

PASSIVE NATURES AND NO REPRESENTATIONS:
MALEBRANCHE'S TWO "LOCAL" ARGUMENTS FOR OCCASIONALISM
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In the last twenty years or so, the study of early modern philosophy seems to have experienced a revival of interest in Nicolas Malebranche. Some might wonder whether "revival" is the right term but I use it intentionally, since it is hardly the case that we for the first time are uncovering an obscure but talented figure from the bin of neglected, underappreciated philosophers. As one commentator has recently noted, Malebranche was hailed by none other than Pierre Bayle as "the premier philosopher of our age"¹ and it has been well established that his work was widely read and influential.²

My own interest in Malebranche came about through a personal "discovery" of sorts. One of the first moments I felt I was seriously engaged in early modern philosophy was when I realized that though there was definitely something new in the air by the middle of the seventeenth century—say, the predominance of the conception of the material world as fundamentally both quantitative and geometrical in character, governed by laws of pushpin mechanics—a lot of what was going on in this tumultuous period was not that new at all. Many philosophers, as I found out, were concerned with how to reconcile this new "modern" conception of the natural world with the "traditional" worldview, which involved core theological and metaphysical principles. While many of the philosophers of the early modern period were proponents of the new science,

¹ See Tad Schmaltz's entry on "Malebranche" in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/malebranche/>>.

² Steven Nadler notes that Malebranche was "[i]n France, the most important Cartesian—perhaps, in fact, the most important philosopher" after Descartes's death. See his "Introduction" to the *Cambridge Companion to Malebranche*, ed. Nadler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 1.

the vast majority were theists as well and this led to their being committed to various views concerning the relation between the created world and the divine being. Given this historical context, Malebranche's philosophical contribution to the discussion about causation, for instance, became far more interesting and significant than I had previously thought.³

Among Malebranche's contributions, his thesis of occasionalism, of course, is well known. As he puts it, "there is only one true cause because there is only one true God; ...the nature or power of each thing is nothing but the will of God; all natural causes are not *true* causes but only *occasional* causes."⁴ This thesis was controversial, even in his own life time. For instance, it provoked Leibniz to charge that occasionalism effectively leads to Spinozism, the view that "everything would merely be certain vanishing or unstable modifications and phantasms, so to speak, of one permanent divine substance. Or, what comes to the same thing, God would be the very nature or substance of all things, the sort of doctrine of ill repute which a recent writer ... either introduced or revived."⁵ But the history of philosophy has seen more than its share of seemingly counterintuitive claims and the threshold for genuine controversy, regardless of time period, is fairly high when it comes to philosophical theses. As we all know, it is only when the arguments in support of these claims are worth taking seriously that the thesis itself gains the minimal respect to be considered at all, controversial or not. In other words, it is the arguments that have to be good and interesting, not the conclusions, however provocative and striking.

³ See Nadler's very nice account of how the issue of causation becomes to have a central place in early modern metaphysics in his "Malebranche on Causation" in Steven Nadler, ed., *Cambridge Companion to Malebranche* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 112.

⁴ Nicolas Malebranche, *De la recherche de la vérité* (1678), VI, ii, 3 in *Oeuvres complètes de Malebranche [OCM]*, ed. André Robinet (Paris: Vrin, 1958–84), vol. II, 312. The works of Malebranche will be cited by volume and page in *OCM* and by the relevant English translations. In the case of the *Recherche* and the *Elucidations*, I follow Lennon and Olscamp, trans., *The Search for Truth and Elucidations of the Search for Truth [LO]* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). For the *Entretiens sur la métaphysique et sur la religion*, I use Jolley, ed., Scott, trans., *Dialogues on Metaphysics and on Religion [Dialogues]* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

⁵ See Leibniz, *On Nature Itself* in *Philosophical Essays*. Ed. and trans. by R. Ariew and D. Garber (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1989), p. 160. The "recent writer" is obviously a reference to Spinoza.

It is these arguments for occasionalism that Malebranche presents in support of his occasionalism that are the focus of this paper. In particular, I hope to address two of Malebranche's "local" arguments for this thesis, arguments that purport to show the occasionalist conclusion for the dual Cartesian substances of mind and body independently. These arguments, which I will refer to as the "no representation" (NR) argument and the "passive nature" (PN) argument respectively, are not in themselves arguments for global occasionalism but are rather restricted in their scope. They have the interesting feature of arguing for occasionalism as following from the basic "nature" of each Cartesian substance, i.e., thought and extension. Despite revealing some important insights Malebranche seems to have had about the nature of Cartesian minds and bodies, these arguments have not received as much attention as the two "global" arguments for occasionalism, the "no necessary connection" (NNC) argument and the "conservation is but continuous creation" (CCC) argument.⁶ These local arguments also deserve our attention in that, as I will try to show, while the two global arguments rely on premises that might be too controversial even for orthodox Cartesians to accept, these local arguments employ premises that would be less controversial and more acceptable. If so, then these arguments would not only be very interesting in their own right but also seem to go a fair ways in supporting Malebranche's claim that occasionalism is the rightful heir to the proper understanding of causation within the boundaries of Cartesianism.⁷

⁶ Some of the existing secondary literature on these "local" arguments include the following: Steven Nadler's "Malebranche on Causation" in the *Cambridge Companion to Malebranche* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Nadler, "Knowledge, Volitional Agency and Causation in Malebranche and Geulincx", *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 7 (1999), pp. 263-274.; Nicholas Jolley's "Introduction" to the *Dialogues on Metaphysics and on Religion*, edited by Nicholas Jolley and trans. by David Scott (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Kenneth Clatterbaugh, *The Causation Debate in Modern Philosophy, 1637-1739* (New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 114-5.

