification. So in an unqualified or substantial change, the substantial form

actualizes or structures primary matter in a specific way (or actualizes a set of potentialities in primary matter), and in a qualified or accidental change, the accidental form actualizes a potentiality of a substance. Note that in the former case, primary matter is the 'matter' or subject of change, but in the latter, it is substance.

These two kinds of genuine change are types of productive efficient causation. Efficient causation, in general, is a causal process in which an agent, by means of its own active powers, produces or conserves an effect. Suarez defines this process as one in which an agent directly (*per se*) communicates being or *esse* to an effect by means of an action (DM 17.1.6). This basic definition can be used to cover different types of *per se* efficient causality, only one of which is the focus of our discussion, namely *transeunt* causation, i.e. causes that produce effects outside of the agents themselves.¹³⁰ So in the case of genuine change via *transeunt* action, the process involves an agent acting on a patient (prime matter or substance) in such a way as to communicate being or *esse* (substantial or accidental being) to a patient, which results in an effect,

¹³⁰ Two things need to be said here. First, the account of *transeunt* causation that follows focuses on agent/patient causation, which excludes *creatio ex nihilo*. The difference between the two will be explained below. Second, Suarez distinguishes between three general sets of *per se* efficient causality: principal and instrumental, univocal and equivocal, *transeunt* and immanent. He defines a *per se* cause in terms of direct dependence. "A *per se* cause is a cause on which the effect directly depends for the proper *esse* that it has insofar as it is an effect, in the way in which (says Aristotle) a sculptor is a cause of a statue" (DM 17.2.2).

a substantial or accidental form, in the patient. Now, the communication of *esse* from agent to patient does not consist in the agent transferring a substantial or accidental form to a patient, rather it is the agent actualizing some corresponding potentiality or passive power in the patient. Using Aquinas' example, a hot body, in virtue of its heat, actualizes the potentiality for heat that exists in the other body. Hence the hot body does not transfer its own heat (accidental form) to the other body. He explains the proper causal interaction between agent and patient in the following way. "For a natural agent does not hand over its own form to another subject, but it reduces the passive subject from potency to act" (SCG 3.69.28). This is also described as an agent educating an effect out the patient by means of an action. Furthermore, the *esse* communicated involves the two aspects of *esse* distinguished above. That is, it makes the effect something rather than nothing (*esse commune*), and it makes the effect one particular kind of thing rather than another (such-*esse*).

Note that the determinate effect that results from a *transeunt* action depends on the active powers of the agent and the corresponding passive powers of the patient. Recall that a substance's active and passive powers are inseparable or necessary accidents, which are determined by what kind of thing it is (*essentia*), and delimit the possible effects it can produce and receive.

Simply put, there is a natural restriction on what a substance can do and how it can be affected given its nature. So in a *transeunt* action, the relevant active powers of the agent must correspond to the relevant passive powers or potentiality of the patient. In Aquinas' fire example, the fire's power of heat can produce an effect in a patient only if the patient has the passive power or potential to be heated. From this, we can see that the laws of nature are grounded in, and determined by, the active and passive powers of substances. Powers also provide the basis of scientific investigation for the natural philosopher, since a substance's powers reveal the nature of that substance.

Now the nature of *transeunt* causation is, admittedly, difficult to grasp. The explanation is couched in terms of actuality and potentiality, and it denies that a form is transferred from agent to patient. So what does causal interaction consist in? According to the scholastics it consists in the communication of *esse* from agent to patient by means of an action, the result of which is the actualization of some form in the patient. Now, the *esse* communicated is the substantial or accidental form that is the result of an action (*terminus ad quem*); therefore, the locution "communicates *esse*" refers to the result of an action not what is transferred in an action. The agent communicates *esse* in the sense that its active powers influence the patient's

corresponding potentialities in such a way that they are brought to actuality. For instance, a body's disposition for heat is realized when it is in contact with fire. Similarly, the solubility of salt is realized when it is put in water. Hence, causal interaction between agent and patient consists in an agent activating certain dispositions or capacities in a patient, not in the agent transferring something to the patient. So, in the end, *transeunt* action consists in influence, not transfer. Certainly, this account will not satisfy everyone; nevertheless, the scholastics believe *transeunt* causation is a brute fact of nature that is based on observation.

As we can see, the scholastic account of *transeunt* efficient causation is based on the strong experiential evidence that nature is a dynamic system of causally interacting substances, each with its own determinate behavior according to its nature. They argue that a substance is a unified entity composed of form and matter, which together, constitute its *essentia* or nature. The nature of a substance determines what kind of thing it is, and the active and passive powers it has. It is through its powers that a substance causally interacts with other substances that have corresponding powers. For them, causal interaction consists in an agent, through its own active powers, actualizing a corresponding potentiality in the patient by means of an action.

By attributing powers to creatures, the scholastics are able to ground the laws of nature in nature. This means that laws of nature are not mere nomological correlations among events, but are reflections of real causal connections among substances. In the end, the scholastics have a robust realist account of causation that gives substances an important causal role in the world.

4.2.2 Scholastic Accounts of Divine Causation

The scholastic account of efficient causation, described above, gives us the philosophical materials for building a clear account of divine causation. The scholastics believe that divine causation is compatible with the actions of substances. But before we can understand this, we must first examine how God creates the world *ex nihilo*.

For the scholastics, creation *ex nihilo* falls under the rubric of direct (*per se*) efficient causation. As the definition above states, an efficient cause is a process in which an agent directly (*per se*) communicates being or *esse* to an effect by means of an action (DM 17.1.6). Now the definition does not require that an agent act on a patient, it just requires that an agent produces an effect by means of an action. According to Suarez “it pertains to the nature of an active power not that it be able to act on something, but that it be able to effect

something" (DM 20.1.11). So the relation between active and passive powers, described above, is not an essential one. For Suarez, active powers contain actions and their effects; thus, active powers are not dependent on passive powers. This leaves open the possibility for an agent to produce an effect that does not presuppose an antecedent subject. In other words, it's possible for an agent to create an entity in its entirety *ex nihilo*.

Furthermore, in creation *ex nihilo*, the communication of *esse* cannot be described adequately in terms of actuality and potentiality. The agent is not educating an effect from the patient, but is creating an entity in its entirety *ex nihilo*. So creation is not a matter of influence, but is one of actual creation. That is, the agent does not communicate substantial or accidental being to a perduring subject, but communicates or creates "absolute being", that is, a subsistent substance with all its inseparable accidents. The agent creates a substance, so to speak, "from the bottom up".¹³¹ In the end, only God has this creative power. This is based on the idea that creation *ex nihilo* requires an infinite power, and that such a power cannot be communicated to finite substances (ST 1.45; cf. DM 20.2).

¹³¹ See Alfred Freddoso (2002), p. li.

Given that God created the universe *ex nihilo*, created substances are contingent entities that rely essentially on God for their *esse* and *essentia*. Aquinas notes that there is nothing about a substance's *essentia* that implies its *esse* (*De ente* 46). So, a substance's *esse* must come from an extrinsic principle. Yet, in order to avoid an infinite regress, every substance that has *esse* through another must be reduced to a first principle that has *esse-through-its-essentia*, i.e. God. Thus, all created substances depend essentially on God for their *esse* (*De ente* 46-47). Expressed in terms of participation, a substance's *esse* participates in God as Pure *Esse*, and is therefore dependent on God for its *esse* (*ST* 1.44c).

It is important to note that, for scholastics such as Aquinas and Suarez, the *esse* and *essentia* of substances are distinct, but not separable. They are distinct for the reason that *essentia* does not imply *esse*, but they are inseparable in the sense that there cannot be *essentia* without *esse*. So in God's act of creation *ex nihilo*, God does not give *esse* to a set of *essentiae* in his mind, rather, *essentiae* are eminently (i.e. in a higher form) contained in God's mind, and they are possible only in so far as they are within God's creative power (*DM* 20.1.9; *SCG* 1.54, *ST* 1.8c). If this were not the case, then God would be acting on a presupposed subject, namely *essentiae*, which is inconsistent with

the very nature of creation *ex nihilo*. Thus, *essentiae* and their corresponding *esse*, are created *ex nihilo* simultaneously.

Now the next step in our discussion is to examine the extent to which a substance is dependent on God. Or alternatively, where divine causation ends and substance causation begins. The scholastics considered four theories, ranging from minor dependence to complete dependence, with two moderate positions in between. They are metaphysical deism, conservationism, concurrentism and occasionalism. The majority of the scholastics subscribed to concurrentism, which gives substances the highest degree of dependence on God while also allowing them to exercise their own causal powers, but they were also well aware of the other three and argued vigorously against them. Let's discuss each in turn.

According to metaphysical deism, a substance's dependence on God is limited to the initial act of creation, and beyond that, it can maintain its own *esse*, and use its powers independently of God. Suarez puts the point as follows.

For before an entity receives *esse*, it is no surprise if it depends on another for its being made, since, given that it does not have *esse* of itself, it cannot have it until it receives it from another—which is just what it is for an entity to come to be. By contrast however, after an entity has once received *esse*, there is no longer any reason why it

should continuously depend on the actual influence of another (*DM* 21.1.1).

For the creature's deficiency seems to consist just in its inability to have *esse* unless that *esse* is given by another—and not in its inability to retain the *esse* unless it is given continuously (*DM* 21.1.2).

So even though a substance depends on God for its initial *esse*, that does not mean it needs to God to maintain that *esse*. This is similar to a craftsman building a house. The house needs the craftsman for its initial construction but after that, it no longer needs the craftsman. Analogously, God creates the world *ex nihilo*, and then leaves his creation to unfold according to a dynamic system of causally interacting substances. Thus, dependence is limited to God's initial creation.

Scholastics deny deism on theological as well as philosophical grounds. They argue that the world needs God's constant influence, and without it, the world would fall out of existence. For them, this is an article of faith that is supported by the Fathers of the Church, especially Augustine. In *De Genesi ad Literam*, Augustine, in discussing Genesis 2-3, where God rested on the seventh day, argues that this should be taken as God merely ending creation *ex nihilo*, not that he stops governing and conserving the world.

It is the creator's power, after all, and the virtuosity, the skill and tenacity of the almighty, that causes every created thing to subsist. If

this tenacious virtuosity ceased for one moment to rule and direct the things that have been created, their various species would at once cease to exist, and every nature would collapse into nothingness. It is not, you see, like a mason building houses; when he has finished he goes away, and his work goes on standing when he has stopped working on it and gone away. No, the world will not be able to go on standing for a single moment, if God withdraws from it his controlling hand (*De Gen. ad litt.* 4.12.22).

They demonstrate this by rejecting the argument that after initial creation, substances can maintain their *esse*. For them, God giving creatures their *esse* at creation does not change the fact that they are unable to exist on their own (*DM* 21.1.12, *ST* 1.104.1 ad 2). This means that a substance's continued existence is on par with its first moment of existence. Suarez clarifies this in terms of participation.

If a participated *esse*, by reason of itself alone, requires the influence of the First Agent [God] in order to exist in reality at some given time, then it requires that same influence at any time at which it exists. For it is always the same *esse*, and whatever belongs to it *per se* and primarily always belongs to it (*DM* 20.1.12).

Aquinas and Suarez also explicate this point by distinguishing between two types of conservation, indirectly or mediately, and *per se* and immediately (*ST* 1.104.1-2; *DM* 21.3). The former is when an agent conserves an effect by preventing its corruption or adding something to it. A craftsman conserves a house by repairing its damaged parts and preventing further damage. In this

case, the agent is conserving a preexisting subject. The latter is when an agent conserves the being or *esse* of an effect. In this case, the agent is not conserving a preexisting subject, but is conserving the subject in its very being. Ultimately, this means that the effect continuously depends on the cause for its being. Without the constant influx of *esse*, it would fall out of existence. Aquinas uses the sun's illumination of the air to capture the dependence of a creature's *esse* on God. Just as illuminated air continually depends on the sun for its light, creatures must depend of God for their *esse*. So, in a way, immediate conservation can be imagined as God keeping the light of existence on. If he turns out the light, we no longer exist, just as a room is reduced to darkness by turning the light off. This example also shows that conservation is positive activity or power.

Suarez uses the positive activity of conservation to demonstrate the necessity of divine conservation. This is an argument from permission.¹³² He argues that creatures continue to exist only because God permits them. This means that God does not wish to annihilate his creation, though he has the ability to do so. Now given the fact that all efficient causal actions communicate *esse* of some sort to an effect, it follows that God cannot

¹³² See Freddoso (2002) for a detailed exposition of this argument, pp. xciv-xcv.

annihilate his creation by this action, because at some level *esse* is communicated in the action. So even if the effect is corruptive in nature, there is always some degree of *esse* that is left over. This means that the annihilation of a substance can only come about by God withholding his conservative power. Yet this implies that God must be conserving the substance while it exists. If God did not continually conserve the substance, then it would be reduced to nothing; thus, God must continually conserve the substance. So from the premise that God is capable of annihilating his creation only by withholding his power, it follows that he must continually conserve his creation (*DM* 21.1.14).

Since a substance's continued existence is on par with its initial existence, creation and conservation require the same causal power and have the same effect. This does not mean that God conserves substances through successive [eternal/temporal] actions. In fact, since the effects of creation and conservation are the same, namely *esse*, the action is the same. Thus, it is through one action that God creates and conserves the world. Now, the action, considered as creation, refers to the starting point of action, and considered as conservation, it refers to the continuousness of the action in time. So, in this case, there is only a conceptual distinction between creation and conservation.

As we will see, Malebranche uses this conception of creation and conservation in his divine recreation argument for occasionalism.

In the case of generated substances, however, there is a distinction between the generation of a substance and its conservation. That is, if a finite agent generates a substance through its own causal powers, then the generative act is distinct from God's conservative one. So, in this case, God conserves the substance after its generation. But note that God is still responsible for the creation and conservation of the matter out of which the substance is generated.

The divine causal theory that falls out this line of reasoning is called conservationism. According to conservationism, God's divine causation consists in creating the world *ex nihilo* and continuously conserving substances along with all of their active and passive powers. For their own part, substances are genuine agents that exercise their own causal powers, independently of God, to produce corresponding effects. Thus, the scope of God's divine causation is limited to creation and conservation, and, therefore, does not contribute the actions of substances. Put another way, God is only the remote cause of a created substance's actions as the substance is the proximate cause.

The next level of divine causation, which developed out of creation *ex nihilo* and conservation, is the theory of concurrentism. Concurrentism is the theory that God concurs, or cooperates, with all the actions of created substances. Now, the difficulty of this position is not in developing arguments, but in providing an account that does not collapse in conservationism on the one hand or develop into occasionalism on the other. So let's briefly examine two arguments for concurrentism, and then focus on an account posed by Suarez, that is, to a certain extent, supported textually by Aquinas.

One argument is that divine conservation entails concurrentism. If conservation is true and God immediately conserves the powers of created substances, then God must also immediately conserve the actions and effects produced by those powers. Therefore, God has *per se* and immediate influence on the effects of created substances (*DM* 22.2.7-9). In terms of participation, created agents, as beings-in-participation, necessarily produce actions and effects that are beings-in-participation. Since this is the case, created agents, as well as their actions and effects, require God's *per se* and immediate influence. Thus, God must, in some way, contribute to the effects of created substances.

Argued the other way, conservationism without concurrentism is not really conservationism at all. Recall that the conservationism claims that God immediately conserves created substance and their causal powers, but allows them, as agents, to produce effects independently of his immediate influence. But if this is the case, it seems that the effects do not require God's immediate conservation after their production. That is, if the cause is sufficient to the produce the effect, then the effect requires nothing else but the cause; thus, God's conservation is superfluous. Suarez argues this point in terms of actions.

If God does not have an immediate influence on every action of a creature, then the created action itself does not require God's influence *per se* and immediate influence on every action of a creature, then the created action itself does not require God's influence *per se* and essentially in order to exist, even though it, too, is a certain participation in being; therefore, there is no reason why the form that is effected by such an action should require the First Cause's actual influence for its own conservation (*DM* 22.1.9).

So conservationism without concurrentism contradicts the very nature of conservationism. Therefore, strict conservationism is false.

Another argument, posed by Suarez, runs along the same lines as his argument from permission. Just as God can deprive created substances of *esse* by withholding his action, he can also deprive natural actions of *esse* by

withholding his influence. Since God's action in the first case entails *per se* and immediate influence, it can be inferred that the second case requires the same influence (*DM* 22.1.11). Thus, God is immediately involved in the causal interactions of creatures. Now, the question is, how?