⁷ I take it that this issue of whether Malebranche is indeed the rightful heir to Cartesianism is a distinct issue from what views Descartes actually held with regard to causation among finite substances. For, one might think that as an interpretation of Descartes's texts, we ought to accept that Descartes indeed affirmed genuine causation between

I. The Four Arguments for Occasionalism

Let me begin by briefly discussing what I take to be the general lay of the land when it comes to Malebranche's arguments for occasionalism. Though dispersed throughout his various works, the arguments are mainly to be found in *The Search After Truth*, *The Elucidations of the Search After Truth*, and *Dialogues on Metaphysics and on Religion*. At a glance, the most conspicuous strategy appears to be that of considering the standard examples of what was widely taken to be genuine cases of causal interaction between finite substances and arguing that in each case there is no real or "true" causation going on. And under the general framework of Cartesian dualism, to which Malebranche was committed, there were the four possible types of causal interaction among finite substances: (1) body-body causation; (2) body-mind causation; (3) mind-body causation; and (4) mind-mind or "intra-mental" causation.⁸

In prosecuting this general strategy, Malebranche employs, both in the *Search* and the *Dialogues*, a dominant "global" argument, by which I mean an argument that argues for occasionalism *en bloc* without making any distinctions with regard to the types of substances involved. In other words, such a global argument does not target a specific type of substance and is comprehensive enough to apply to both minds and bodies, for it employs premises that do not discriminate among the various subcases is presented. In the *Search*, the global argument is the

bodies, for instance, while at the same time thinking that, given his views about what bodies are like, Descartes *should not* have made such an affirmation.

⁸ Body-mind causation and mind-body causation differ in that we are distinguishing the direction of the causal influence: in the former case, the body causes an event or change in the mind and in the latter, the mind causes an event or change in the body. For instance, a typical example of body-mind causation might be an instance of my feeling pain when my finger is pricked, while a typical example of mind-body causation would be when I will to raise my arm and it goes up.

“no necessary connection” (NNC) argument and, in the *Dialogues*, the “conservation is but continuous creation” (CCC) argument.⁹

In contrast to this global approach, Malebranche at times resorts to another group of arguments, not so general in their applicability. These “local” arguments for occasionalism are tailored to deny the causal efficacy of the alleged cause by focusing on the specific type and nature of the substance in question. In the case of bodies, we find what I have dubbed the “passive nature” (PN) argument and, for minds, the “no representation” (NR) argument. These arguments are interesting in the following two respects. One is their limited applicability. On this approach, the reasons why bodies are not causes are different and distinct from why minds are causally inert. An implication of such an approach is that if we bracket the plausibility of the global arguments, the success of one local argument is independent of the other and as a result one could, for instance, come out as an occasionalist about bodies by accepting the PN argument but maintain a realist position about the causal powers of minds in rejecting the NR argument. Malebranche himself, of course, was a global occasionalist but the limited applicability of these substance-specific arguments allows one to retain or reject the occasionalist position selectively, depending on which finite substance is under consideration.

The other interesting aspect of the PN and NR arguments is in the character of the basic premises involved in their arguments. If both NNC and CCC arguments might be thought to employ rather controversial premises, at least to some Cartesian proponents of genuine secondary causation, both the PN argument and the NR argument appear to employ premises that might be less controversial in that they could with some plausibility be regarded as basically Cartesian. In other words, the premises in the PN argument and the NR argument seem to rest on

⁹ For more on what these arguments are and how they relate to each other, see my “Necessary Connections and Continuous Creation: Malebranche’s Two Arguments for Occasionalism”, *The Journal of the History of Philosophy* (forthcoming).

some very basic characterizations of the natures or essences of Cartesian substances, characterizations most likely to be accepted by a Cartesian. If so, then this fact about the PN and NR arguments might make them more palatable to Cartesians insofar as they share these common assumptions. Furthermore, it would also appear to support the claim that Malebranche ultimately wishes to make, namely, that the correct understanding of the Cartesian system will lead one to see that occasionalism is the right way to go.

Why do I say that the premises of the NNC argument and the CCC argument are controversial? First the NNC argument. Briefly put, the critical premise in the argument is Malebranche's claim that "a true cause as I understand it is one such that the mind perceives a necessary connection between it and its effect" (*OCM II 316/LO 450*). In other words, Malebranche identifies "necessary connection" as the necessary and sufficient condition for genuine causality. But once this premise is granted, given that divine omnipotence seems to entail that God is the only necessarily efficacious causal agent, it seems to be a short step to the occasionalist conclusion that there are no real creaturely causes.¹⁰ Why does divine omnipotence suggest that there are no necessary connections between creaturely causes and their effects? If there were such connections, this would suggest that even if God were to will otherwise—for instance, intervene to stop the creaturely effect from occurring—this divine intervention would fail, a consequence inconsistent with divine omnipotence. Faced with this situation, the theistic proponents of real creaturely causation most likely would not consider challenging the uniqueness of divine necessary efficaciousness but they would seriously wonder whether some agent qualifies as a cause only if there are necessary connections between it and its effect. For instance, even if I grant that when I will to raise my left arm, were God to will that it stay put, it

¹⁰ In fact, Malebranche, after stating the critical premise, goes on to claim that "the mind perceives a necessary connection only between the will of an 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*).

will stay put, my conceding this point need not imply that when I will my arm to go up and it actually does go up, I am not at least a partial cause of my arm going up. So, for a theistic proponent of genuine creaturely causation, Malebranche's claim that only necessarily efficacious causes are real causes would be an unacceptably narrow conception of causation, particularly in the theistic context.

What about the CCC argument? What might be problematic about its main premise, the thesis that "conservation is but continuous creation"? The argument, roughly speaking, proceeds in the following fashion: God's causal involvement in moments subsequent to his initial creation of the world—that is, his conserving activity—is identical to his initial act of creation *ex nihilo*. Hence, "conservation is but continuous creation." The key idea of the argument then is fairly obvious: just as God was the sole causal contributor in the case of creation *ex nihilo*—for the creative act occurs, after all, *ex nihilo*—God is the sole causal contributor in every subsequent, conserving state of affairs. This being the case, there are no real creaturely causes at the moment of creation *nor* at moments of conservation.

It has been fairly well established that the vast majority of the theistic philosophers of the Middle Ages and the early modern period accepted some version of the CCC thesis.¹¹ But nearly all of the members of this vast majority were not occasionalists and Malebranche was virtually alone in trying to infer occasionalism from the CCC thesis itself. The center of controversy between Malebranche and his opponents who also accept the CCC thesis concerns how literally we are to understand the alleged identity relation between conservation and creation. Many of the proponents of the CCC thesis appear to have thought that while the being or *esse* of the creature itself is indeed fully dependent on divine causal activity in a continuous manner, the

¹¹ For more on this and surrounding issues, see Alfred Freddoso, "God's General Concurrence with Secondary Causes: Why Conservation Is not Enough", *Philosophical Perspectives* vol. 5 (1991).

individual properties or “modes” of the creature are a different matter, such that God need not be the full and sole “modal” cause of the creature’s states or properties.¹² Descartes, for instance, according to several commentators, held this view and thought that one could consistently remain true to the spirit of the CCC thesis, while accepting some sort of causal agency on the part of creatures, if the causation in question was that of bringing about the modes of other creatures.

I have suggested in a different paper that much of the respect and attention Malebranche received for his occasionalism stems from his striking and rather plausible interpretation of the CCC thesis and its implications.¹³ But I also agree that, for his contemporaries, it was by no means a settled issue as to how the CCC thesis should be understood. In this respect, the CCC argument, though definitely presenting a challenge to those who wished to endorse a weaker version—one in which divine causality is not the sole causal factor in the bringing about of a creature’s modes—would have been controversial in its assumption that God’s conserving activity is *exactly* like his creative activity.

So these are ways in which the NNC argument and the CCC argument might be thought to face a higher hurdle in convincing Malebranche’s fellow Cartesians to abandon their endorsement of genuine creaturely causation. The two local arguments that are to be the focus of this paper, in contrast, do not seem to face the same kind of difficulty, since their central premises respectively appear to be more palatable to anyone with a basically Cartesian orientation about the natures of created substances.

¹² The term “modal cause”—that is, a cause of the particular modes or properties of a creature—comes from Dan Garber. See his “How God Causes Motion: Descartes, Divine Sustenance, and Occasionalism,” *Journal of Philosophy* 10 (1987): 577. For more on this issue, also see Steven Nadler’s “Continuous Creation and the Activity of the Soul: Louis de la Forge and the Development of Occasionalism,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 36 (1998): 215–231.

¹³ For more on this interpretation, please see my “Necessary Connections and Continuous Creation: Malebranche’s Two Arguments for Occasionalism”, *The Journal of the History of Philosophy* (forthcoming).

II. The Passive Nature Argument

The first instance of what I take to be the “passive nature” (PN) argument appears in a rather inconspicuous manner in book 6, part 2, chapter 3 of the *Search*, where Malebranche first introduces his thesis of occasionalism. After stating the main thesis that “there is only one true cause because there is only one true God; that the nature or power of each thing is nothing but the will of God; that all natural causes are not *true* causes but only *occasional* causes,”

Malebranche goes on to present the first string of arguments in its support:

It is clear that no body, large or small, has the power to move itself. A mountain, a house, a rock, a grain of salt, in short, the tiniest or largest body conceivable does not have the power to move itself. We have only two sorts of ideas, ideas of minds and ideas of bodies; and as we should speak only of what we conceive, we should only reason according to these two kinds of ideas. Thus, since the idea we have of all bodies makes us aware that they cannot move themselves, it must be concluded that it is minds which move them. But when we examine our idea of all finite minds, we do not see any necessary connection between their will and the motion of any body whatsoever. On the contrary, we see that there is none and that there can be none. We must therefore also conclude, if we wish to reason according to our lights, that there is absolutely no mind created that can move a body as true or principal cause, just as it has been said that no body could move itself.

But when one thinks about the idea of God, i.e., of an infinitely perfect and consequently all-powerful being, one knows 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. We must therefore say that only His will can move bodies if we wish to state things as we conceive them and not as we sense them. The motor force of bodies is therefore not in the bodies that are moved, for this motor force is nothing other than the will of God. Thus, bodies have no action; and when a ball that is moved collides with and moves another, it communicates to it nothing of its own, for it does not itself have the force it communicates to it. Nevertheless, a ball is the natural cause of the motion it communicates. A natural cause is therefore not a real and true but only an occasional cause, which determines the Author of nature to act in such and such a manner in such and such a situation. (*OCM* II 312-13/*LO* 448)

As one can see, reading the *Search* can be slightly frustrating, especially when we are accustomed to the “customer-friendly” packaging and presentations of arguments typically found in the work of our contemporaries. Here we see that the lack of self-initiation of movement is presented as a key reason as to why bodies are not moved by other bodies, while, at the same time, the notion of necessary connection already seems to play a central role in arguing for why

it cannot be the case that finite minds cause bodily movements.¹⁴ None of these points seem obvious to us but, to complicate matters, the claim that the motor force of bodies is but the will of God, which seems rather close to the main idea of the CCC argument,¹⁵ is thrown into the mix as well.