Suarez is well aware of the dangers involved in crafting an account of concurrentism. He must craft it in such a way that God is a cooperative not a mediate cause. That is, both God and created agents must be *per se* and immediate causes of actions and effects without over-determination. This can be done in a few ways. One option is to divide the effect so that God is causally responsible for one part and the created agent is causally responsible for the other. The problem with this, however, is that the created agent will have produced part of the effect by itself, that is, without God's concurrence, in violation of concurrentism. Another option is to say that a single effect is caused by two actions, one by God and the other by a created agent. Yet this runs into the same problem (*DM* 22.3.4). So dividing the effect or action in this way is not compatible with the concurrentist thesis. Suarez, however, argues for a third option that makes God and a created agent act by the very same

cooperative action, but through different orders of causality. In support of this option he relies on two passages by Aquinas.¹³³

It is also apparent that the same effect is not attributed to a natural cause and to divine power in such a way that it is partly done by God, and partly by the natural agent; rather, it is wholly done by both, according to a different way, just as the effect is wholly attributed to the instrument and also wholly to the principal agent (*SCG* 70.8).

One action does not proceed from two agents of the same order. But nothing hinders the same action from proceeding from a primary and secondary agent (*ST* I.105.5.2).

With the idea that God and created agents act by a single action through different orders of causality, Suarez is able to provide a viable account of cooperative action that retains the causal efficacy of created agents, as well as avoids the problem of over-determination.

The different orders of causality correspond to the different powers of God and his creatures. Recall that created agents, given their nature, can only produce effects within their own species, as God, whose power is infinite and unlimited, conserves the *esse* of all things. Now, in terms of a single cooperative action, God is the *per se* and immediate cause of the effect in so far as the effect is something rather than nothing, and the created agent is the *per*

¹³³ I avoid the debate between the Thomists and Jesuits over whether God acts *through* a created agent, like an instrument, to produce an effect or if God and a created agent act by the same cooperative action. Suarez believes, in the end, that Aquinas supported the latter (*SCG* 3.70.6). For more on this debate see *DM* 22.2.

se and immediate cause in so far as the effect is a particular species. Essentially, a created agent's communication of *esse*, as *esse-in-participation*, needs God's immediate influence to sustain it in being. This falls right in line with arguments for concurrentism above. Thus, the action, divided into different causal orders, avoids the over-determination problem since each agent is responsible for a different aspect of the action.

Given this set-up, the created agent is an immediate cause of an effect, but is not independent of God's power because it needs God's concurrence to produce the effect. God, on the other hand, is independent in his influence and concurs freely with created agents. God's concurrence, however, is not whimsical or haphazard, but has a lawful order that is in accordance with his creatures and their natural operations (*DM* 22.4.3). Thus, the regularities we experience in nature are grounded in the causal powers of created substances and in God's lawful concurrence with their causal interaction. But these regularities can, from time to time, be interrupted by miracles. God does this not by obstructing or overriding the natural actions of his creatures, but by merely omitting or withholding his concurrence (*DM* 22.1.11).

It should not be assumed, however, that God's concurrence is an indifferent or blind power that is directed by created agents towards

particular actions. To the contrary, it is tailored according to the particular actions of created agents.

God's concurrence is not one and the same with all secondary causes, but instead varies according to the diversity of the secondary causes. For God concurs with them in such a way as to accommodate himself to each according to its need. Thus, just as he grants numerically distinct concurrences for numerically diverse effects, so too he grants concurrences that are distinct in species for actions that are diverse in species (*DM* 22.4.8).

Thus, God's concurrence is as diverse as the actions of his creatures. His concurrence is general only in so far as it makes a created agent's effect something rather than nothing. This distinction will be important for our discussion of Malebranche's occasionalism, especially his understanding of God's general will.

From the belief that created substances have active and passive powers to the idea that God created the universe *ex nihilo* and continuously conserves it, the scholastics articulate the doctrine of concurrentism, which makes created substances and God cooperative agents in the production of all natural effects without over-determination. The doctrine maintains a delicate balance between the independence of God and the dependence of created substances on God. In the next section, the balance is tipped in favor of God's glory and

omnipotent power, essentially stripping created substances of their causal efficacy.

4.2.3 Occasionalism, al-Ghazālī and Averroes

Occasionalism, in its most rigorous form, is the theory that God is the only causally efficacious power in the universe. Occasionalists, therefore, deny the scholastic idea that created substances are causally responsible, in some way, for their effects. So the regularities experienced in nature are solely grounded on God's lawful power, rendering created substances the occasional causes of God's divine actions. So, for instance, fire does not heat an object, rather, God heats the object on the occasion of the fire's presence (SCG 3.69.1). Substances are merely *sine qua non* causes in so far as God produces effects in their presence. Thus, the concomitance of causal events has nothing to do with the nature of substances.

Occasionalists rely on theological as well as philosophical grounds for their position. The former is based on God's omnipotent and pervasive power, and the latter entails arguments against the natural causation of creatures. The most well-known medieval proponent of this theory is the Islamic religious intellectual Abu Hāmid al-Ghazālī (1058-1111 CE). Al-Ghazālī's poses two

arguments that strike at the heart of the scholastic claim that creatures are causally efficacious. They also expose the fundamental tension between Aristotelian metaphysics and occasionalism.

The first argument attacks the claim that natural causation is a brute fact based on observation. Observation, al-Ghazālī argues, does not show the causal interactions between substances, only the regularities between them. The denial of causal or necessary connections stems from the claim that it is metaphysically possible that the presence of a cause, under sufficient conditions, does not necessitate its effect.

The connection between what is habitually believed to be a cause and what is habitually believe to be an effect is not necessary, according to us. But [with] any two things...it is not necessary of the existence of the one that the other should exist, and it is not a necessity of the nonexistence of the one that the other should not exist—for example, the quenching of thirst and drinking, satiety and eating, burning and contact with fire...Their connection is due to the prior decree of God, who creates them side by side, not to its being necessary in itself, incapable of separation. On the contrary, it is within [divine] power to create satiety without eating, to create death with decapitation, to continue life after decapitation, and so on with to all connected things (MM 17.1.1-20).

Al-Ghazālī concludes from this that “existence “with” a thing does not prove that it exists “by” it” (MM 17.6.31). This argument not only undermines the causal powers of substances, but also the regularities of nature that follow

from them. For al-Ghazālī, however, the regularity and concomitance of causal events are explained by the lawful power of God acting in accordance with his own decrees, except in the case of miracles.¹³⁴

The second argument is premised on the claim that causal efficacy entails knowledge. That is, in order for an agent to produce an effect, it must know how to do it. But there are many cases in which creatures do things that they clearly do not have the requisite knowledge to do; therefore, they are not causally responsible for their effects, God is. Consider the following passages.

For [in the case of] actions that proceed from the human being and the rest of animals, if asked about their number, details and amount, [the individual] would have no information about them. Indeed, the infant boy as he separates from the crib, [beginning to move on his own], will crawl by his own choice to the [mother's] breast to suck...[Again] the spider weaves by way of webs wondrous shapes that astound the geometer by their circularity, the parallelism of the sides of [their concentric shapes] and the symmetry of their organization. One knows by necessity their having no connection with knowing [things] the geometers are unable to know. And the bees design their cells in the form of hexagons...Upon my word, did then the bees know these subtle points which most rational animals fall short of apprehending?

Woe then to those who stray from the path of God, who are conceitedly deceived by their inadequate power and weak ability, who think that they participate with God in creation, invention and the innovating of such wonders and signs. How preposterous, how far off the mark! May the creatures be rendered low; the one who alone has might is the almighty of the earth and heavens (MM[2] 304-305).

¹³⁴ As we will see, al-Ghazali anticipates Malebranche's "necessary connection" argument.

This argument does not necessarily deny that substances have powers, only that these powers are causally inefficacious, thereby rendering them useless. So even if substances had powers they could not use them anyway. Powers without efficacy, one could argue, are not really powers at all.¹³⁵

The scholastics were well aware of occasionalism and its implications for Aristotelian natural philosophy (*SCG* 3.69; *DM* 18.1). Yet, the most revealing response to occasionalism comes from the Islamic Aristotelian philosopher Ibn Rushd, or Averroes. Averroes, in his response to al-Ghazālī, argues that if substances do not have causal powers, then they have no natures. If they have no natures, then there is no way to distinguish one substance from another. This is tantamount to destroying the entire scientific enterprise, and more importantly, Aristotelian metaphysics.

It is self-evident that things have essence and attributes, which dictate the specific acts of each existent, and with respect to which the essences, names, and definitions of things differ. If each existent did not have a specific action, it would not have a specific nature, and if it did not have a specific nature, it would not have a specific name or definition. Thus, all things would be one thing, or rather not even one thing, since we could ask of that one thing: does it have an action or reaction specific to it or not? If it does have one specific action, then since specific actions issue from specific natures [it will have a specific nature]. And if it does not have one specific action, then the one would not be one. Moreover,

¹³⁵ Again, al-Ghazali anticipates Malebranche's "knowledge" argument. One can speculate that Malebranche got this argument, as well as the previous one, from al-Ghazali via Aquinas and Suarez (*SCG* 3.69; *DM* 18.1).

if the nature of the one is revoked, then the nature of the existent is also revoked, and if the nature of the existent is revoked, that entails non-existence (MK 162-3).

The chief aim of Aristotelian natural philosophy is to discover the natures of substances, which is done by observing the activities of substances, and their causal interactions with other substances. So, without causal powers, knowledge of the natural world is impossible. Furthermore, given the inseparability of powers and natures, the denial of one entails the denial of the other. Without natures, substances lose their unity, identity and individuality. Thus, the doctrine of occasionalism undermines Aristotelian metaphysics as well.

As we can see, scholasticism is incompatible with occasionalism. For the scholastics, natural causation is a brute fact of nature that must be reconciled with God's divine actions. The occasionalist rejects this fact, and strips substances of their causal powers, giving causal efficacy to God alone. So, even though occasionalism is just one small step away from concurrentism, the consequences that result, are devastating for scholasticism. Thus, concurrentism is as far as the scholastics can go.

Our discussion of al-Ghazālī expresses the basic motivations behind, and arguments for, occasionalism. It also provides a natural starting point for

our discussion of seventh-century accounts of causation, particularly Cartesian causation, and the different levels of occasionalism that potentially follow from them.

4.3 Cartesian Accounts of Causation: Descartes and La Forge

Cartesians also faced challenges integrating divine causation into their causal theories of the natural world and demarcating where God's causation ends and created substances' begin. As scholastics drew the line at concurrentism, finding occasionalism incompatible with their metaphysics, some Cartesians argued for some form of occasionalism, which they believed, followed from Descartes' new metaphysics and mechanical physics. The origins of Cartesian occasionalism can be found in Descartes' own works, particularly in his argument for continuous creation in his second proof for God's existence in the *Third Meditation* and its application in his theory of body-body causation. This argument, with its scholastic pedigree, was transformed and expanded by some Cartesians to argue for occasionalist theories of causation. Louis de la Forge used it for his occasionalist theory of body-body causation and Malebranche expanded it to minds. In fact, some scholars believe that this is Malebranche's most powerful argument for his occasionalism, and is the most

serious threat to his theory of freedom.¹³⁶ Given its implications for the mind's self-perfection, it is best to first examine the Cartesian roots of the continuous creation argument in Descartes and La Forge, and then see how Malebranche uses it to argue for his occasionalism. By doing this, we can determine its scope and understand the problems it might pose for Malebranche's theory of perfection.

4.3.1 Descartes and Continuous Creation

Unlike the scholastics, who think that the natural world is a dynamic system of causally interacting substances, each with its own substantial form that defines its active and passive powers, Descartes believes that the world is made up of two finite substances, immaterial minds and matter. He replaces the cumbersome scholastic ontology of form, matter, and accidents with a more parsimonious substance/mode ontology. He believes that both substances depend on God for their existence *ex nihilo* and preservation, since they are contingent beings whose existence are not entailed by their essences. Referring to his own existence, Descartes argues in the *Third Meditation*,

For a lifespan can be divided into countless parts, each completely independent of the others, so that it does not follow the fact that I

¹³⁶ See Steven Nadler (1998). Andrew Pessin (2000) argues against this.

existed a little while ago that I must exist now, unless there is some cause which as it were creates me afresh at this moment—that is, which preserves me. For it is quite clear to anyone who attentively considers the nature of time that the same power and action are needed to preserve anything at each individual moment of its duration as would be required to create that thing anew if it were not yet in existence. Hence the distinction between preservation and creation is only a conceptual one, and this is one of the things that are evident by the natural light (AT VII 49, CSM II 33; cf. AT XIB 13, CSM I 200; AT XIB 23-24, CSM I 209).

Here, Descartes argues that since there is nothing about his existence now that guarantees his existence in the future, God must sustain him with the same creative power that brought him into existence. This argument shows that Descartes, following Aquinas and Suarez, believes that since a created substance's continued existence is on par with its initial existence, creation and conservation require the same causal power and have the same effect, that is, being or *esse*. He explicates this claim in his response to Gassendi's objection, given in the *Fifth Objections*, that God does not need to continuously conserve created substances because they have sufficient powers to sustain themselves in existence (AT VII 300-302, CSM II 209-210). Descartes argues that Gassendi is assuming that God's conserving power falls under one form of causation, that of *coming into being* (*secundum fieri*), when in fact it falls under another form, that of causing *being itself* (*secundum esse*). Here, Descartes is using the

scholastic distinction between conserving a preexisting subject, such as a worker repairing a house or a parent nurturing a child, and conserving the subject in its very being, like the sun's causal relationship to light. Descartes argues that the latter is properly applied to God's creative and conserving power, both which pertain to the very being or *esse* of a substance, not the former, which has to do with maintaining the integrity of a substance. Since creation and conservation produce the same effect, namely a substance's being or *esse*, they require the same causal power, that is, *creatio ex nihilo*. From this, Descartes concludes that the action must be the same as well, with the action considered as creation, referring to the starting point of the action, and conservation referring to the continuousness of the action in time. So, in the end, there is only a conceptual distinction between creation and conservation. Given this, Descartes argues against Gassendi that created substances cannot have their own conserving powers. In fact, it is contradictory for a created substance to possess its own conserving power because if God made gave them such a power, then he would be giving them the power to create *ex nihilo*, which is an infinite power or perfection that only an infinite being like God could have (AT VII 368-371, CSM II 254-255; cf. *ST* 1.45; *DM* 20.2)

Descartes' continuous creation argument, with its focus on conserving a substance's very existence, appears to place God's causal involvement in the world at the level of conservation, thereby leaving room for created substances to modify themselves and other creatures.¹³⁷ However, there has been a long and lively debate amongst scholars about whether or not Descartes uses the continuous creation argument to go beyond conservationism to occasionalism in his account of body-body causation. We do not have time to settle the debate here, but we can use it to determine the possible implications of Descartes' continuous creation argument, and then see how it was transformed and used by La Forge and Malebranche to support their own particular brands of occasionalism. The best way to do this, is to briefly explain why Descartes used God as the primary cause of bodily motion, and then examine three different interpretations of his theory of motion that correspond to three levels of God's continuous creation, from conservationism to partial and full-blown occasionalism.

¹³⁷ Kenneth Clatterbaugh (1999), p. 40; Pyle (2003), pp. 35-36.

4.3.2 Descartes and Body-Body Occasionalism

For Descartes, the physical world is filled with matter in motion, and all material objects and their causal interactions can ultimately explained in mechanical terms. In effect, Descartes replaces scholastic substantial forms with a mechanistic physics, which he believed could provide a better explanation of the causal structures of the world. Substantial forms, complained Descartes, should not be used in causal explanations because their nature and “occult” powers are unintelligible, making any explanation based on them unintelligible (AT III 503-504, CSM III 208; cf. AT XI 25-27, SG 18). By stripping the material world of substantial forms, Descartes essentially removes the primary causal mechanism used by the scholastics to explain the causal structure of the material world and forces him to find a replacement. Matter itself is out the question because matter, whose essence is pure extension (length, depth and breath), does not have an inherent motive force. He fills the causal lacuna with God, who infuses motive force into matter. God not only injects motive force into matter, but he also conserves the same quantity of motive force that he created at the beginning of universe. To support this claim, Descartes employs his continuous creation argument to explicate his point.