Despite this flurry of diverse arguments jumbled together, I think we can isolate a thread of thought that focuses on the passivity or nonactivity of bodies. Malebranche appears to be thinking that, by considering their passive nature, we can know that bodies are causally inactive. Note that Malebranche draws our attention to the fact that “the idea we have of all bodies makes us aware that they cannot move themselves,” which he takes to imply that therefore “it is minds which move them.” Why the lack of self-initiation of movement entails the lack of causal power is, of course, something we should think more about. But what’s interesting about Malebranche’s approach here is that he relies on his idea of matter or body to reach substantial conclusions about what it can and cannot do. Malebranche employs this approach again in the *Elucidations*, where we get an explicit statement of the essential passivity of bodies, though once again this claim is interwoven with the claim that the motor force of bodies is but the will of God:

When I see one ball strike another, my eyes ... seem to tell me, that the one is truly the cause of the motion it impresses on the otherBut when I consult my reason I clearly see that since bodies cannot move themselves, and since their motor force is but the will of God that conserves them successively in different places, *they cannot communicate a power they do not have and could not communicate even if it were in their possession. For the mind will never conceive that one body, a purely passive substance, can in any way whatsoever transmit to another body the power transporting it.* (OCM III 208-9/*Elucidations* 660, my emphasis)

Here the emphasis is on the fact that bodies cannot transmit the motor force that moves them, even if they possessed such a force. The reason for this inability, we are told, is that bodies are purely passive substances. The argumentative strategy here is a curious one in that we wonder whether it really makes sense to try to flesh out the passivity of bodies in this manner—that is, as

¹⁴ The reason obviously is that there are no necessary connections between the will and the bodily movement.

¹⁵ That is, if we add the assumption that the will of God is operative in the form of continuous creation.

the inability to transfer modes that are in its possession. For, as Malebranche himself pointed out, it was commonplace to reject across the board the communication or transfer of modes from one substance to another: “if moving force belonged to bodies, it would be a mode of their substance, and it is a contradiction that modes go from substance to substance.”¹⁶ The contradiction here is meant to apply to any substance or combinations thereof, regardless of whether the substances involved are active or not. Modes cannot be transferred, period, because such transfers presuppose the “free-floating” of modes—that modes exist, however instantaneously, without inhering in a substance as they move over from one to the other substance—which is a metaphysical impossibility. This being the case, it does not seem to make much sense to think of the passivity of *bodies* to consist in the inability to transfer one’s mode of force since no substance, even one that perhaps possesses an active force, could ever fail to be passive in this regard. In short, this conception of passivity fails to pick out any relevant subset of substances and, according to this criterion, all substances are passive. There would be no passivity distinctive and unique to extended substances.

Fortunately, I don’t think that the main line of Malebranche’s argument from the passivity of bodies relies heavily on this conception of passivity. In the following section from the *Dialogues*, we get a different and better argument for why and, more importantly, in what sense bodies are passive, which at the same time is consistent with the overall approach to consider our ideas of extension and draw out its implications:

Consult the idea of extension and decide by this idea which represents bodies... whether they can have any property other than the *passive faculty* of receiving various figures and movements. Is it not entirely obvious that all the properties of extension can consist only in relations of distance? (*OCM XII 150-51/Dialogues 106*, my emphasis)

¹⁶ See *Réponse à une Dissertation de Mr. Arnauld contre un Eclaircissement du Traité de la Nature et de la Grace* VII. 6 OCM 7:515-6.

The argument here is both straightforward and more persuasive: given that all the properties of extension simply consist in relations of distance, it would be, as it were, a category mistake to ascribe active powers to bodies. For active powers are not properties that bodies can have at all, insofar as active powers do not consist in relations of distance. If so, no body could move another body or mind without it ceasing to be a thing that consists only in relations of distance, that is, a body. So here we get a conception of passivity that tells us that the passivity or passive nature of extension consists in all the properties of bodies being relations of distance and nothing more. This conception of passivity seems to rule out anything like powers in bodies, if we assume with Malebranche that powers are not relations of distance. This assumption that powers are not modes or modalities that bodies possess gets expressed slightly more explicitly in the following argument, which reinforces the conception of passivity as consisting in relations of distance:

But that bodies should receive in themselves a certain power, by the efficacy of which they could act on the mind—this I do not understand. For what would this power be? Would it be a substance, or a modality? If a substance, then bodies will not act, but rather this substance in bodies. If this power is a modality, then there will be a modality in bodies which will be neither motion nor figure. Extension will be capable of having modalities other than relations of distance. (*Dialogues*, 107)

With the help of a commonly accepted Scholastic assumption that any real being must either be a substance or mode, Malebranche presents a rather nifty argument that active powers have no place in bodies.¹⁷ One might wonder what would be so bad with the first option of accepting that there is a distinct substance in bodies that is responsible for the bodies' activity. But Malebranche's response is clear: even if we bracket the worry of whether we can get a clear conception of what kind of thing this substance would be, it is clear that this substance would not be a body, which subsequently proves his point. And in discussing why the second option is

¹⁷ Clatterbaugh provides a nice summary of this argument in his *The Causation Debate in Modern Philosophy*, 1637-1739 (New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 114-5.

going to fail, we see the explicit statement that, though an active power perhaps could be a mode of some other substance, it is not a mode that belongs to bodies, since forces or powers clearly are not relations of distance.

It may seem in some ways obvious that powers or forces are not relations of distance. But why this is the case and if so, how powers or forces relate to the more obvious properties of extension—for instance, size and figure—raise interesting and important questions that go to the heart of the PN argument. I believe that the main intuitive thrust behind Malebranche's PN argument is to convince the reader that motive force or power is something that is fundamentally out of place in the Cartesian landscape of bodies. This is, of course, not surprising since anyone who would propound something like the PN argument would try to convince us of this view. But let us think more about why motive forces or powers for Malebranche are indeed so out of place.

One idea, as we have already seen, is that when we try to express or identify motive force in terms of the actual spatial properties of a Cartesian body, we are at a loss to do so. We can give the full description of all the spatial properties of a body in motion but these properties do not themselves pick out or describe a power. Thus, in positing a force or power, we seem to be positing something in bodies that we do not actually find in them and that is heterogeneous to their basic features. But not only do we have no way of identifying these powers with the properties at our disposal, it also turns out that these powers are not needed to give a full description of the identity conditions of an extended substance. This can be done by simply listing its spatial properties, which do not incorporate any descriptions of a power or force.

Recognizing these facts naturally leads us to what seems very close to Descartes's original insight that having specific spatial features and standing in particular spatial relations to other

bodies is sufficient for the existence as a body¹⁸ and Malebranche takes this to imply that whether the body in question possesses a motive force or power and thus whether it is in motion or at rest is at best a peripheral issue. So, when the dust has cleared, for someone like Malebranche, whether the body is in motion or at rest turns out to be an extrinsic fact about the body.

We see that this view of the extrinsicness of motion and rest—extrinsic to the essential features of bodies, i.e., relations of distance—also finds expression in Malebranche’s discussion on the “essence of matter” in the *Search*. Here Malebranche lists figure, divisibility, impenetrability, and extension as attributes essential to matter but notes that other properties, such as “fluidity, hardness, softness, motion, and rest,” are not essential to matter, since they can be “separated from matter, since there are many bodies without hardness, or fluidity, or softness, that are not in motion, or not at rest” (*OCM I 460/LO 243*). This comment is somewhat intriguing, since we know that in the *Dialogues* Malebranche makes the following claim, which might be thought to be in tension with his observation that there are many bodies “that are not in motion or not at rest”:

It is a contradiction for a body to be neither at rest nor in motion. For even God—though omnipotent—cannot create a body which is nowhere or which does not have certain relations of distance to other bodies. (*OCM XII 155/Dialogues 111*)

Appearances to the contrary, I think it is fairly clear that the previous statement from *OCM I 460/LO 243* does not commit Malebranche to thinking that there are bodies that are neither at rest nor in motion. Rather, the point of the *OCM I 460/LO 243* passage seems to be that bodies need not be in motion, since they can remain at rest, and that they need not be at rest, since they can be in motion. But if bodies need not be in motion, then, on the assumption that any

¹⁸ Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy* II §4, AT VIII 42. All works of Descartes are cited by volume and page in Adam and Tannery and in the standard English translation of Cottingham, Stoothoff and Murdoch[CSM].

nonnecessary, dispensable feature of a thing is not part of its essence, both motion along with the motive force supposedly responsible for it are rightfully deemed inessential to what it is to be a body. And the same goes for the mode of being at rest. Just as motion and motive force are not indispensable in that bodies need not be in motion and can be at rest, being at rest is not indispensable since bodies need not be at rest and can be in motion. If so, then being at rest and being in motion are on a par as nonessential modes of bodies. For neither being at rest or in motion is an essential quality of bodies, though it is the case that any given body has to be one or the other.¹⁹

This understanding of motion and rest as being on a par with each other as nonessential modes of extended substances certainly seems to fit the discussion of motion and rest that emerges in the *Dialogues*, where Malebranche argues for occasionalism on the basis of the “conservation is but continuous creation” thesis. According to the account of divine causal activity as continuous creation, motion is explained as the continuous creation of a body over different locations over time, while a body at rest is accounted for as the continuous creation of that body at the same location over time. So, when explaining motive force, Malebranche states, “the motive force of a body is but the efficacy of the will of God, who conserves it successively in different places” (*OCM XII 161/Dialogues 117*).²⁰

So, on this picture, we see that, in terms of the divine causal activity involved, there is not that much of a difference between God creating bodies in motion or at rest. The only difference

¹⁹ This raises the question of whether the disjunctive pair of motion and rest do constitute an essential feature of bodies.

²⁰ Also see the following from the *Dialogues*:

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; and when this volition ceases – I am speaking of God according to our mode of conception – it is necessary that bodies cease to exist. Thus *it is this same volition that puts bodies at rest or in motion, because it is that volition which gives them being*, and because they cannot exist without being at rest or in motion. (*OCM XII 156/Dialogues 111*, my emphasis).

is whether the body in question maintains the same relative location or not. If so, then it seems as though the very idea of a motive force can be somewhat misleading, if by “motive force” we imagine something over and above the spatial properties of a given extended substance. For it is not as if God needs to do more when he is moving bodies in comparison to keeping a body in existence at rest. The conservation of a body at rest involves as much divine causal activity as the conservation of a body in motion, since what is at issue is *where* God is going to continuously create the body. Presumably it would not take God more effort or causal oomph to create a body over there in a new location, instead of here, where it had been. We get a fairly clear sense that motive forces, if understood as some real quality that is irreducible to relations of distance but inheres in extended substances, are eliminated from the picture here. And this elimination fits well with the understanding of bodies as genuinely passive substances, totally subject to continuous creative activity on the part of God, whether they be in motion or at rest.

There is, however, a wrinkle to this story. For there is a discussion on the nature of motion and rest presented in the *Search* that seems to be in tension with this picture, in that the *Search* presents us with a rather different account. Consider the following:

I am not considering motion and rest here according to their relative being: for it is obvious that bodies at rest have relations just as real to those around them as those in motion. I conceive only that bodies in motion have a motor force, and that those at rest have no force for their state of rest, because the relation of moving bodies to those around them is always changing; and therefore there has to be a continuous force producing these continuous changes, for in effect it is these changes which cause everything new that happens in nature. But there need be no force to make nothing happen. When the relation of a body to those around it is always the same, nothing happens; and the preservation of this relation, I mean the action of God's will that preserves this relation, is no different from what preserves the body itself. (*OCM II 431-32/LO 517*)

Malebranche's views concerning the metaphysics of rest and motion is a complicated topic and I will not be able to give it the full attention it deserves in this paper. Still, it is hard to ignore the distinct impression that Malebranche here seems to be thinking that motive force is something

additional or added on, as it were, to bodies at rest and that, in this respect, there is a fundamental difference between the two modes of motion and rest.