Thus, God imparted various motions to the parts of matter when he first created them, and he now preserves all this matter in the same way, and by the same process by which he originally created it; and it follows from what we have said that this fact alone makes it most reasonable to think that God likewise always preserves the same quantity of motion in matter (AT VIIIA 61-62, CSM I 240; cf. AT VIIIA 66, CSM I 243).

In *The World*, Descartes suggests that God does more than just conserve the same quantity of motion, but that he moves bodies according to the laws of nature:

...let us think of the differences the He creates within this matter as consisting wholly in the diversity of the motions He gives to its parts. From the first instant of their creation, He causes some to start moving in one direction and others in another, some faster and others slower (or even if you wish, not at all); and He causes them to continue moving thereafter in accordance with ordinary laws of nature (AT XI 34, SG 23; cf. AT VIIIA 61-61, CSM I 240).

It is not clear, however, how God moves bodies “in accordance with the laws of nature”. Does God merely conserve the total quantity of motion and let bodies do the work or does he move them around himself? Tad Schmaltz defends the former interpretation. He argues that as God continuously conserves the same quantity of motion that he infused in matter and dispersed amongst its parts at creation, generating particular modes of bodily duration (i.e. bodies), bodies distribute motion according to their size and collision

speed.¹³⁸ Motion is not transferred upon collision from one body to another, rather the collision causes the production of numerically distinct modes in the affected bodies according to the laws of motion.¹³⁹ The laws of motion, in this case, are not created by God to govern the causal interaction between bodies; rather they merely reflect the effects of these bodily interactions.¹⁴⁰ Presenting extremely detailed textual evidence and strong philosophical arguments in support of his interpretation, Schmaltz partly defends it by relying on Descartes' causal distinction of *secundum esse* and *secundum fieri*, attributing the former to God and the latter to bodies.¹⁴¹ That is, God creates and conserves a constant quantity of matter in motion, and bodies, in turn, are responsible for its distribution in body-body interactions.

Schmaltz's interpretation also makes metaphysical room for Descartes' claim that minds can make modal changes in bodies as well. Descartes suggests this possibility in two letters, one to Henry More (August 1649) and the other to Arnauld (29 July 1648). First More:

The power causing motion may be the power of God himself preserving the same amount of transfer in matter as he put in it in the first moment of creation; or it may be the power of a created substance,

¹³⁸ Schmaltz (2009), p. 124.

¹³⁹ Schmaltz (2009), p. 114.

¹⁴⁰ Schmaltz (2009), p. 124.

¹⁴¹ Schmaltz (2009), p. 118.

like our mind, or any other such thing to which he gave the power to move a body (AT V 403-404, CSMK 381).

Then two passages from the Arnauld letter:

We are conscious, however, of every action by which the mind moves the nerves, in so far as such action is in the mind, where it is simply the inclination of the will towards a particular movement. The inflow of spirits into the nerves, and everything else necessary for this movement, follows upon this inclination of the will (AT V 222, CSMK 357).

That the mind, which is incorporeal, can set a body in motion is shown to us every day by the most certain and most evident experience, without the need of any reasoning or comparison with anything else (AT V 222, CSMK 358).

In the letter to Arnauld, Descartes describes the way in which the mind can act on the body. For Descartes, the principal seat of the soul is the pineal gland. This is the place that the mind and body 'interact' with each other. Descartes argues that the mind can adjust the flow of animal spirits by tilting the gland in different directions. Descartes compares the soul's movement of the gland to a fountaineer (AT XI 131-132, SG 107). Just as the fountaineer can impede, initiate and alter the movements of the flow of water from the tanks, the mind can do something similar to the gland. In article 43 of the *Passions* Descartes describes the mind's action on the body.

Thus when we will to imagine something we have never seen, this volition has the power to make the gland move in the way required to

drive the spirits toward the pores of the brain by whose opening that thing may be represented...Thus, finally, when we will to walk or move our body in some other manner, this volition makes the gland drive the spirits to the muscles conducive to this effect (AT XI 361, SV 42).

Now, how a mind, which is immaterial, can act on the body is not very clear.

Descartes suggests that the union of mind and body instituted by God affords the mind the opportunity to act on the gland (AT XI 356-357, SV 39; AT XI 361-362, SV 42-43). Unfortunately, Descartes does not explain how the mind *moves* or directs the gland. Nonetheless, it seems clear that Descartes believed that the mind is the efficient cause of some bodily motions.

The problem with this picture is that, according to the passage above, the mind injects some kind of motive force or power into the universe by moving and directing the pineal gland. This seems to contradict Descartes' conservation principle that God maintains a constant quantity of motion in matter, thereby excluding any injection of additional motive force. Some scholars, such as Dan Garber, argue that Descartes could avoid this contradiction by limiting the scope of the conservation principle to inanimate bodies, thereby allowing minds to move, by force, animate bodies (i.e. the human body via pineal gland). Schmaltz believes, agreeing with Garber, that this was most likely Descartes' position, but Schmaltz rejects this response on

philosophical grounds. He argues that the quantity of force that the mind uses to move its pineal gland, would, nevertheless, add motion to the total quantity motion, forcing God to act to conserve these additions; thus, violating the claim in his continuous creation argument that creation and conservation are really one action.¹⁴² To avoid this problem, Schmaltz believes that Descartes should ascribe to the idea, posited by Cartesians such as Johann Clauberg, that the mind merely has directional control over the pineal gland just like the fountaineer who merely controls the water flow, but does not add force to the flow.¹⁴³ Whether this avoids the problem or not is beyond the scope of our inquiry.

In the end, Schmaltz believes that Descartes continuous creation argument underlies his theory of body-body causation and that its scope is limited to conservation, making God's continuous creation indeterminate at the level of modal change, leaving that up to bodies and minds. Abstracting from this, we can see that continuous creation does not necessarily entail that God continuously create/conserves substances with a complete set of determinate modes, but it could be limited to conserving substances and their causal powers, leaving modal changes up to them. Now let's turn to Dan

¹⁴² Schmaltz (2009), pp. 174-177.

¹⁴³ Schmaltz (2009), pp. 176-177.

Garber's account of Descartes' theory of body-body causation that gives God a larger causal role.

Garber believes that Descartes has an occasionalist theory of body-body causation whereby God is not only causally responsible for keeping the material world in existence, but also for the particular modal changes that occur when bodies collide, excluding bodies from the causal story.¹⁴⁴ In this case, when two bodies collide *God* adjusts the motion of each body according to its size and speed, and the laws of motion. To put this in occasionalist terms, the contact between two bodies provides God with the 'occasion' to change the motion of each body according to the laws of nature. So, *contra* Schmaltz, Garber believes that Descartes' God is also involved with the modal changes of bodies.

Interestingly, even though Garber uses Descartes' continuous creation argument to buttress his occasionalist reading, he restricts God's conserving activity to holding the material world in *existence*, seeing God's infusion of motion, and the modal changes that follow, as a separate activity. In his words, "God sustains bodies in their being and sustains bodies in their motion. But, it is important to note, *these two activities seem to be quite distinct*"

¹⁴⁴ See Hatfield's (1979) seminal article on Descartes' occasionalist theories of bodies for the main arguments in support of this interpretation.

[his emphasis].¹⁴⁵ Garber describes the second activity as God giving bodies a “divine shove.”¹⁴⁶ So, God, as a sustaining cause, holds the material world in existence through continuous creation, and as a modal cause, he modifies bodies by moving them from one place to another according to the laws of motion.

Garber argues that one important advantage of his divine impulse theory is that it can accommodate Descartes claim that minds can move bodies, unlike a theory that extends God’s creating/conserving activities to both bodies and all their modes, leaving no room for the mind to exercise its powers.¹⁴⁷ Moreover, as we saw above, Garber claims that he can also avoid the problem of Descartes’ conservation of motion principle by limiting this principle to God’s modal activities amongst inanimate bodies, freeing up mind to move animate bodies (i.e. pineal gland) by force. With this addition, Garber attributes a partial occasionalist theory to Descartes by dividing modal changes between God and finite minds.

Even though Schmaltz and Garber have different accounts of Descartes’ theory, they both agree that Descartes’ continuous creation argument is

¹⁴⁵ Dan Garber (1987), p. 578. Also see Hatfield (1979), p. 130 fn. 74.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Garber (2001), pp. 209-210.

behind his theory of bodily motions, and that the mind can act, with directional or motive control, on bodies. As Garber believes the scope of God's conserving activity is restricted to keeping the material world in existence, making God's divine pushing of bodies a separate activity, Schmaltz widens it to include motion as well, making bodies responsible for its distribution. As a result, motive force is part of the material world for Schmaltz, but not for Garber, who places it in God and minds. These two interpretations illustrate the difficulty in pinning down Descartes' theory of bodily motion and identifying the scope of his continuous creation argument in body-body causation. So it's no surprise that Louis de la Forge, seeing himself as a faithful follower of Descartes, interpreted the scope of the continuous creation argument to not only include matter and motion, but also the modal changes of bodies. Considered as one of the major sources of Malebranche's occasionalism, La Forge is the next logical step in providing the necessary background for our study.¹⁴⁸ It is to this account that we now turn.

¹⁴⁸ Nadler (1998), p. 231.

4.3.3 La Forge and Continuous Creation

La Forge claims that his work, *Treatise on the Human Mind*, is the natural outcome of Descartes' metaphysical principles. In the last paragraph of the work La Forge concludes, "I think I have suggested nothing here which is not found in the writings of Mr Descartes, or which could not be drawn as necessary conclusions from the first truths which he demonstrated in his metaphysics" (DC 233). Though La Forge modestly suggests that his work is a "poor" substitute for what Descartes would have written if he had lived to complete *The Treatise on Man*, he believes that he has captured the essence of Descartes' understanding of the mind (DC 33, 100-101). What concerns us here is La Forge's understanding of Descartes' continuous creation argument, and how his interpretation might have influenced Malebranche.

Following Descartes, La Forge argues that matter, as pure extension, does not have a motive force for causing modal changes of motion in bodies and that God must be the cause bodily motion (DC 145-146). Believing that the continuous creation argument is behind Descartes' theory of motion, La Forge uses it to argue for an occasionalist theory of body-body causation. La Forge does this by widening the scope of God's creating/conserving activities to not only matter and motion, but also to the *modal changes of bodies*. For him, God

does not, as a separate activity, give a “divine shove” to a body that he wants to move, but create/conserves the body and its modes in successive locations.

I also claim that there is no creature, spiritual or corporeal, which can cause change in it or in any of its parts, in the second moment of their creation, if the Creator does not do so himself. Since it was He who produced this part of matter in place A, for example, not only must he continue to produce it if he wishes it to continue to exist but also, since he cannot create it everywhere or nowhere, he must put it in place B himself if he wishes it to be there. For if he put it anywhere else there is no force capable of removing it from that location (DC 147).

La Forge argues that continuous creation *entails* that God must move particular bodies because he must create/conserves a body, with all of its modifications, in some place in relation to other bodies. He bases this on the Cartesian claim that bodies are parts of matter that are individuated according to their relative motion to other parts. This motion defines a body’s size, shape and speed (DC 146). So in order for God to create/conserves bodies he *must* create/conserves their motion as well. Accordingly, if God wants to move a body continuously from place A to place D, then God must “recreate” that body at A, B, C, and D. If he wants to keep a body at rest, he just “recreates” it in the same place. I put scare quotes around recreation because some scholars, such as Garber, have misunderstood this to mean that God *literally* recreates the material world anew from whole cloth at every moment. Garber calls this

a “cinematic view” of motion.¹⁴⁹ First, this interpretation seems to entail multiple creative acts on God’s part which is inconsistent with the fact that God’s creation and conservation are considered one and the same action, with the former referring to the starting point of the action, and the latter referring to the continuousness of the action in time. And second, La Forge argues that even though a body cannot cause another body to move by motive force, it can, given its size and speed at impact, *determine* God to move the other body according to the three laws of motion that he established to govern the material world.

Although God is thus the universal cause of all the motions which occur in the world, I also recognize bodies and minds as the particular causes of these same motions, not really in producing any ‘impressed’ quality in the way the Schools explain it, but in determining and forcing the first cause to apply his force and motive power to the bodies to which he would not otherwise have applied it according to the way He decided to govern himself in relation to bodies and minds; that is, for bodies, according to the laws of motion...(DC 148).

This suggests that La Forge does not see the world as being recreated at every moment like at old time movie reel flickering in and out of existence, but as a continuous unfolding of God’s creative activity, with God’s motive force rippling through time and matter. Even though La Forge uses the continuous

¹⁴⁹ Garber (2001), p. 208. Hatfield (1979) discusses this view and compares it with “divine shove” view argued for by Garber, p. 130 fn. 74.

creation argument to account for bodies and their modal changes, he believes that bodies, nevertheless, provide the conditions or occasions, for God to modally adjust the motion of bodies. So the emphasis should be put on the conservation or the temporal side of God's action when discussing La Forge's theory of bodily motion, not the creation side. One might object that bodies, by providing the conditions for motion, are still technically causes, contradicting this occasionalist interpretation. This might be true according to contemporary accounts of causation that define causation as nomological correlations between *events*. La Forge, however, understands causation in terms of *forces* or *powers*, not seeing passive bodily conditions, in this case, as true causes, but only as determining or *occasional* causes. Understanding La Forge in this way will have implications for our discussion of Malebranche's famous "recreation" argument for his brand of occasionalism.

La Forge restricts his continuous creation argument to bodies and their modes and does not explicitly extend it to minds and their modifications.¹⁵⁰

This provides metaphysical room for the mind to move bodies.

But the force which moves can be considered either as belonging to God, who conserves in the parts of matter as much transfer or motion as he put there in creating it ('namely, by continuing to move them

¹⁵⁰ Nadler (1998) argues that since continuous creation argument logically extends to minds, La Forge, to stay consistent, must include minds as well.

with the same force'), or as belonging to a created substance, for example, our soul and whatever else there may be to which God gave the power to move bodies... (DC 150).

La Forge is aware of the conservation principle and its consequences, as we discussed above, and argues that the mind cannot inject new motion in the material world. It can only exert directional force or control over the pineal gland, which in turn, directs the animal spirits to the different parts of the body, just like Descartes' fountainer (DC 150-151). Put in occasionalist language, the mind's directional influence on the gland occasions God to move the animal spirits to the different parts of the body.

In the end, pinning down Descartes' theory of motion is not easy, and we do not have to figure it out here. What is important for our discussion is the many ways in which his continuous creation argument has been interpreted. As Garber limits its range to keeping the material world in existence, making God's divine pushing of bodies a separate activity, and with Schmaltz widening it to include both matter and motion, leaving modal changes to bodies, La Forge takes it a step further to encompass the entire operation including all bodily modes. Malebranche, picking up where La Forge left off, uses God's continuous creation to argue for a strong form of occasionalism that appears to deny causal efficacy to both bodies *and* minds,

making God the only causal force in the universe. But just like Descartes, the scope of his continuous creation argument, particularly in the case of mind's attentive desires, is not as clear as some scholars might think. In fact, his three major arguments for occasionalism, from necessary connection, from knowledge, and from continuous creation, do not explicitly cover the mind's attentive desires. So, in the end, I believe there is metaphysical room for the mind to be responsible for its self-perfection. With this in hand, we can then move to examine, in chapter five, a particular interpretation of occasionalism that accommodates the mind's perfection.

4.4 Malebranche's Arguments for Occasionalism

At the heart of Malebranche's occasionalism is the claim that "God is the only true cause; that the nature and power of each thing is nothing but the will of God; that all natural causes are not *true* causes but only *occasional* causes..." (OCM II 312, LO 448). Many statements like this one appear throughout Malebranche's work, and taken together, present seemingly undeniable textual evidence that Malebranche is a full-blown occasionalist, whereby God is the only efficacious cause in the universe and that minds and bodies are causally impotent, and at most, provide the occasioning conditions for God's

causal activities. Couple these statements with his arguments denying the causal efficacy of mind's and bodies, it appears to be a closed and shut case. Just as bodies are not causally responsible for their motions, minds are not causally responsible for any of their own internal states, such as sensations, thoughts, and volitions. But if we actually take a closer look at the context in which Malebranche made these statements and examine the scope of his arguments, we can see that Malebranche never denied that the mind could produce its own attentive desires. In fact, he was careful enough to leave room for them within his particular brand of occasionalism.