Whatever causal contribution is needed on the part of God to bring bodies into existence, Malebranche seems to be thinking that there needs to be an additional causal contribution on the part of God in the form of motive force to bring about changes in relations of distance, which occur when bodies are moved. It is almost as if the default mode of existence for extended substances is to be at rest, and motive force is added on through another divine volition, one that is distinct from the volition that brings the body into existence in the first place.²¹ And it is this additional volition that is responsible for and results in the movement of bodies—that is, the changing of the relations of distance among bodies. Now, insofar as this additional causal power of motion is God’s action, a view to which Malebranche clearly was committed, the passivity of bodies is secure, of course. And the passive nature of bodies might be thought to come out nicely on this account as well: motive force is not part of the essence of extension not only because bodies need not be in motion to be the extended substances they are but also because the motive force is some additional feature that is added on to bodies, which are by default at rest and passive.²²

It is, nonetheless, a perplexing issue as to which of these two views, the one in the *Dialogues* and the other in the *Search*, is Malebranche’s considered view, or even whether there is such a considered view. We know that the last edition of the *Search* came out much later than the last edition of *Dialogues* and both of these editions retain the relevant sections, so we have to

²¹ In the same section, Malebranche describes the asymmetry between rest and motion in the following manner: “The will of the Author of nature, which creates the power and force that each body has for continuing in the state it is in, concerns only motion and not rest, since bodies have no power whatsoever in themselves” (*OCM* II 432/*LO* 517). Note that this seems to be in tension with what Descartes says in the *Principles* II, §§24-37 (*AT* VIII, 53-62).

²² Tad Schmaltz has suggested that the *Dialogues* passages might be read in a like fashion. I am not sure how but am open to further suggestions.

consider the possibility that Malebranche for some reason maintained both views simultaneously.²³ This much is clear: both of these accounts of motion and rest are consistent with the outlook that bodies are basically passive and any type of active force is foreign to their natures, which is the core insight promoted by the PN argument.

Let us turn to the last point of this section, Malebranche's claim that bodies lack the ability to initiate motion. We recall the following passage from the beginning paragraph of the *Search* arguing for why bodies are causally inactive:

It is clear that no body, large or small, has the power to move itself. A mountain, a house, a rock, a grain of salt, in short, the tiniest or largest body conceivable does not have the power to move itself. We have only two sorts of ideas, ideas of minds and ideas of bodies; and as we should speak only of what we conceive, we should only reason according to these two kinds of ideas. Thus, since the idea we have of all bodies makes us aware that they cannot move themselves, it must be concluded that it is minds which move them. (*OCM* II 312/*LO* 448)

Why does Malebranche think it is clear that no body has the power to move itself? Once again, the more detailed argument comes out in *Dialogues* VII. In response to Aristes' confession that he is rather unclear about whether bodies can move themselves, Theodore urges,

Contemplate intelligible extension, the archetype of bodies. This represents them, as it is on its basis that they have all been formed. This idea is completely luminous; therefore be guided by it. Do you not clearly see that bodies can be moved, but that they cannot move themselves? You hesitate. Well, suppose then this chair can move itself. In which direction will it go, with what speed, and when will it decide to move itself? Give it then an intelligence as well, and a will capable of determining itself. In other words, create a human being out of your armchair. Otherwise this power of self-motion will be useless to it. (*OCM* XII 54-55/*Dialogues* 110)

What is interesting about this passage is that Malebranche does not suggest that the contemplation of intelligible extension leads us to directly perceive (with clarity and distinction perhaps) that extension is void of any power of self-movement. Rather he draws out what he takes to be an implication of attributing the power of self-movement to bodies and claims that

²³ The "sixth" edition of the *Search*, which is actually the seventh, was the last edition to be published in Malebranche's life and came out in 1712. The *Dialogues* first came out in 1688.

bodies fail to meet this condition. The key move here, of course, is that self-initiating movement implies some form of intelligible, rational agency on the part of a mind-like mover.

But, to say the least, this inference is far from obvious. First of all, it seems perfectly conceivable that there is some nonmental, physical entity that possess some sort of self-activating motive force. In other words, it is not clear why the self-movers have to be mind-like. Second, why assume that if there are such powers in self-movers, we would know how they will move? For even in cases where we are pretty sure there is genuine rational agency, it is hardly the case that the intentions of the agent are transparent to us.

Perhaps in Malebranche's defense, we might respond to the first query by asking whether this physical entity that possesses this self-moving power would really count as a Cartesian body. In employing this response, Malebranche would be reverting to the central idea behind the PN argument—namely, that all essential properties of extended substances consist of relations of distance, and power or force is not among them. So given this background of the Cartesian dualism, according to which the only candidates for nonphysical substances turn out to be mind-like beings, Malebranche's move that imagining a self-moving chair would be akin to turning it into a human being does not seem totally unwarranted.

The second assumption on the part of Malebranche here—that the intentions of the self-mover would be transparent to the observers—is somewhat more problematic. Briefly put, it is far from clear that even if we grant that the self-movers are mind-like beings, their intentions and subsequent movements are transparent to us. Malebranche might respond by suggesting that the standard instances of rational agency are those in which the intentions of the agent are transparent to the agent in question. In other words, we are typically aware of what we intend or will. But that we are aware of our intentions and volitions, of course, does not entail that we are

aware of that of others. Life would have been much easier if the volitions and intentions of others were actually transparent. So insofar as this argument against the self-movement of bodies employs the premise that the determinations of a self-determining agent are transparent to the observers, it seems hardly persuasive. On this note, we will conclude our discussion of the PN argument. The focus on our being aware of our intentions and volitions in cases of self-determining powers, nonetheless, provides a good point to redirect our attention to the “no representation” argument, which seems to critically depend on this observation.

III. The No Representation Argument

The strategy for establishing “local” occasionalism, as mentioned earlier, was to draw out occasionalistic implications from the very nature of the Cartesian substances. In the case of minds or “thinking substances,” Malebranche sets forth what I will call the “no representation” (NR) argument. The argument has been criticized as grounded on a key principle that has “little intuitive plausibility”²⁴ but Malebranche himself must have thought more of the argument than our contemporary critics, since it appears in most of Malebranche’s works that deal with occasionalism—that is, the *Search*, the *Elucidations*, the *Dialogues*, and even the *Méditations Chrésiennes*. First presented in the *Search* in arguing for why I do not cause my arm to move (*OCM* II 315/*LO* 449), we find the following version in the *Elucidations*, which covers intramental causation as well as mind-body causation:

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, i.e., of certain tiny bodies whose motion and figure I do not know and which choose certain nerve canals from a million others I do not know in order to cause in me the motion I desire through an infinity of movements I do not desire. (*OCM* III 226/*Elucidations* 669)

²⁴ See Nicholas Jolley’s “Introduction” to the English translation of the *Dialogues*, p. xxiv.

Nicholas Jolley suggests the following principle is at work here:

KP (“Knowledge Principle”) If *A* is the cause of *B*, then *A* knows how to bring about *B*.²⁵

He goes on to argue that this principle has “little intuitive plausibility” in that it “appears to rest on a wild generalization from a few cases of causal agency.” I have a different reaction to KP and its role in the NR argument and am hesitant to fully share Jolley’s assessment of the NR argument. I am inclined to be more sympathetic to something like KP and, with some modifications, it can be made more intuitively plausible, in my view. In the end, I do think the NR argument as a whole is rather problematic but I will identify the problematic feature of the NR argument elsewhere and not in KP as Jolley seems to be doing. From my perspective, what is most problematic is Malebranche’s insistence that our causing a bodily event requires an incredibly high level of detail in our knowledge of the outcome.

But let us think first about how KP might be rendered more acceptable. The first thing to mention about KP is that it is not obvious that Malebranche intended the principle to apply to all alleged causes, including bodies. In fact, the passages we are considering appear to limit this principle to instances of *minds* causing various outcomes. Thus, the principle could have been intended to apply merely to thinking substances, in which case the principle doesn’t seem to be as wild a generalization.²⁶ Second, it might be thought that Jolley’s version is too strong in that knowing how to bring about an effect involves a lot more on the part of a mind-like agent than,

²⁵ *ibid.* Jolley points out that this principle does not have its origins in Malebranche but is associated with Arnold Geulincx, who stated: “*Quod nescis quomodo fiat, id non facis*”. See *Metaphysica vera*, Part I, Quinta Scientia, in *Arnoldi Geulincx Antverpiensis Opera Philosophica*, 3 vols., edited by J.P.N Land (The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1893), vol. 2, 150-1.

²⁶ Steven Nadler has suggested that the NR argument might have been employed by Malebranche to apply to not only to minds, but causes in general, including bodies. See his “Knowledge, Volitional Agency and Causation in Malebranche and Geulincx”, *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 7 (1999), p. 267. He duly notes that this broader reading is a minority view and also points out that “Malebranche’s texts do not strongly support this broader reading of his argument.” Though I side with the majority view, I find Nadler’s suggestion both intriguing and informative. Nadler does present the following passage from the *Conversations Chrétiennes*, which seems to support his suggestion that Malebranche at times seems to have thought something like the KP principle to be “an epistemic condition on causality *tout court*”: “Can the fire act upon you? Can it cause in you pleasure that it does not possess, that it does not feel, pleasure of which it has no knowledge?” (OCM IV, 15-6).

say, for it to intend the effect by representing the outcome. The passage above is consistent with the reading that all Malebranche is arguing for here is that a minimal requirement for a thinking substance to bring about a bodily event is to intend this outcome by representing the effect and to be in possession or aware of such representations. In other words, the principle might seem more faithful to the passages at hand if rendered as follows:

RP (“Representation Principle”) If a thinking substance A is the cause of bodily event B, then A intends B by representing B and is aware of this representation.

Not only does this version make the principle less demanding but it also skirts the potentially hazardous issue of whether the intentional agent actually knows how the causal influence from the mind to the body is supposed to work. We are well aware that the issue of whether such radically different substances could interact at all was raised against Descartes himself and he seems to have carefully avoided providing an account of what actually goes on in such interactions.²⁷ Thus, it is not unlikely that Malebranche would not have been requiring such knowledge on the part of the mind. Now if we add to this revised principle the additional premises that the movement of bodily parts involve “an infinity of movements of tiny bodies” and that I am in fact unaware of any representations of such movements, we have the full reductio argument against mind-body causation.