Malebranche marshals medieval and Cartesian assumptions and arguments for divine causation to formulate his three main arguments for occasionalism. Two of them have roots in al-Ghazālī's arguments against creaturely causation, and the third in the continuous creation argument whose lineage goes through La Forge and Descartes, and then back to Aquinas and Suarez. All three present problems for self-perfection, the most troubling being the continuous creation argument because it appears to outright exclude the mind's attentive desires. Leaving the most difficult for last, let's turn to the first two arguments so that we can understand the nature and scope of his occasionalism.

One of his most influential arguments is the one from necessary connection, where Malebranche, through an analysis of causation in general, argues that minds and bodies are causally impotent. What distinguishes a causal relation from a correlation is that there is a necessary connection between two objects or events, such that, given the same conditions, if one event occurs, the other *must* occur (OCM II 317, LO 450). Causal relations cannot be discovered through sensible experience because witnessing a constant conjunction between two events does not give us license to conclude that there is a genuine causal relation between them (*contra* the scholastics) (OCM III 209, LO 660). They can only be discovered through reason.

In the case of bodies, we cannot conceive a necessary connection between a body and its own movement or colliding bodies and their subsequent movements. We experience them in constant conjunction, but that does not imply a causal relation. By attending to the idea of body, one discovers that bodies can only bear the properties of pure extension (e.g. size, shape, divisibility, motion and rest) and therefore do not have an inherent motive force to move bodies (OCM II 313, LO 448).

The situation is same for minds. We cannot conceive a necessary connection between the mind's desire to move its arm and the arm's

movement. The mind experiences, through inner sensation, its desire to move the arm, and the effort that naturally goes along with it, in conjunction with a sensation of the arm's movement, but that does not mean that there is a necessary connection between the desire and effort, on the one hand, and the arm's movement on the other (*OCM III 227-228, LO 670*). He bases this inconceivability on the inherent dissimilarities between the mind's (immaterial) desires and the arm's (material) movements.

But I deny that my will is the true cause of my arm's movement, of my mind's ideas, and of other things accompanying my volitions, for I see no relation whatever between such different things. I even see clearly that there can be no relation between the volition I have to move my arm and the agitation of the animal spirits... (*OCM III 225-226, LO 669*).

This also applies to the mind's own inner states. The mind experiences a strong correlation between its desire to think of something and the presentation of a corresponding idea, but, again, that does not imply that there is a causal relation between the two.

The same is true of our faculty of thinking. We know through inner sensation that we will to think of something, that we make an effort to do so, and that at the moment of our desire and effort, the idea of that thing is presented to our mind. But we do not know through inner sensation that our will or effort produces an idea. We do not see through reason that this could happen. It is through prejudice that we believe that our attention or desires are the cause of our ideas; this is due to the fact that a hundred times a day we prove that our ideas follow of accompany them...we do not see in us any power to produce

them; neither reason nor the inner sensation we have of ourselves tells us anything about this (OCM III 229, LO 671).

In fact, it is inconceivable for the mind to produce its own ideas because to will an idea is to already presuppose the idea because the mind cannot will what it does not know. So it is wrong to say that my produces it own ideas (OCM III 226, LO 669).

The mind's causal impotence goes even deeper for Malebranche. He argues that *all* of the mind's volitions are causally inefficacious as well.

Man wills, but his volitions are impotent in themselves; they produce nothing; they do not preclude God's doing everything, because God himself produces our volitions in us through the impression He gives us toward the good in general, for without this impression we would be able to will nothings (OCM III 225, LO 669).

In the end, he leaves us with a bleak picture of the mind's abilities.

You cannot yourself move your arm, change place, situation, posture, do good or wrong to others, or effect the least change in the universe. Here you are in the world without a single power, immobile as a rock, as stupid, as it were, as a stump (OCM XII 165, JS 119).

God, however, can satisfy the 'necessary connection' requirement because he has, unlike minds and bodies, an infinite power.

A true cause as I understand it is one such that the mind perceives a necessary connection between it and its effect. Now the mind perceives a necessary connection only between the infinitely perfect being and its effects. Therefore, it is only God who is the true cause and who truly has the power to move bodies (OCM II 316, LO 450).

God needs no instruments to act; it suffices that He wills in order that a thing be, because it is a contradiction that He should will and that what He wills should not happen (*OCM II 316, LO 450*).

God's infinite power entails that whatever God wills necessarily comes to be.

We cannot conceive it to be otherwise. Malebranche explains this in terms of bodily motion.

But when one thinks about the idea of God, i.e., of an infinitely perfect and consequently all-powerful being, one knows that there is such a connection between his will and the motion of all bodies, that it is impossible to conceive that He wills a body to be moved and that this body not be moved (*OCM II 316, LO 450*).

So it appears that Malebranche believes that only something with an infinite power can satisfy the necessary connection requirement for causal efficacy.

But if this is the case, it appears that even if finite minds and bodies *had* finite causal powers, they still would not be true causes. Moreover, even if God were able to give an infinite power to finite minds and bodies, he would be giving them not only the power to modify themselves and others, but also the power to create and annihilate, making them omnipotent and godlike.

Malebranche outright dismisses such an idolatrous idea (*OCM II 317, LO 450-451*). For Malebranche God does everything.

Bodies, minds, pure intelligences [i.e. angels], all these can do nothing. It is He who made minds, who enlightens and activates them. It is He

who created the sky and the earth, and who regulates their motions. In short, it is the Author of our being who executes our will...(OCM II 318, LO 451).

This argument appears to render the mind causally impotent. God is causally responsible for the mind's thoughts, sensations, and volitions. If this is so, then how can the mind be responsible for anything, particularly its attentive desires? First of all, if we examine the text closely Malebranche *never* denies that the mind is responsible for its own attentive desires. Of course, he argues that the mind's attentive desires are causally impotent and cannot modify the mind by producing a sensation, an idea, or move a body. But this is consistent with his claim that attentive desires only petition or occasion God to reveal more information to the mind about an object under investigation or reveal different ideas to the mind so that it can move beyond it and seek other objects. But, he never targets the mind's ability to produce its own attentive desires. Recall the passage cited above.

Man wills, but his volitions are impotent in themselves; they produce nothing; they do not preclude God's doing everything, because God himself produces our volitions in us through the impression He gives us toward the good in general, for without this impression we would be able to will nothing (OCM III 225, LO 669).

The first sentence merely states the mind's volitions cannot causally modify the mind in anyway. The second sentence, however, appears to suggest that

God is responsible for the volitions themselves. But we need to be careful here. As we saw in chapter three, the will is God's invincible impression towards the good general and it is through this impression that the mind can love particular goods, or for that matter, anything at all. But it is up to the mind, through its attentive desires, to determine or direct this impression. The few sentences that come before the passage, and follow after, support this reading.

I grant that man wills and that he determines himself; but this is because God makes him will by constantly leading him toward the good. He determines himself; but this is because God gives him all the ideas and sensation that are motives by which he determines himself (*OCM III 224-225, LO 669*).

There is quite a difference between our minds and the bodies that surround us. Our mind wills, it acts, it determines itself; I have no doubt about this whatsoever. We are convinced of it by inner sensation we have of ourselves (*OCM III 225, LO 669*).

Of course, God determines the mind by producing sensations and passions, and revealing ideas to the mind that naturally incline it towards apparent goods, but the mind can, nonetheless, override, or move beyond, these natural inclinations by using its attending power. Without sensations and ideas to provide content to the mind or the will to motivate it, the attention would have no material to work with and, therefore, desire nothing. So God's causal

power is necessary for the mind's attending power by providing conditions for its exercise, but God is not responsible for how the mind uses it.¹⁵¹

Secondly, the necessary connection argument with its "infinite power" requirement does not appear to apply to the mind's attentive desires. Malebranche does not explicitly address this issue, but he does suggest that the mind's attentive desires are brute desires that do not causally require second and third order desires, such that, for the mind to desire X it needs a desire Y to desire X, and so on (*OCM* III 27, 225, LO 552, 669).¹⁵² Of course, there are structuring or action guiding desires, such as the desire for self-perfection, which may guide the mind's attentive desires, but the guiding desire itself is merely an advising cause and thus not an efficient one that requires an infinite power.

And lastly, attentive desires do not need God as a causal intermediary as in the case of sensations and ideas. As we saw in the last chapter, a sensation is a complex of mental and physical processes, whereby the actual 'felt' sensation corresponds to, and are occasioned by, a pattern of brain traces. This dual aspect requires God to coordinate, via mind-body union, both the

¹⁵¹ Peppers-Bates (2009) correctly captures this idea in terms of agent causation, whereby the mind is the *immanent* causal source of its attentive desires and is outside God's *transeunt* causal activity, pp. 108-110.

¹⁵² Peppers-Bates (2009), p. 110.

physical and mental side of causation. The intellectual perception of ideas is also a complex process that requires God to form intentional relations between the mind's understanding and his ideas. So both sensations and ideas require complex processes that only God can do. But attentive desires do not directly rely on mind-body or mind-God union, but are simple volitions that come from mind itself. Of course, attentive desires *occasion* bodily motions and new intentional relations and so they are merely "immanent" acts of the mind (OCM III 25, LO 551). In the end, the necessary connection argument is concerned with explaining body-body, mind-body, and mind-God causation, *not* with the mind's attentive desires. So this argument does not preclude the mind's power of attention.

The second argument is an argument from knowledge. For Malebranche, a true cause must not only have a necessary connection to its effects, but it must know *how* to bring about the effect. So even if the mind had the power to move its body, it would still need to know *how* to move it. As al-Ghazālī's spider does not know how to spin its intricate web, the mind, given the complexity of human physiology, can never meet this epistemic requirement as well.

For, even assuming that our volitions were truly the motor force of our bodies...how is it conceivable that the soul should move the body? Our arm, for example, is moved only because spirits swell certain of the muscles composing it...but this is inconceivable, unless we allow in the soul an infinite number of volitions for the least movement of the body, because in order to move it, an infinite number of communications of motion must take place. For, in short, since the soul is a particular cause and cannot know exactly the size and agitation of an infinite number of particles that collide with each other when the spirits are in the muscles, it could neither establish a general law of the communication of motion, nor follow it exactly had it established it (*OCM* III 228, LO 671).

Given the mind's finite capacities, it is impossible for the mind to cause and direct complex bodily motions. Only God, who has an infinite power and intellect, can do this. This argument could also be expanded to include the mind's sensations and ideas, but I do not think it legitimately covers the mind's attentive desires. Unlike sensations and ideas, which require complex interactions between the mind, its body and God, attentive desires come from the mind alone. They do not require complex bodily movements or the production of ideas. So they are not the kind of things that require knowledge for their production like a workman needs when he builds a house or a painter when rendering a portrait. The mind does not need to know *how* to desire, it just does it. They are simple, immediate acts of the mind. One could also argue that the 'knowledge' of desire is imprinted on the will by God's

continuous movement of the mind towards the good in general. In this case, attentive desires are epistemically parasitic, as it were, on this indeterminate movement. So, the knowledge argument seems inapplicable on its face, but it also could be satisfied if the objection is pushed.

The most powerful argument in Malebranche's arsenal is the continuous creation argument, which is presented in detail in his *Dialogues on Metaphysics and on Religion*. There, he follows the same lines of reasoning behind God's continuous creation that are found in the scholastics, Descartes, and La Forge. He believes that God is the creative and conserving force of the created world, and without his constant conservation, created substances, as contingent beings, would fall out of existence. Since a created substance's continued existence is on par with its initial existence, creation and conservation require the same causal power and have the same effect, that is, being or *esse*. Given this, God's creating/conserving action must be the same as well, with creation referring to the starting point of the action and conservation referring to the continuous of the action in time. Theodore, Malebranche's mouthpiece in the dialogue, succinctly presents this aspect of the argument.

For the world assuredly depends on the will of the creator. If the world subsists, it is because God wills it to existence. Thus, the conservation of creatures is, on the part of God, nothing but their continued creation. I say on the part of God who acts. For on the part of creatures there appears to be a difference, since by the act of creation they pass from nothingness to being, whereas by the act of conservation they continue to be. But in essence the act of creation does not cease, because in God creation and conservation are but a single volition which, consequently, is necessarily followed by the same effects (*OCM XII 157, JS 112*).

Here, Theodore's is discussing God's creating/conserving power in terms of maintaining the *existence* of the world and its creatures. Taking this passage in isolation, we could assume that divine causation, for Malebranche, is limited to conservationism, with God only sustaining created substances in their being, allowing them to modify themselves and causally interact with other substances. But taken in context, Theodore is employing God's continuous creation to argue for a strong form of body-body occasionalism, where God is not only causally responsible for sustaining a body in existence, but also for all of its modal changes. Following the same line of reasoning as La Forge, Theodore argues that in order for God to create/conservate a body, he must also create/conservate it in a particular location. He explains this to his pupil Aristes:

But it is the will of God that gives existence to bodies and to all creatures, whose existence is certainly not necessary. Since this same volition that has created them always subsists, they always exist... Thus it is the same volition that puts bodies at rest or in motion, because it is the same volition which gives them being, and because they cannot

exist without being at rest or in motion. For, take note, God cannot do the impossible, or that which contains a contradiction...Thus He cannot will that this chair exist, without at the same time willing that it exist either here or there...since you cannot conceive of a chair existing unless it exists somewhere...(OCM XII 156, JS 111-112).

Since existent bodies are defined by their size, shape and motion, God cannot create a body without a determinate set of modes. For instance, an existent house without a particular size, shape and location is inconceivable. If this is the case, God's continuous creation of bodies must extend to their modes. Of course, as Aristes suggests, we can have an abstract concept of a house, but, again, this is not a house that could *exist*.

That is not what I am saying to you. You can think of a body in general, and make abstractions as you please. I recognize that...But once again I am telling you that you cannot conceive of a body that exists, which does not at the same time exist somewhere, and whose relation to other bodies neither changes nor does not change, and that consequently is neither at rest nor in motion (OCM XII 156, JS 112).

According to this schema, God's creating/conserving act, from a temporal perspective, initially brings bodies into existence *ex nihilo* and then continues to unfold in time, conserving bodies in relative rest or motion according to the laws of nature. If God is creating/conserving bodies with all their modes, then there is no left room for mind-body causation according to Malebranche.

Thus, minds cannot infuse motion into or change the direction of bodies.

Theodore, speaking to Aristes, argues,

Further, I claim, it is a contradiction for you to be able to move your armchair...Now it is a contradiction that God wills this armchair to exist, unless He wills it to exist somewhere and unless, by the efficacy of His will, He puts it there, creates it there. Hence, no power can convey to where God does not convey it, nor fix nor stop it where God does not stop, unless God accommodates the efficacy of His action to the inefficaciousness of His creatures (*OCM XII* 160, *JS* 115-116).

As this passage suggests, some scholars have described God's action as "recreation," arguing that God moves bodies by recreating the body in successive locations. So if God wants to move a body from place W to place Z, then God must "recreate" that body at W, X, Y, and Z. If he wants to keep a body at rest, he just "recreates" it in the same place.¹⁵³ But I think that this is an extreme reading of Malebranche's theory and produces serious, but unnecessary, problems for his occasionalism in general. Following Garber, recreation implies a cinematic view of bodily motion, where a body is merely a set of spatiotemporal slices, with each slice spatiotemporally related to each other, but, nevertheless, metaphysically isolated from every other like the cells in a movie reel that present a single image on the screen. But this runs roughshod over Malebranche's explanation of bodily motion. Just as La Forge,

¹⁵³ Pyle (2003), p. 111.

Malebranche uses God's continuous creation to argue for body-body occasionalism, but he believes that bodies, given their size, speed, and position, provide the conditions or *occasions* for God to modally adjust their motions (OCM III 216-217, LO 664; OCM XII 164, 244, JS 119, 188). If God is literally recreating substances at every moment in time, then bodies do not really *occasion* anything. They are merely spatiotemporal markers for God's recreating activities. This will be argued for in more detail in the next chapter.

So, as Descartes appears to limit the continuous creation argument to *matter*, Malebranche expands it to the level of *bodies*, which are, metaphysically, parts of matter that are individuated according to their relative motion to other parts, and it is from this motion that they derive their size, shape and speed (OCM XI 239-240, JS 184). Given this, Malebranche believes that God's continuous creation logically extends to the modal changes of bodies because without them, God would not be able to create bodies at all.¹⁵⁴

Malebranche also extends the continuous creation argument to minds as well. It is debatable, however, whether he limits God's continuous creation to the mind as a substance or extends it to all of the mind's modifications as

¹⁵⁴ Pessin (2000) in "Does Continuous Creation Entail Occasionalism?" explicates this point, pp. 422-425.

well. In other words, is God's continuous creation of minds the same as his continuous creation of bodies? If it is, then it appears that there is no metaphysical room for the mind to produce its own attentive desires. However, I believe that the textual evidence does not necessarily support this conclusion. Let's first examine the textual evidence, and then discuss the philosophical issues.

Given our concerns, the best place to start is with Andrew Pyle's detailed account of Malebranche's theory of freedom in terms of God's continuous creation. In his discussion, Pyle argues that Malebranche presents two inconsistent accounts of how the mind acts freely, one depending upon an interpretation of God's continuous creation that does not include the mind's modifications, and another that does. Pyle has us consider two passages that are representative of each account. Here is the first one.

Consequently, I propose to designate by the word WILL, or capacity of the soul has of loving different goods, *the impression of natural impulse that carries us toward general and indeterminate good*; and by FREEDOM, I mean nothing else but the power that the mind has of turning this impression toward objects that please us so that our natural inclinations are made to settle upon some particular object, which inclinations were hitherto vaguely and indeterminately directed toward the universal or general good, that is, towards God, who alone is the general good because He alone contains in Himself all goods (OCM I 46-47, LO 5).

In this passage, according to Pyle, Malebranche is arguing that the mind has a causal power that can direct God's indeterminate impression towards the good in general, likening God to a motor and the mind to a steering wheel. God's continuous creation in this case would be limited to sustaining the mind in existence and conserving the mind's indeterminate impression towards the good in general, allowing the mind determine its own volitions.¹⁵⁵

Pyle believes that the next passage makes a stronger claim about continuous creation, eliminating the mind's directional power.

But not only our will (or our love for the good in general) comes from God, but also our inclinations for particular goods (which inclinations are common to, but not equally strong among, all men), such as our inclination toward the preservation both of our own being and those with which we are naturally united are impressions of God's will on us for by the term of natural inclination. I mean all the impressions of the Author of nature common to all minds (*OCM* II 13, LO 267).

God not only sustains the mind's being and conserves its desire for the good in general, but also modifies the mind by determining its natural inclinations. So God is now the steering wheel, not the mind. Pyle finds definitive support for this interpretation in a passage where Malebranche explains God's interventions in the mind.

¹⁵⁵ Pyle (2003), pp. 216-217.

First, God unceasingly impels us by an irresistible impression toward the good in general. Second, He represents to us the idea of some particular good, or gives us the sensation of it. Finally, He leads us toward this particular good (OCM III 18, LO 547).

Recognizing the implications of his continuous creation argument, Malebranche appears to have eliminated the mind's directional power and replaced it with God's. In this case, God continuously creates the mind *and* all its modifications, just like in the case of bodies. The mind can "in no way give [itself] new modifications" (OCM III 21, LO 549). The only thing the mind *can* do is to consent or not to particular goods that are presented to it. As Pyle succinctly explains it in relation to sin, "The modifications that God creates includes all our first-order inclinations, which we experience in our souls but do not choose, the sin lies in a second-order act by which we as it were 'endorse' some of these inclinations."¹⁵⁶ As we saw in chapter three, the mind's act of consent is technically not a material or real modification of the mind for Malebranche, but a moral change in the mind's *external relation* to God's Order.¹⁵⁷ Recall that he divides the sinful act into a material and moral aspect. God is responsible for the material aspect of sin in so far as he presents the mind with a false good and causes the mind's requisite sensations and

¹⁵⁶ Pyle, p. 219.

¹⁵⁷ See chapter 3, pp. 138-140.

passions, but the mind is morally responsible for consenting to the false good. So, the mind's sinful consent does not materially modify the mind in any way, but it does change, for the worse, its relation to God's moral order. This interpretation, consequently, appears to leave no room for the mind's attentive desires.

What Pyle sees as two inconsistent accounts, I see as one consistent account. In the second and third passages above, Malebranche is merely describing how God's movement of the mind toward the good in general naturally leads the mind toward particular goods. That is, the mind is naturally led to particular goods as a *consequence* of God's indeterminate impression, not by God *directly* "recreating" the mind with particular inclinations or volitions as Pyle suggests.¹⁵⁸ To understand this distinction better, let's continue Malebranche's train of thought in the third passage by picking it up a few lines later.

Finally, God leads us toward this particular good; for since God leads us toward all that is good, it is a necessary consequence that He leads us toward particular goods when He produces the perception or sensation of them in our soul (OCM III 18, LO 547-548).

¹⁵⁸ Pyle, 219.

God determines or naturally inclines the mind toward particular goods only in so far as he presents particular goods to the mind and causes the requisite sensations in accordance with the laws of mind-body union. Both provide the conditions for *particularizing* the mind's indeterminate impression towards the good. Malebranche states this in the following way.

We are also materially predetermined toward particular goods in this sense, that we are urged toward what we know and relish as good. *The soul's natural impulse toward particular goods is, in effect, but a natural consequence of the impulse toward the good in general.* Thus, all pleasure is by itself efficacious in relation to the will, for it moves and urges it, as it were, toward the object (OCM III 31-32, LO 555) [my italics].

Given the mind's natural impulse toward the good in general, the mind is naturally or instinctively inclined toward the particular goods that God presents to it. So it is the combination of God's indeterminate impression and the particular goods that are presented to mind that forms the mind's particular volitions. In this case, particular goods, as occasional causes, are "steering" the mind's will. As a result, the mind instinctually, but not invincibly, loves particular objects. This is consistent with God only creating/conserving the mind's impulse toward the good in general, leaving its determination up to the particular goods.

As particular goods naturally determine the mind's will, the mind can also freely direct the will with its own attentive desires. This is what is implied, I believe, in Pyle's first passage. Here's the relevant part of that passage.

By FREEDOM, I mean nothing else but the power that the mind has of turning this impression toward objects that please us so that our natural inclinations are made to settle upon some particular object, which inclinations were hitherto vaguely and indeterminately directed toward the universal or general good, that is, towards God, who alone is the general good because He alone contains in Himself all goods (OCM I 46-47, LO 5).

Malebranche explains what he means in the next passage.

But it must be carefully noted that insofar as a mind is thrust toward the good in general, it cannot direct its impulse toward a particular good unless that same mind, insofar as it is capable of ideas, has knowledge of that particular good. In plain language, I meant that the will is a blind power, which can proceed only toward things the understanding represents to it. As a result, the will can direct both the impression it has for good, and all its natural inclinations in various ways, only by ordering the understanding to represent to it some particular object. The power our soul has of directing its inclinations therefore necessarily contains the power of being able to convey the understanding toward the objects that pleases it (OCM I 47, LO 5).

As we saw in chapter three, the mind directs the will by petitioning God to present new objects to it. By presenting new objects to the understanding, God is *causally* responsible for changing the will's direction, though the mind *occasioned* the change with its attentive desire. Using Pyle's metaphor, God is

the motor and the mind is the steering wheel, but it is God that steers it in different directions according to the mind's requests. Piling one metaphor on top of another, the mind is like a sailboat captain directing his sailors to tack one way rather than another. So the "power" of conveying "the understanding toward the objects that please it" is, I believe, the mind's attentive desires occasioning God to present the understanding with new objects.

Malebranche also directly confronts the problem of God's continuous creation and the mind's freedom. Entertaining the objection that if God creates/conserves the mind with a determinate set of modes, including its states of consenting and not consenting, then the mind cannot exercise its freedom, Malebranche responds in the following way.

I answer that God creates us, speaking, walking, thinking, willing, that he causes in us our perceptions, sensations, impulses, in a word, that He causes in us all that is real and material...But I deny that God creates us as consenting precisely insofar as we are consenting or resting with a particular good, whether true or apparent. God merely creates us as always being able to stop at such a good...For since God creates us, then, not precisely insofar as we are consenting or withholding our consent, but insofar as we are able to give or withhold it. For since God constantly creates us, not *being able* to will, but willing to be happy, and since our mind is limited, a certain amount of time is necessary to determine whether some good is a true or a false good...(OCM III 31, LO 554-555).

Here, Malebranche is arguing that God does not continuously create the mind consenting or not to particular goods. God, of course, is responsible for presenting to the mind a particular good, but not for making the mind's decision about it. Consenting to a false good negatively changes the mind's external relation to God's moral Order, but it does not result in a material change in the mind. But if the mind withholds consent, then it naturally petitions God for more information about the false good or asks to be presented with new ideas. Withholding consent provides the mind's attention the *opportunity* to examine the false good or turn towards other goods.

I grant, however, that when we do not sin and when we resist temptation, we can be said to give ourselves a new modification in this sense, that we actually and *freely will to think of things* other than the false goods that tempt us, and we will not rest in their enjoyment (OCM III 25 LO 551) [my italics].

Thus, God's continuous creation does not include the mind's consenting or withholding activities, and as a consequence, the mind's attentive desires.

In the end, Pyle's two accounts are really just one account, with each passage describing how the mind's natural impulse toward the good in general is a "blind power" that is determined or particularized by the objects God presents to the mind. This can happen either by the mind's occasional interactions with the material world or by the mind's attentive desires. If this

is the case, then God's continuous creation of the mind is different from his continuous creation of bodies. As God creates/conserves bodies with a determinate set of modes, he creates/conserves the mind's with a general volition for the good, leaving the mind's particular volitions to the occasional interactions between the mind, its body and God.

Even though Malebranche does not believe that God's continuous creation includes the mind and all of its modification, there is still a question of whether Malebranche must extend it in order make God's *single* action consistent in the case of bodies and minds.¹⁵⁹ Steven Nadler argues that Malebranche must apply the argument equally in both cases.¹⁶⁰ That is, if God creates/conserves a body with determinate set of modes, then he must do the same for minds as well. Andrew Pessin, however, believes that God's action is equally applied to both minds and bodies, but the effects on each are different. For him, God's continuous creation entails the "recreation" of both minds and bodies only in terms of their *essential* features. As we saw earlier, the essential features of bodies *are* their modes because they are defined by their size, shape and relative positions to other bodies. Without them, God would not be able to create bodies at all. Thus, God's creating/conserving action must include

¹⁵⁹ Nadler (1998), pp. 220-221.

¹⁶⁰ Nadler (2001), p. 128 fn. 21.

bodies and their modes.¹⁶¹ Pessin argues that, for Malebranche, the mind's essential features do not necessarily entail a determinate set of modes. First of all, Malebranche believes that the mind has only one essential feature, that is, its *capacity* for thought, not in having any particular thoughts. Pessin finds support for this in book three, chapter one of the *Search after Truth*. Here Malebranche argues,

I do not think that, after some serious thought on the matter, it can be doubted that the mind's essence consists only in thought...I warn only that by the word *thought*, I do not mean the soul's particular modifications, i.e., this or that thought, but rather substantial thought, thought capable of all sorts of modifications or thoughts...I think, further, that no mind can be conceived of that does not think, though it is quite easy to conceive of one that does not sense or imagine, and that does not even will... there can also be a mind that perceives neither hot nor cold, neither joy no sadness, imagines nothing and even wills nothing; consequently, such modifications are not essential to it. Thought alone, then, is the essence of mind...(OCM I 381-382, LO 198).

Given that the mind's only essential feature is substantial thought, Pessin argues that Malebranche's metaphysics does not entail that God must "recreate" the mind with a determinate set of modes like he does in the case of bodies. He technically only has to "recreate" the mind's capacity for thought. Malebranche carefully excludes the will as an essential feature of the mind because it is only God moving the will toward the good in general. Even

¹⁶¹ Pessin (2000), "Does Continuous Creation Entail Occasionalism?," pp. 422-425.

though this movement is inessential to the mind, it is nevertheless inseparable from it (OCM I 383, LO 199). Accordingly, God could just “recreate” the mind’s capacity for willing and thinking. If this is the case, then God is not compelled to recreate the mind with particular thoughts or volitions as Nadler suggests.¹⁶² Thus, God’s continuous creation is equally applied to minds and bodies in that he recreates their essential features, but as this entails a complete set of modes for bodies, it only includes the capacity for thinking and willing for minds. Of course, God, following the laws of mind-body union and presents objects to the mind that occasion particular volitions, but this still leaves open the possibility for the mind to petition God, via its attentive desires, to present it with new ideas.

I agree with Pessin’s assessment of God’s continuous creation, but I disagree with the main conclusion he draws from it. He concludes that even though continuous creation *simpliciter* does not entail “recreating” the mind with a determinate set of modes, Malebranche’s commitment to full-blown occasionalism requires him to extend God’s “recreating” activity to the mind’s modifications.¹⁶³ However, given the substantial evidence presented in this chapter and the last one, Malebranche is *not* committed to full-blown

¹⁶² Pessin (2000), “Does Continuous Creation Entail Occasionalism?,” p. 427.

¹⁶³ Pessin (2000), “Does Continuous Creation Entail Occasionalism?,” p. 430.

occasionalism that requires God to “recreate” minds with a full complement of modes. As we have seen, Malebranche leaves metaphysical room for the mind’s attentive desires, and in turn, its self-perfection. Switching this around, his commitment to the mind’s self-perfection would require him to *reject* full-blown occasionalism, not the other way around. Interestingly, Pessin’s analysis helps my interpretation by blunting the objection that continuous creation excludes the mind’s free will. In fact, continuous creation is compatible with the mind’s self-perfection.

4.5 Conclusion

Our brief historical tour of divine causation has provided insights into the origins and nature of Malebranche’s occasionalism. For him, God is causally responsible for all bodily motions and for the mind’s intellectual and sensible perceptions, sensations, and passions. Malebranche never denies, however, the mind’s responsibility for its own attentive desires and acts of consent. More importantly, none of his arguments for occasionalism, particularly his infamous continuous creation argument, exclude this possibility. Given the overarching importance of self-perfection in Malebranche’s system, we should switch our emphasis from occasionalism to self-perfection when we question

their compatibility. In other words, we should not try to make self-perfection conform to the constraints of occasionalism; rather we should try to conform occasionalism to the constraints of self-perfection. To drive this point home, we need to compare, in the last chapter, two theories on how God actually governs the mental and material realms. One theory, advocated by Nadler and Pessin suggests that God, using particular volitions, directly causes the modifications of minds and bodies by continuously “recreating” them with a determinate set of modes. The other theory, which I support, claims that God governs both realms through general volitions or laws, using minds and bodies as inefficacious instrumental or advising causes to particularize the effects of his volitions. Comparing both theories, we will see that “instrumental” occasionalism fits better with his theory of self-perfection than “direct” occasionalism.

5. Malebranche's Occasionalism: Direct vs. Instrumental Occasionalism

5.1 Introduction

In chapters one and two, I argued that Malebranche's Augustinianism is at the core of his philosophical *persona*, that is, the belief that philosophers must cultivate their intellectual and moral character in order to acquire philosophical knowledge in both the intellectual and moral realms, and in turn, act according to them. From this insight, I showed that the mind's perfection is at the heart of his philosophical system and that the other parts of his system must be understood in this context. In order to properly understand Malebranche's theory of perfection, we needed to go back and examine Augustine's own theory of perfection. During our examination we discovered an Augustinian soul that is cognitively and volitionally active, whose goal is to imitate God as best it can by moving up the stages of perfection: purification, illumination, and unity.

Then in chapters three and four, I presented Malebranche's theory of perfection and argued that the Malebranchean mind also has the cognitive and volitional resources to perfect itself, and that it can achieve it by moving up through the stages of purification, illumination, and unity. The mind

begins to perfect itself by habitually performing mental exercises that help reduce its concupiscent desires, augment its strength and freedom, and prepare itself to receive and utilize Christ's grace of feeling. By doing these things, the mind becomes better able to elicit, and focus on, God's illumination. With God's illumination, the mind can then order its life according to reason, not instinct. This enables the mind to unify itself with God by rationally following the same Order that God does. Next, I argued that Malebranche's theory of perfection is not incompatible with his brand of occasionalism. As we saw earlier, Malebranche never denies that the mind is responsible for its attentive desires and acts of consent, and that the arguments he uses to deny the causal efficacy of minds and bodies do not necessarily apply to these activities.

In this chapter, we will compare two different interpretations of Malebranche's occasionalism in relation to God governance of the mental and material realms. Using his theory of perfection as the ultimate measure, we will see that an "instrumental" interpretation should be preferred over a "direct" interpretation. By working through this comparison, we will see how Malebranche's occasionalism and theory of perfection can come together to

form a unified philosophical system that emphasizes God's power as well as the mind's freedom to perfect itself.

5.2 Direct vs. Instrumental Occasionalism

Currently, there are two contending interpretations of Malebranche's occasionalism. One is a direct occasionalist reading. According to this reading, all of God's volitions are particular in content such that there is a one-to-correspondence between God's volitions and each particular event in the world. This means that God positively and directly wills every particular event in the world; hence, he is constantly moving individual bodies around, and giving ideas and sensations to the mind and also dispensing grace to them. According to this reading, Malebranche divides God's volitions into "general" volitions, which are dispensed according to the general laws of nature, and "particular" volitions, which produce effects that are outside the lawful order of nature, such as miracles and the initial act of creation. Both types of volitions have particular volitional content that are aimed at particular effects, but the former are lawful while the latter are not. So lawfulness and non-lawfulness are what distinguish general volitions from particular ones. Occasional causes, in this case, merely "occasion" or "trigger"

God to produce particular events according to his general laws. In other words, God's production of a particular effect will "occasion" him to produce another effect, and so on.¹⁶⁴

The other interpretation is an instrumental occasionalist reading. According to this reading, God governs the world according two types of volitions that differ in their volitional content: general and particular. God's general volitions are general (non-specific) in content and can be described in terms of general laws (if event x occurs, then event y occurs). More specifically, God's general volitions *just are* the laws of nature. Since they are general in scope, they are not directed towards any specific event. Rather, they are directed towards event types that fall under certain conditions, without being specifically aimed at any particular event within any type. Under this scheme, God uses finite substances and their modal features as occasional causes to *delimit* or *determine* the application of his general volitions. They do not "occasion" God to directly will a particular effect, but they are the conditions by which God's general volitions are individuated or particularized so that they give rise to particular effects. So given the role of

¹⁶⁴ This position has its origin in Leibniz's account of Malebranche in *On Nature itself* and is revived and explicated by Nadler (1993), Pessin (2001), Lisa Downing (2005), Peppers-Bates (2009). Nadler argues that Daisie Radner holds this position, but this is debatable, see Rader (1978) and (1993).

occasional causes, God's general volitions are necessary, but not sufficient for the production of particular effects. God's particular volitions, on the other hand, are those that have particular content, just as the direct reading. However, some are lawful and others are not. In this case, God's volitions are distinguished by the scope of their volitional content, not exclusively by their nomicity or anomicity as under the direct reading.¹⁶⁵

Supporters in both camps, quite correctly, focus their attention on the textual evidence. They build their case by collecting passages from different parts of Malebranche's *oeuvre*, and arrange them in such a way as to provide a picture of his occasionalism. They also provide philosophical support by primarily focusing on Malebranche's occasionalist theory of bodies and then applying this theory to minds. This method is helpful, but is ultimately not decisive for either reading. In fact, after close examination, the textual evidence is ambiguous at best, and could potentially support multiple interpretations. Moreover, as we have seen, the application of his theory of bodies to minds fails to take into account the mind's cognitive and volitional resources and the role they play in knowledge acquisition, requiring God to

¹⁶⁵ Proponents of similar positions are: Antoine Arnauld and recently Andrew Black (1997), Charles McCracken (1983), Desmond Clarke (1995), Craig Walton (1972), and Nicolas Jolley (1990).

govern minds in importantly different ways than bodies. A better method is to examine the textual evidence within the context of Malebranche's philosophy as whole. Obviously, the reading that is most compatible with his other philosophical commitments, and best resolves the particular tensions between them, is the one that Malebranche should subscribe to, regardless of whether he actually subscribed to it or not.

In the end, I argue that Malebranche is, and should be, an instrumental occasionalist. Even though the textual evidence is ambiguous, I believe that the instrumental reading is compatible with Malebranche's account of the mind's self-perfection, which is at the heart of his system. The direct reading, though simple in its application and buttressed by strong textual evidence, creates insurmountable problems for Malebranche's philosophy, particularly in terms of the mind's freedom and perfection.

5.3 God's Creation and Governance of the Universe

In order to understand each reading and its implications, we need to examine Malebranche's account of God's creative activity and governance. For him, God is an infinitely perfect being with infinite attributes, and necessarily lacks nothing. Given his nature, God had no reason outside of himself to create the

universe. That is, there is nothing intrinsically good or worthy about the nature of the universe itself to give God the reasons, desires or motives to create it. Such motives must be from God himself. The only explanation or justification for God's creative activity is his intent to express his own glory in the Incarnation of the Word, through which the world is divinely sanctified and worthy of God's attention (*OCM XII 205-207, JS 154-6*). Unlike Leibniz's God, who picks the best possible world according to its intrinsic nature alone, Malebranche's God picks a world that best reflects his infinite attributes, not only in terms of the perfection of world he creates, but in the way he governs it.

He was not required to undertake the most perfect work possible, but only the most perfect work that could be produced through the wisest or most divine ways, so that any other work produced in any other way could not express more exactly the perfections God possesses and glories in possessing (*OCM XII 225, JS 172*).

God finds glory in both his product and his design. Just as an architect finds glory in the house that he designed, he also finds glory in the efficient and harmonious way it was designed and built (*OCM XII 202-203, JS 153*). He strikes a perfect balance between the perfection of what is created and the perfection by which it is created. In the end, God picked the most perfect world that could be governed by the most simple, uniform and fecund laws.

Our world, governed in this way, best expresses God's infinite attributes and is the most perfect world given this balance.

For Malebranche, this explanation of God's governance provides justification for the disorders, monsters, and impious people in the world. Since God must balance the perfection of the world with the perfection of his attributes, our world is not intrinsically the most perfect. Given this, disorders are bound to occur. Ultimately, God could have created a world that was intrinsically more perfect, or he could fix the disorders of this world. If God were to do either, however, he would have to multiply his volitions unnecessarily, thereby violating the uniformity and simplicity of his ways, which would ultimately reflect badly on him.

Now God, having chosen this world, knew every thing about it. He knew all creatures, their actions, and all the physical and moral consequences that follow from their infinite relations and combinations (*OCM XII 268, JS 208*). Thus, God established not only the physical order of the universe but also its moral order. In terms of physical order, God, given Malebranche's mechanistic science that all material bodies (including complex organisms) can be reduced to the size, shape and relative motion of their matter, created the initial state of the universe, with every creature in it, by a single

impression of motion (motive force) into matter. This impression generated individuals of every species (plants and animals) along with all of their future progeny. Their progeny are preformed and housed, one inside another, like a Russian doll, in the seeds and eggs of the first of their species (*OCM* XII 252ff., *JS* 195ff.). Thus, all the future generations in the world were established at the first instant of creation, although they will unfold at different times according to the laws of nature. God's initial act of material creation, according to Malebranche, does not follow the three simple laws of motions because, *contra* Descartes, they are not sufficient to produce complex organisms. He argues that "an infinity of laws—which would hardly make them general—would be required in order to form the organic bodies of plants and animals by following these laws exactly" (*OCM* XII 246, *JS* 190). Moreover, the laws of motion presuppose, and derive from, the dispositions of bodies; thus, bodies must be created prior to the laws of motion.

The laws of nature, therefore, were not used to create the world, but to govern it. They are responsible for the regular motions of celestial and terrestrial bodies, and for the natural growth and maturation of creatures. But they also inevitably give rise to disorders in nature such as storms, drought, famine and the development of malformed offspring (*OCM* V 31-32, *PR* 118).

As we saw earlier, God knew that these disorders would happen, but he did not establish the laws of nature with the purpose of creating these things, but only to express his simplicity, uniformity and immutability. God's glory trumps the intrinsic imperfections of our world.

In terms of the moral order, God governs the dispensation of grace in relatively the same way. As we saw chapter three, God distributes grace of enlightenment in accordance with the laws of God-mind union on the *occasion* of the mind's attentive desires, and he lawfully dispenses grace of feeling on the *occasion* of Christ's attentive desires (OCM XII 320, JS 253). Recall that Christ, limited by his finite human nature, cannot dispense grace simultaneously or uniformly to all minds at all times, but must dispense it according to his successive thoughts and desires, which are limited to particular individuals or groups of people that share the same dispositions (OCM V 174-175, PR 144). Since Christ is limited in the number of persons he can think about at any given time, he must constantly change his thoughts and desires in order to dispense grace of feeling to all the minds that he desires. Nonetheless, Christ's dispensation perfectly follows the laws of grace, even though, at times, it yields disorders, such as dispensing grace superfluously

on hardened hearts. So, just as in the physical realm, the simple laws of grace sometimes yield inefficacious results.

With this brief account of God's creative activities and governance in hand, let's turn to the two competing interpretations of Malebranche's occasionalism.

5.4 The Direct Reading

Advocates of the direct reading have ample textual support in their favor.

Malebranche seems to advocate this view throughout his works. Consider the following representative passages:

I say that God acts by general wills, when he acts in consequence of general laws which he has established. For example, I say that God acts in me by general wills when he makes me feel pain at the time I am pricked (*OCM V 147, PR 195*).

A natural cause is not a real and true cause, but only an occasional cause, which determines the Author of nature to act in such and such a manner and in such and such a situation (*OCM II 313, LO 448*).

Since God alone acts immediately and by himself in minds, and produces in them all the different modifications of which they are capable, it is only he who diffuses light in us, and inspires in us certain feelings which determine our different volitions (*OCM V 66, PR 138*).

The main source of philosophical support comes from Malebranche's continuous creation argument that we examined in detail in chapter four.

Supporters believe that God's continuous creation extends, either by metaphysical entailment or from Malebranche's prior commitment to full-blown occasionalism, to minds and bodies, along with all of their modes.¹⁶⁶ Recall that, according to this interpretation, God continuously creates minds and bodies, along with all of their modes at each moment in time. For instance, if a body is in movement, God recreates that body in a new location at every successive moment (*OCM* XII 161-164, *JS* 115-119). If a mind switches its attention from one object to another, God recreates the mind with a new attentive desire along with a new object of thought. In the end, advocates of the direct reading see God as recreating the moral and material realms anew at every moment in time in accordance with the laws of nature and grace that he established at creation.

Working with the textual evidence and God's continuous creation, Steven Nadler and Andrew Pessin have developed different accounts of direct occasionalism, each leading to different consequences.¹⁶⁷ For Nadler, Malebranche's God created the initial state of universe along with all of its laws by (anomic) particular volitions, with each volition corresponding to a

¹⁶⁶ Nadler (1993), p. 42; Pessin (2000), "Does God Continuous Creation Entail Occasionalism," p. 430; Pyle (2003), pp. 113, 216-219.

¹⁶⁷ Even though both commentators limit their discussion primarily to God's governance of the material world, I assume that they believe their interpretations can be applied to God's creative activity and God's governance of the moral realm as well.

particular state of affairs. Then, in accordance with these laws, God governs the world by (nomic) particular volitions.¹⁶⁸ God's volitions, according to Nadler, are eternal by nature, residing atemporally in God's mind, but are temporal in application insofar as they are simultaneous with the events they produce. This means that volitions are eternally present in God but are activated or triggered temporally by the appropriate occasional cause.¹⁶⁹ For instance, when two bodies collide, God is triggered to move each body according to the laws of motion. In the case of grace, Christ's desire to dispense grace to Peter triggers God to dispense grace to Peter according to the laws of grace. Nadler uses this "triggering" account of occasional causes to accommodate the many passages where Malebranche describes occasional causes as determining the efficacy of the laws.¹⁷⁰

Under this model, the laws of nature are merely the rules or reasons by which God governs the world, leaving all the causal work to God's particular volitions. For Nadler, the reason why laws cannot do any real causal work is that their content is non-specific and therefore cannot cause particular events. Given their causal inefficacy, God must use particular volitions in order to

¹⁶⁸ Nadler (1993), p. 43.

¹⁶⁹ Nadler (1993), p. 46.

¹⁷⁰ Nadler (1993), pp. 45-46. For examples see *OCM* XII 175-176, JS 129, *OCM* V 67, PR 139.

uphold or fulfill the laws. This implies that God must constantly fiddle around with nature in order to keep it running in a lawful manner, with one event triggering God to produce another event.

Pessin's account is similar to Nadler's insofar as God's volitional content must be specific and correspond to particular events in the world. But Pessin's description of God's activity shows two important differences. One has to do with Pessin's account of the laws of nature. Unlike Nadler, Pessin argues that God did not first will the laws of nature and *then* act according to them; rather, God's particular volitions *just are* the laws of nature. "A natural law is not the general content of a divine volition but rather a uniform pattern of particular content volitions."¹⁷¹ In this case, God never wills the laws of nature, they are merely the expression (or description) of God's uniform activities in the world. Pessin uses this reduction to accommodate, like Nadler, Malebranche's frequent claims that occasional causes determine (or establish) the efficacy of laws. Since the laws are just patterned sets of volitions, every patterned event *qua* occasional cause, in effect, establishes the efficacy of the laws.¹⁷² In terms of volitional scope, Pessin's God has one type of volition: particular volitions (nomic or anomic), as Nadler's God seems to have two

¹⁷¹ Pessin (2001), pp. 97-98.

¹⁷² Pessin (2001), p. 83.

types: (1) the laws of nature (general in content) that God established at creation and (2) particular volitions (nomic or anomic) to produce particular effects, the latter upholding the former. Pessin rejects this distinction and *reduces* the laws of nature to God's particular volitional acts. Even though their accounts differ in this way, they agree that God must constantly uphold the lawful order of the world by particular volitions, and that general laws of nature cannot do the necessary causal work.

The other difference has to do with the way Pessin describes the nature of God's activity. At first, Pessin seems to follow Nadler's line that God has patterned sets of discrete particular volitions that are temporally activated by the proper occasional causes.¹⁷³ But he also describes God's activity as single, eternal volition that encompasses all the state of affairs that constitute the entire created world throughout time. This eternal volition unfolds in time and produces every event in the universe.¹⁷⁴ Pessin seems to think, given that he switches from one description to another without qualification, that both describe the same thing, but from different perspectives. From one perspective, God wills everything at once by a single super-volition that captures the world in its entirety, but from another perspective this super-

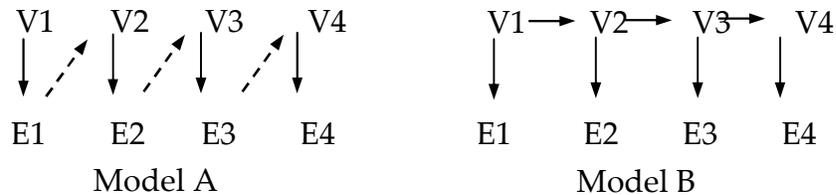
¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Pessin (2001), p. 97.

volition can be delimited into discrete volitions by the individual events that are produced. The former description is used to accommodate God's simplicity and immutability, and the latter is used to show that every event is accounted for by a specific volitional content in God's mind. This dual description, coupled with Pessin's reduction of the laws of nature, gives us a more accurate account of God's governance under direct occasionalism. In fact, it shows that Nadler's account fails to describe accurately the relationship between occasional causes and particular volitions under the direct occasionalist model.

The problem of Nadler's model can be seen from Pessin's dual perspective. From the super-volition perspective, God's single volition unfolds in time, producing temporal effects according to the order and lawful patterns specified in the volition's content. This unfolding does not require occasional causes to temporally trigger or activate anything; they are merely the result or by-product, as it were, of God's will. From the discrete volitions perspective, it is not the occasional causes that trigger particular volitions, but rather the previous volitions in the sequence. It is not Christ's desire that triggers God to dispense grace to Peter, but the particular volition that produced Christ's desire. That is, the model is not that a volition produces x and then x in turn

triggers another volition to produce y (Model A), but that the volition that produced x triggers, or in this case causes, another volition to produce y (Model B).



Model B suggests that God's atemporal particular volitions unfold in time successively creating lawful patterns of effects without occasional causes triggering or determining anything. Since particular volitions are sufficient to cause their corresponding effect, there is no reason to appeal to occasional causes in order build a temporal bridge, as it were, between the volitions' eternity in God and temporality in nature. Occasional causes merely indicate the lawful ordering of God's governance in time. Hence, occasional causes do not really have a role to play at all; they are merely the result of God's causal activities, just as in the super-volition description.¹⁷⁵ These dual descriptions provide us with a clear account of direct occasionalism that reveals the nature of occasional causes.

¹⁷⁵ I believe that Pessin (2000) has Model B in mind when he argues that God "continuously creates us, then, with all our features (sensations, thoughts, inclinations, volitions, etc.), and that is everything real and intrinsic to us." In "Malebranche's Doctrine of Freedom/Consent and the Incompleteness of God's Volitions," p. 50; cf. Nadler (1993), p. 42.

Direct occasionalism has its costs and benefits. One benefit is that it clearly upholds the fundamental principle of Malebranche's occasionalism that God alone is causally responsible for every event in the material and moral universe. Since the universe is just the temporal unfolding of God's eternal will, there is no room or need for secondary causes. Another important benefit, suggested by Nadler and Pessin, is that it is consistent with Malebranche's theodicy contrary to a standard objection to the direct occasionalist account.¹⁷⁶ According to this objection, direct occasionalism runs contrary to Malebranche's claim that God does not directly will the disorders of nature because he works by simple, general (non-specific) laws (*OCM* V 35, PR 119; cf. *OCM* XI 25-26, CW 50). The direct occasionalist counters by arguing that the main argument for Malebranche's theodicy is that God must act lawfully not that he does not directly will particular events. Even though God knows that his governance will produce disorders, his aim is not to produce these disorders, but to create a world that best reflects his attributes in terms of his activity and the ends of the activity. Now this is consistent with God acting by (nomic) particular volitions because God is bound to work in a lawful manner that best reflects his attributes. So it does not matter if God

¹⁷⁶ Nadler (1993), pp. 35-36; Pessin (2001), pp. 79, 99.

works by general (non-specific) laws or by (nomic) particular volitions, only that he acts lawfully. So the instrumental interpretation may remove God from directly producing disorders, but it does not remove him from producing disorders altogether since his general (non-specific) laws gives rise to disorders as well.

The main costs, however, clearly outweigh the benefits. The costs are the position's incompatibility with some of Malebranche's statements concerning occasional causation, the undesirable consequences of the position itself, and its incompatibility with other important aspects of Malebranche's philosophy such as his theory of freedom and self-perfection. Let's examine each in turn.

The direct reading undermines the purpose of Malebranche's occasionalist system. It appears that direct occasionalism reduces occasional causes merely to denotative features of God's general volitions, rendering their "triggering" or "occasioning" role superfluous. Under this model, the mind is merely a sequence of God's general volitions that unfold in time as discrete creative actions. But this seems to run contrary to Malebranche's descriptions of occasional causes as "establishing" or "determining" the efficacy of God's general laws. Here are two representative passages.

For in order that the general cause act by general laws or wills, and that his action is lawful, constant, and uniform, *it is absolutely necessary that there be some occasional cause which determines the efficacy of these laws, and which serve to establish them* (OCM V 67, PR 139).

But recall that creatures do not act upon each other by their own efficacy, and that God communicates His power to them only because He established their modalities as occasional causes which determine the efficacy of the general laws He prescribed. Everything depends on this principle (OCM XII 318-319, JS 252).

According to these passages, occasional causes are necessary for the application of general laws, not merely the necessary effects or by-products of God's volitions. This is clearly seen in the Christ's dispensation of grace. Christ, given his finite human nature, does not dispense grace as a real cause, but as an occasional cause (OCM V 72, PR 143). Christ's thoughts and desires *qua* occasional causes *determine* the laws of grace in particular ways. Simply put, God dispenses grace *through* Christ's human nature. This is also true for the mind and its attentive desires. Attentive desires are occasional causes that determine God to reveal new ideas or objects to the understanding. Both examples show that occasional causes are not just effects in Malebranche's occasionalist system, as the direct reading suggests, but play an important role in God's governance. Even though both Nadler and Pessin attempt to accommodate this position by giving occasional causes a "triggering" role in

God's governance, they cannot sustain this given the consequences of direct reading described above.

In terms of undesirable consequences, the direct reading undermines the ontological status of substances. If God's causal activity results only in the lawful production of patterned effects, then created substances are just finite sets of event patterns with their identity and unity defined by their unique event pattern. This appears to strip creatures of any real substantiality and puts Malebranche's philosophy in serious danger of collapsing into Spinozism, which is something that he clearly wanted to avoid.¹⁷⁷

In terms of incompatibility, the direct reading fails to accommodate Malebranche's theory of freedom and self-perfection. Despite the intense focus of scholars on his occasionalism, perfection, as we have seen, is the ultimate goal of his philosophy. Simply reading the preface to the *Search* will show that Malebranche's work is an attempt to demonstrate how people can turn away from the pleasures of the body and turn to God in order to achieve perfection by following his immutable order (*OCM* I 9-26, LO xxxiii-xliii). If minds are merely concatenations of patterned effects, as the direct reading suggests, then

¹⁷⁷ G.W. Leibniz makes this point in his *Theodicy*, "...if the created substance is a successive being, like movement; if it does not endure beyond the moment, and does not remain the same (during some stated portion of time) any more than its accidents; if it does not operate any more than a mathematical figure or a number: why shall one not say, with Spinoza, that God is the only substance, and that creatures are only accidents or modifications?" (EH 358).

perfection is excluded, since there is no metaphysical room for the mind to exercise its cognitive and volitional resources.

Advocates of the direct reading are not unaware of the free will problem. In fact one major advocate, Andrew Pessin, has attempted, admittedly unsuccessfully, to reconcile direct occasionalism with Malebranche's theory freedom.¹⁷⁸ He bases his attempt on the idea that the content of God's general volitions are incomplete insofar as they do not contain all possible applicable descriptions of the effects they produce. Just as we can have beliefs with different intentional contents that refer to the same object, God can produce effects under limited or incomplete descriptions. After providing some textual evidence to support his claim that Malebranche's God actually uses incomplete general volitions, Pessin argues that God continuously creates minds and all their modifications only under physical or real descriptions, excluding moral descriptions. In the case of mind's freedom to give or withhold consent, God creates everything that is real about the state of affairs, but not under the moral description of withholding or giving consent. That is, he does not create us *qua* consenting or not consenting. For Pessin, this "immanent" act is merely the mind's

¹⁷⁸ Pessin (2000), "Malebranche's Doctrine of Freedom/Consent."

experience of God shifting (producing different) its inclinations to other objects.¹⁷⁹ It is nothing over and above the mind's modifications.

From this, Pessin argues that even though God only continuously creates minds and all their modifications under physical descriptions, they are still morally evaluable in terms of their relation to God's order. Minds that conform to order are meritorious and those that do not are sinful. This supposedly removes moral responsibility from God and preserves the mind's freedom.

To preserve our freedom and remove Himself [God] from responsibility for our sins, He creates the states of affairs constituting our behaviour under descriptions leaving open their moral features. He continuously creates us, then, with all our features (sensations, thoughts, inclinations, volitions, etc.), and that is everything real and intrinsic to us. Nevertheless, these sequences of states of affairs may be morally evaluable by virtue of their external relation to the moral law...But in so far as God's volitional contents are neutral relative to the moral mode of description, He is not directly causally responsible for the moral features of our behaviours, and in this way our freedom is preserved. Yet in so far as He does indeed create all states of affairs, occasionalism is preserved.¹⁸⁰

In the end, Pessin admits that his account does not reconcile direct occasionalism with freedom. At best, it may free God from moral responsibility, but it fails to attribute to minds a meaningful conception of

¹⁷⁹ Pessin (2000), "Malebranche's Doctrine of Freedom/Consent", pp. 43, 46.

¹⁸⁰ Pessin (2000), "Malebranche's Doctrine of Freedom/Consent," p. 50.

freedom. Pessin confesses that, “once God has full causal responsibility for all states of affairs, regardless of the descriptions under which He wills them, freedom is precluded.”¹⁸¹

Pessin’s account reveals some of the fundamental problems with interpreting Malebranche’s theory of free will and self-perfection through the lens of direct occasionalism. Even though this interpretation can accommodate the mind’s “immanent” act of withholding and giving consent, it cannot take into account the mind’s attentive desire. Recall that the attentive desires give the mind the *ability* to examine objects, and move beyond them, by occasioning God to enlighten it. Without them, the mind cannot possibly contribute to its own perfection.

Susan Peppers-Bates, who subscribes to both the direct reading *and* the idea that Malebranchean mind is causally responsible for its attentive desires, does not explicitly address their compatibility. But one way to do this is to say that God continuously creates minds and bodies, with all of their modifications, *except* for the mind’s attentive desires.¹⁸² They in turn, provide the occasional “trigger” for God to present a corresponding idea or object to

¹⁸¹ Pessin (2000), “Malebranche’s Doctrine of Freedom/Consent and the Incompleteness of God’s Volitions,” p. 51.

¹⁸² Peppers-Bates (2009), p. 108.

the mind, thereby falling under the Model A, while everything else falls under Model B. This interpretation is plausible, but the direct reading has the consequence of God recreating minds at every moment in time, making them mere concatenations of patterned effects. This does not leave the necessary metaphysical or temporal room for the mind to exercise its attention and produce its own attentive desires. Consequently, the direct reading seems to entail that God causes all of the mind's attentive desires. In the end, the direct reading cannot accommodate Malebranche's theory of freedom and perfection.

In conclusion, there are serious textual problems as well as philosophical problems with the direct reading. Even if Malebranche subscribed to the direct reading, which appears to be unlikely, he should not have subscribed to it given the reading's philosophical problems and incompatibility with other aspects of his philosophy.

5.5 The Instrumental Reading

Given the problems with the direct reading, let's turn to the instrumental reading. Just as the direct reading, the instrumental reading has ample textual support. Consider the following passages:

An occasional cause was actually required for a general cause...in order that this general cause, acting continually in a uniform and constant manner, could produce an infinity of different effects in its works, by the simplest means and by general laws which are always the same (OCM XII 12, JS 60; cf. OCM III 212-214, LO 663, 664-5).

He is able to communicate His power to them [minds] by carrying out their desires, and thereby establish them as occasional causes in order to act through them in a thousand ways (OCM XI 23, CW 48).

But, because God acts in consequence of general laws which He has established, we rectify his work without offending His wisdom. We resist His actions without resisting His will, because He does not positively and directly will each deed that He does (OCM XI 26, CW 50).

These passages suggest that there is *not* a one-to-one correspondence between God's volitions (single super-volition) and particular events, and that God actually "uses" or "acts through" occasional causes to diversify the effects of his general (non-specific) laws. In fact, the laws *just are* God's general volitions (OCM II 315, LO 449; OCM V 67, PR 139).

According to this reading, God created the initial state of the world by particular (specific) volitions, yet he governs the world by general (non-specific) volitions or laws. In this case, God knew everything about the world, and created the initial state of the world with every species, along with all their preformed progeny, with a single super-volition. After this, God, given his infinite wisdom and perfect foreknowledge, decided to govern the world

by general laws (volitions) that would best reflect his attributes, such as his simplicity and immutability. God knows all the events that will result from these laws, but he does not directly and immediately will the events with a single, eternal super-volition or with an infinite set of particular (specific) volitions as the direct reading suggests, rather, the events follow from the laws. So there is no need for God to govern the world by directly producing particular events.

Since God's governing laws (volitions) are general in scope, they are not directed towards any specific event. They are, however, directed towards event types that fall under certain conditions, without being specifically aimed at any particular event within any type. Given the undetermined nature of his general volitions, God uses finite substances and their modal features as occasional causes to *delimit* or *determine* the application of his general volitions. So occasional causes do not denotatively "trigger" God to directly will a particular effects, as in Model A, rather, they are the conditions by which God's general volitions are individuated or particularized so that they give rise to particular effects.

Occasional causes, according this reading, *simulate* efficient causes insofar as they are *sine qua non* conditions. This means that they must be

spatially or temporally contiguous with their effects, and the effects produced are proportionate to them. However, they are not considered efficient causes because they lack one critical element: they have no active power in terms of motor force, grace or power of enlightenment. For Malebranche, in order for something to count as an efficacious cause it must actually have its own causal *powers* (OCM III 203-205, LO 658). Without such powers, occasional causes are causally inefficacious and, therefore, not really efficient causes, even though they are responsible for particularizing or individuating God's general volitions.

The instrumental reading is similar to, but essentially different from, the scholastic concurrentist models of causation. Recall that concurrentism is the causal theory that sees God and his creatures act through the same cooperative action to produce particular effects according to different orders of causality. Creatures, through their innate causal powers, determine the action by ensuring that a specific *kind* of effect is produced. God, on the other hand, cooperates by conserving the creature's causal powers and by determining the *singularity* of the effect insofar as one singular effect will occur rather than another. Thus, creatures determine the type of effect that will be produced, and God determines what token of that type will be produced.

Malebranche, according to instrumental occasionalism, keeps the basic structure of concurrentism, but switches around the cooperative responsibilities. First, Malebranche shifts all causal powers to God, essentially stripping creatures of their causal powers, except for the mind ability to produce its attentive desires. God exercises his causal powers through his general volitions which are directed towards event types that fall under certain conditions, without being specifically aimed at any particular event within any type. Second, Malebranche shifts the singular or particular determination of effects from God to occasional causes. This is how occasional causes “determine the efficacy” of God’s general volitions or laws. Simply put, all causal powers and type determinations are attributed to God, and all token determinations are attributed to substances and their modes as occasional causes. In fact, token determinations activate, so to speak, God’s general volitions.

The instrumental reading, in this case, does not see God’s continuous creation as recreating minds and bodies, each with a determinate set of modes, at every moment in time. If God is literally recreating substances at every moment in time, then minds and bodies do not really *occasion* anything, but are mere by-products of God’s volitions. Again, minds and bodies are not

patterned sets of temporal slices, with each slice temporally related to, but metaphysically isolated from, each other like cells in a movie reel that present a single image on the screen. Malebranche uses recreation language to express the fact that creation and conservation requires the same causal power and that only God has this power, not that God recreates the world anew at every moment. God actually uses the body's size, shape and speed to determine its motion and the mind's sensations, perceptions and attentive desires to determine the effects that follow from the general laws (volitions) that govern mind-body and God-mind union.

Following our discussion in chapter four, God creates/conserves the essential and inseparable features of minds and bodies. In the case of bodies, the creation side of the action is the initial creation of bodies from the bottom up with all of their modal features along with the general laws (volitions) that govern them. The conserving side of the action is the conservation of bodies and their modes in time, and the laws are responsible for diversifying God's conserving action in time. So when Malebranche speaks of God moving bodies by creating them in successive places, he is discussing this dual aspect of God's creating/conserving activity where God maintains bodies in their *being* while also governing their motions through general laws. In the end,

Malebranche uses the continuous creation argument to show that God is responsible for *all* bodily motion, not to explain *how* God moves bodies.

In the case of minds, however, God continuously creates them with only the general capacities for thinking and willing (i.e. indeterminate impression toward the good in general), not with any particular thoughts or volitions. The mind's thinking and willing, as we discussed in chapter four, are determined or particularized either by the particular goods that are naturally presented to it through its body or freely by the mind's attentive desires to acquire more knowledge. Of course, the general laws of mind-body and mind-God union govern what particular thoughts and volitions a mind might have at any given moment depending on the occasional cause. So the mind requires God to first maintain it in being and then use his general laws to produce its particular modifications.

In general, we can see the relations between God's general volitions and occasional causes as analogous to those between a modern power grid and the appliances that are plugged into it. A grid's power is general insofar as it can accommodate a variety of appliances within certain physical parameters. The appliances, given their particular physical structure, channel the grid's power to produce particular effects. A lamp channels the power to

produce light, a toaster to toast bread, and a fan to distribute air. In this case, the grid's power acts through the appliances to produce particular effects. The power and appliances can produce nothing on their own, but they are necessary, and together sufficient, to produce particular effects. So it is the complex of the power and the appliance that produces a particular effect.

In the same way, God general volitions work through occasional causes to produce particular effects. In order for the laws to be efficacious, the appropriate occasional cause must be in place. This is exactly what Malebranche is suggesting when he states:

For in order that the general cause act by general laws or wills, and that his action be lawful, constant and uniform, it is absolutely necessary that there be some occasional cause which determines the efficacy of these laws, and which serve to establish them. If the collision of bodies, or something similar, did not determine the efficacy of the general laws of the communication of motion, it would be necessary that God move bodies by particular wills (*OCM V 67, PR 139; cf. OCM III 216-217, LO 664*).

God's general laws of motion produce particular effects only when they are instantiated by the particular dispositions or modes of bodies. God uses the collision of bodies to diversify his general volition and to establish the second law of motion which regulates the communication of motion among bodies (*OCM V 25, PR 117; cf. OCM III 217, LO 664; OCM XII 319, JS 252*).

Similarly, God's general laws of grace are instantiated by, or dispensed through, Christ's attentive desires, which are the occasional, not productive, cause of grace. So Christ plays a directive role, as the redeemer and intercessor for humankind, in the dispensation of grace. This is much different from the direct reading. That reading would have us believe that God produces particular attentive desires in Christ, and that these in turn, "trigger" God to produce particular effects of grace, as models A and B indicate. But Malebranche clearly rejects this account, since this implies that Christ's dispensation is really God's dispensation; therefore, Christ's occasional role is superfluous. In fact, this is the model that is used in the second objection in the *Illustration to the Treatise on Nature and Grace*. Malebranche's responds to this objection in the following way.

I grant that the particular wills of the soul of Jesus Christ are always conformed to those of the Father: but it is not the case that the Father has particular wills which answer to those of the Son, and which determine them; it is only that the wills of the Son are always conformed to order in general, which is necessarily the rule of divine wills and of all those who love God...All the different thoughts of this soul, always given over to the execution of his plan, also come from God, or from the Word to which it is united. *But all these different thoughts certainly have his desires for occasional causes; for he thinks what he wants* (OCM V 162-163, PR 208) [my italics].

In this passage, Malebranche is clearly rejecting the direct reading. Even though God is the productive cause of grace, it is up to Christ to dispense it according to his own attentive desires, which are, nonetheless, in conformity with the immutable order. So as Christ is responsible for thinking and desiring what he wants, God is responsible for presenting him with corresponding ideas and sensations.

In a similar way, the instrumental reading is also compatible with the mind's attentive desires. Just as Christ is responsible for the dispensation of grace insofar as he directs God's productive power, the mind is also responsible for its own enlightenment by determining or particularizing God's illumination with its attentive desires. Consider the following passage.

Now, God had established us as the occasional cause of our knowledge, for several reasons, the chief of which is that otherwise we would not be able to be masters of our wills. For since our wills must be enlightened in order to be excited, if it were not in our power to think, then it would not be in our power to will. Thus, we would not be free with a perfect freedom nor, for the same reason, would we be in any condition to merit the true goods for which we are made. The mind's attention is thus a natural prayer by which we obtain Reason, which enlightens us...there is no other way to obtain light and understanding than by the effort of the attention (*OCM XI 60, CW 75-6*).

Here, Malebranche assumes that the mind can produce its own attentive desires, and that attentive desires themselves, as occasional causes, play a

substantive role in knowledge acquisition insofar as they occasion God to enlighten the mind. Recall that the mind's attentive control over the "blind power" of the will means that the mind petitions God to present new intellectual, imaginative or sensible objects to the understanding, which in turn, attracts the will and moves it towards new objects (*OCM I 47, LO 5*). The mind's attention, in this case, is not the true cause of the will's change of direction, as it were, but it nevertheless occasions God to cause the directional change. In the end, the mind must produce attentive desires in order for the laws governing God-mind union to be efficacious. If they are merely by-products or denotative features of God's particular volitions, as the direct reading suggests, then there is no room for the mind's free will and self-perfection.

In each case, God's power, manifesting itself either as motive force, grace, or power of enlightenment is directed by occasional causes to produce particular effects. The modal dispositions of bodies diversify God's power in the material world, and the attentive desires of minds determine God's power of enlightenment. Moreover, unlike bodies, which are determined to move in particular ways, the mind is cognitively active insofar as it can freely direct its attention towards different objects. Hence, the instrumental reading does not

make occasional causes the direct effect of God's particular (nomic) volitions, but gives them a substantive role in God's governance of the world. Furthermore, unlike the direct reading, it nicely conforms to Christ's dispensation of grace, and the mind's perfection.

Admittedly, the instrumental reading has issues of its own. One major objection with the instrumental reading is that it seems to violate both poles of Malebranche's occasionalism. At one pole, it seems to be inconsistent with Malebranche's claim that God does not use instruments and that his will alone is sufficient for particular effects.

God needs no instruments to act; it suffices the He wills in order that a thing be, because it is a contradiction that He should will and that what He wills should not happen. Therefore, His power is His will, and to communicate His power is to communicate the efficacy of His will (OCM II 316, LO 450).

On its face, this passage suggests that God does not use occasional causes, in any way, to produce particular effects. God's is the sufficient cause for every effect. Yet the instrumental reading implies that God's general volitions by themselves are *insufficient* to produce particular effects because they are in need of occasional causes to determine their efficacy. Thus, God's will alone is not sufficient for particular effects in terms of his general volitions. However, the context in which Malebranche makes this claim clearly shows that he is

rejecting the idea that God uses minds instrumentally by communicating causal powers to them, and letting them causally contribute to the effect. Here is the rest of the passage.

But to communicate this efficacy to a man or an angel signifies nothing other than to will that when a man or an angel shall will this or that body to be moved it will actually be moved. Now in this case, I see two wills concurring when an angel moves a body; that of God and that of the angel; and in order to know which of the two is the true cause of the movement of this body, it is necessary to know which one is efficacious. There is a necessary connection between the will of God and the thing He wills...and consequently it is God who is the true cause of its movement, whereas the will of the angel is only the occasional cause (*OCM II 316, LO 450*).

Here, Malebranche uses “instruments” in terms of God communicating powers to the mind so that it can produce their own effects, with God’s cooperative help of course. His argument, it seems to me, is leveled against concurrentism, not the fact that God uses occasional causes to diversify his effects. Malebranche is merely arguing that the angel’s will is not causally responsible for the action, God is. Yet, Malebranche assumes, like he does with other minds, that the angel is responsible for willing or desiring the movement of a particular body, and that that desire occasions God to move the body. The angel’s desire, in the case, delimits or determines the efficacy of the laws of motion. Moreover, Malebranche is not arguing that God never uses

instruments, but that he does not *need* to use them. This does not exclude the possibility that God, given the simplicity of his ways, set up the world in such a way that he uses occasional causes instrumentally to determine the effects of his general laws, without having to constantly govern the world with particular volitions. There are plenty of passages, some quoted above, in which Malebranche states that God “uses” occasional causes in the way. Recall that God “uses” the collision of bodies to distribute his motive force, and uses Christ’s attentive desires to distribute grace. So the passage above does not rule out the possibility that God uses occasional causes instrumentally in his actions.

At the other pole, the instrumental reading seems to be inconsistent with Malebranche’s claim that occasional causes are not real causes because it makes occasional causes necessary for the production of particular effects. Since God’s general volitions are insufficient to produce effects, occasional causes must causally contribute in some way to make up for their causal deficiency. Now, it is true that occasional causes are part of the causal explanation for particular effects, but, as noted above, they are merely *sine qua non* conditions that make God’s general volitions *efficacious*, that is, produce particular effects. However, they do not really causally contribute because

they have no causal powers of their own. As noted above, occasional causes are not real causes in Malebranche's sense of the term, since they do not possess their own causal *powers* (*OCM* III 204-205, LO 658). Therefore, the instrumental reading is consistent with the claim that occasional causes are not real causes.

Along the same lines, another objection is that even though God does not communicate causal powers to occasional causes, the passive powers of occasional causes satisfy Malebranche's definition of true cause in terms of a necessary connection between a cause and its effect (*OCM* II 316-317, LO 450). Now, in the case of motion, there is a necessary connection between the impenetrability of bodies and the motive changes those bodies undergo after impact. That is, irrespective of God and his general laws, when one body strikes another there *must* be some change in the motion of both bodies. Hence, if there is a necessary connection between the motions of bodies before and after impact, then there is a real causal connection.¹⁸³

Malebranche was well aware of this objection and responds to it in the *Dialogues* (JS 118-19). He agrees that there is a necessary connection between

¹⁸³ This objection was first raised by Malebranche's contemporary, Bernard le Bovier de Fontenelle, and is still used today by commentators such as Nadler (2000), pp. 118-19.

the motive states of bodies when they collide, but denies that bodies are true causes of motion. For something to count as a true cause, according to Malebranche, it must not only have a necessary connection to its effects, it must also have an active power. He describes active powers in the terms of will, power, and force (*OCM* III 204, LO 658). Clearly, the property of impenetrability does not fall into this category. So bodies satisfy the first requirement, in virtue of their impenetrability, but they do not satisfy the second.

Matter is essentially mobile. By nature it has a passive capacity for motion. But it does not have an active capacity...thus one body cannot move another by an efficacy belonging to its nature. If bodies had in themselves the force to move themselves, the stronger would—as efficient causes—overcome those bodies they encounter. But, as a body is moved only by another body, their encounter is only an occasional cause which, in virtue of their impenetrability, obliges the mover or creator to distribute his action (*OCM* XII 164, JS 119).

So, in Malebranche's conception of efficient causation, occasional causes are not true causes. This is consistent with the instrumental occasionalist reading.

The final, and most powerful, objection is directed towards the mind's attentive desires and their incompatibility with Malebranche's frequent claim that God is the only efficacious cause in the universe. If the mind can produce its own attentive desires, which appear to count as a "real" or "material"

change in mind if anything does, then the mind causally contributes to God's governance, making both God and the mind casually efficacious (*OCM* III 25, LO 551). How can this be reconciled with his full-blown occasionalism? The problem with this objection is that Malebranche, when it comes to the mind, is *not* a full-blown occasionalist as many scholars believe. Of course, God is responsible for all of the mind's perceptions, passions, and its natural impulse towards the good general. The mind also cannot move bodies, produce its own ideas, sensations and perceptions, and cannot will anything without God pushing it towards the good in general. The mind's power, both in terms of its attentive desires and its acts of giving or withholding consent, is parasitic on the will's indeterminate and invincible movement toward the good in general. As a consequence of this invincible movement, the mind is not invincibly drawn to particular goods, giving it the freedom of mind to give or withhold consent. If the mind withholds its consent, then it can, depending on its strength of mind, attend to other objects by petitioning God to produce new perceptions in the understanding. The mind, in this case, does not have an independent power, but it harnesses, so to speak, God's power. As we saw in chapter three, Malebranche is more than willing to accept the fact that the mind's attentive desires are real changes in the mind.

We can be said to give ourselves a new modification in this sense, that we actually and freely will to think of things other than the false goods that tempt us, and we will not rest in their enjoyment...For in the final analysis, if willing different things is said to be a matter of giving oneself different modifications, or if our consent, which I view as inactivity or voluntary suspension of seeking and examining, is taken to be a material reality, then I agree that in this sense the mind can modify itself in different ways through the action or desire to be happy that God places in it, and that in this sense it has a real power (*OCM* III 25, LO 551).

Even though Malebranche immediately rejects the claim that an act of consent “materially” modifies the mind because it merely rests its attention on the object, he never denies the fact that the mind is responsible for its own attentive desires and that they are, in themselves, real modal changes. What he does deny is that attentive desires can, in turn, cause new modifications. So God’s general volitions do not account for the mind’s attentive desires.

More importantly, Malebranche’s occasionalism does not force him to be a full-blown occasionalist. Given our detailed examination of Malebranche’s arguments for occasionalism, particularly his continuous creation argument, he can easily accommodate the mind’s attentive desires without violating his claim that the mind is causally impotent when it comes to moving bodies, producing its own perceptions, sensations, passions, and willing anything on its own, that is, independent of God’s power. Thus,

Malebranche is a full-blown body-body and mind-body occasionalist, but not a full-blown mind-mind occasionalist, at least in terms of the mind's attentive desires.

5.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I attempted to show that Malebranche is, and should be, an instrumental occasionalist. Even though the textual evidence is ambiguous, I argued that the instrumental reading fits better with Malebranche's philosophy as a whole. Moreover, it provides us with a coherent and complete picture of Malebranche's occasionalism. The direct reading, though supported by strong textual evidence, does not give us a satisfactory account of Malebranche's occasionalism in terms of its consequences, and its compatibility with other areas of Malebranche's system, particularly the mind's perfection. Concerning the former, it strips creatures of any real substantiality by turning creatures into finite event patterns (ala Averroes), which, I believe, puts Malebranche's in serious danger of collapsing into Spinozism. Concerning the latter, it creates insurmountable problems for Malebranche's philosophy as a whole, especially in terms of Christ's dispensation of grace and the mind's perfection. The instrumental reading

avoids these problems and does not undermine the integrity of his occasionalism. This interpretation clearly goes against the current scholarly consensus that makes Malebranche an uncompromising occasionalist in all three areas, but seen within the context of the mind's perfection, and the central role it plays in Malebranche's system, it seems obvious.

Abbreviations and Translations

Malebranche:

- OCM *Oeuvres complètes de Malebranche*. Directed by Robinet, 20 vols. Paris: J. Vrin, 1958-67.
- LO *Search After Truth*. Translated by Thomas M. Lennon and Paul J. Olscamp. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- CW *Treaties on Ethics*. Translated by Criag Walton: Dordrecht, the Netherlands, 1993.
- JS *Dialogues on Metaphysics and on Religion*. Translated by Nicholas Jolley and David Scott. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- PR *Treatise on Nature and Grace*. Translated by Patrick Riley. New York: Clarendon Press, 1992.

Descartes:

- AT *Oeuvres de Descartes*. Edited by C. Adam and P. Tannery, 12 vols. Paris: J. Vrin: 1897-1913.
- CSM *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. Translated by Robert Stoothoff John Cottingham, Dugald Murdoch, and Anthony Kenny. 3 vols. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985-1997.
- SV *The Passions of the Soul*. Translated by Stephen Voss. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1989.
- SG *The World and Other Writings*. Translated by Stephen Gaukroger. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Louis De La Forge:

DC *Treatise on the Human Mind* (1664). Translated by Desmond M. Clarke.
Dordrecht, the Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1997.

Augustine:

<i>De lib. arb.</i>	<i>De libero arbitrio</i>
<i>Sol.</i>	<i>Soliloquia</i>
<i>De Trin.</i>	<i>De Trinitate</i>
<i>Conf.</i>	<i>Confessiones</i>
<i>De Gen. ad litt.</i>	<i>De Genesi ad litteram</i>
<i>De beata vita</i>	<i>De beata vita</i>
<i>De util. cred.</i>	<i>De utilitate credendi</i>
<i>De vera relig.</i>	<i>De vera religione</i>
<i>De civ. Dei</i>	<i>De civitate Dei</i>
<i>De quant. anim.</i>	<i>De quantitate animae</i>
<i>De Musica</i>	<i>De Musica</i>
<i>De nat. boni c. Man.</i>	<i>De natura boni contra Manichaeos</i>
<i>De ord.</i>	<i>De ordine</i>

The City of God. Translated by Marcus Dods. New York: The Modern Library, 2000.

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The Confessions. Translated by Maria Boulding. New York: Random House, 1997.

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On Genesis. Translated by Edmund Hill. New York: New City Press, 2002.

Writings of Saint Augustine, volumes 1 and 2. New York: Cima Publishing, 1948.

The Trinity. Translated by Edmund Hill. New York: New City Press, 1991.

Aquinas:

ST *Summa Theologica*

SCG *Summa Contra Gentiles*

De ente *De ente et essentia*

Qq. disp. *Quaestiones disputate*

Summa Theologica. Translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province. 5 vols. Notre Dame, IN: Christian Classics, 1948.

Summa Contra Gentiles. Translated by Charles J. O'Neil Anton C. Pegis, James F. Anderson, and Vernon J. Bourke. 5 vols. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975.

On Being and Essence. Translated by Armand Maurer. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1968.

Suarez:

DM *Disputationes Metaphysicae*

On Creation, Conservation, and Concurrence: Metaphysical Disputations 20-22. Translated by Alfred J. Freddoso. South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2002.

On Efficient Causality: Metaphysical Disputations 17,18, and 19. Translated by Alfred Freddoso. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994.

Al-Ghazali:

MM *The Incoherence of the Philosophers.* Translated by Michael E. Marmura, *Islamic Translation Series.* Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1998.

MM[2] "Ghazali's Chapter on Divine Power in the *Iqtisad.*" In *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy*, vol. 4, 279-315. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Ibn Rushd:

MK "The Incoherence of the Incoherence" in *Medieval Islamic Philosophical Writings.* Translated by Ali Khalidi, Muhammad. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Plotinus:

E *The Essential Plotinus.* Translated by Elmar O'Brien. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1964.

The Enneads. Translated by Stephen MacKenna. New York: Penguin Books, 1991.

Leibniz:

EH *Theodicy.* Translated by E.M. Huggard. Chicago: Open Court 1998.

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