²⁷ For instance, in responding to Princess Elisabeth’s inquiry as to how the human mind, “being only a thinking substance” can “determine the bodily spirits in producing voluntary actions”, Descartes introduces the “primitive notion” of the “union between our soul and body”, which allegedly enables us to grasp this interaction without difficulty. What is conspicuous in Descartes’s response here is that Descartes is not providing a direct answer to Elisabeth’s question and is not even attempting to explain *how* the mind can act on the body. The gist of his answer is that we are, via the “primitive notion” of their union, simply aware of this interaction. See AT III 663-8 (CSM III, 218). There are the references to the pineal gland as the location of this interaction, not to mention the alleged account of the mind interacting with the mind by “determining” bodies, i.e. changing the direction, but not the velocity, of bodies, which might seem to the contrary. However, the specification of the location of the interaction doesn’t really help in answering the initial question that Elisabeth raised since telling us *where* this interaction occurs doesn’t explain *how* it occurs. Moreover, as for the so-called “determination” account of mind-body interaction, there has been disagreement in the literature as to whether this position should be taken to be Descartes’s actual view. See Daniel Garber, “Mind, Body and the Laws of Nature in Descartes and Leibniz” in *Descartes Embodied* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2001), pp. 133-167 and Peter McLaughlin, “Descartes on Mind-Body Interaction and the Conservation of Motion”, *Philosophical Review*, vol. 102 (1993), pp. 155-182.

In short, in the NR argument, we might take Malebranche to be arguing that a minimal requirement for my mind to cause movements of minute bodies, which constitute the movement of my arm, is that I have the ideas of the movement of these minute bodies and *not* that I know *how* these ideas *cause* the movements themselves. Making such a weaker claim about the relation between our representations and volitions does not seem as implausible as requiring the mind to know how ideas cause movements of bodies.

Now one might think that a potential downside of this somewhat watered-down version is that, depending on the level of detail we want the representation of the effect to have, it is conceivable that even Malebranche could accept that the RP is satisfied, say, in the case of my raising my arm. For, when I will to raise my left arm, if such broad descriptions such as “my left arm going up” were allowed as possible representations of the outcome, then it might indeed be the case that I am representing this outcome and that I am aware of this representation. If so, then it does seem to be the case that I am satisfying RP. This is possible, of course, because the event of my raising my left arm can be represented in any number of ways, in greater or lesser detail and determinacy.²⁸ While I may not be representing this event as one that involves millions of minute bodies moving about, I am representing it at some level.

Malebranche most likely would not have wanted to deny that we as Cartesian souls do represent the alleged outcome of our volitions at this level of description. For I doubt he would have wanted to deny our having such ordinary representations about our bodily states. But allowing such broad descriptions of outcomes into the game disarms the NR argument itself, since RP can be so easily satisfied. So for the NR argument to retain its bite, it seems like Malebranche would have to insist that the descriptions of outcomes be limited to those with a high level of detail. The problem with this restriction, however, is that it would seem to beg the

²⁸ I thank an anonymous reader on an earlier version of this paper for this comment.

question against the causal realist about the mind's powers. For we can easily imagine someone arguing that that when she pulls the trigger of the musket, it is clear that she does not know all there is to know about the various chemical processes involved in the igniting of the gunpowder and how the explosion propels the bullet toward the target. But this does not stop her from thinking that she caused the musket to fire. For Malebranche to insist that real causation requires such intricate knowledge of the uttermost detail of the constitutive events, he would have to present a principled reason why such intricate, detailed knowledge is necessary and why broad generic descriptions of outcomes are thus ruled out. But I'm not sure there is an obvious way to do this.

It might be thought that a reliance on the stronger but less plausible principle, KP, would do the trick. For it might seem easier to make the case for the necessity of possessing the intricate details of the constitutive events if what were required of us was knowledge of *how to bring about* these bodily events, and not merely represent the outcome and be aware of this representation. But I am not sure this is the case, even if I were thinking of myself as a Cartesian soul. For does a commitment to KP automatically entail a commitment to this kind of detailed, intricate knowledge specified by Malebranche? Not necessarily. I am pretty sure I know how to make *pa-chun* (Korean scallion pancakes) and I actually do make them fairly often. So I am the cause of the *pa-chun* I made last night and I surely seem to know how to bring them about. But I am also very confident that I do not have the kind of intricate, detailed knowledge of the chemical and physical processes, not to mention the molecular structure of scallions. So even if I see myself subscribing to something like KP, I don't really see myself subscribing to the connection Malebranche is making between knowing *how to bring something about* and knowing *everything there is to know about the outcome*. This suggests that my resistance to the

NR argument is at Malebranche's *identification* of the knowledge of *bringing about* with the knowledge of *all there is to know about the effect*. And, again, my main reason for resisting this is that I do not think it necessary for the causal agent to have such detailed, intricate knowledge of the outcome or the process to bring about this outcome.

So the move back to KP won't do the job of providing a principled reason as to why descriptions of outcomes have to be at the finest, most detailed level. In fact, insofar as RP is the more plausible claim, charity suggests that we take RP to be what Malebranche was employing as a key premise in his NR argument. But this still leaves Malebranche with the pressing problem of not having a convincing reason to limit the kinds of descriptions of outcomes to those of utter detail, a limitation that is crucial for the success of the NR argument. And this brings out the fact that my main complaint about the NR argument is not that it requires some sort of knowledge or representation of the outcome on the part of the agent, which seems to be a perfectly plausible position to hold with regard to the relation between our intellect and volition, but rather that such knowledge or representation have the level of detail that Malebranche suggests.

Despite my issues, I want to be fair to Malebranche and motivate this problematic aspect of the NR argument a little bit more by discussing a different kind of response. One might think that the very idea of requiring such vast and complicated knowledge of the bodily events that we allegedly cause is in itself preposterous. The bar is set so unreasonably high that it doesn't even seem to count as a relevant criterion.²⁹ And if the bar is set in such a way that it could never be met, then the argument itself seems suspect, since it is designed to thwart any attempt to secure genuine causal efficacy on the part of rational agents, the complaint would go.

²⁹ Note that this response is different from the main objection I had raised against the NR argument. My objection was that, regardless of whether we can have such intricate, detailed knowledge, such knowledge is not required on the part of the agent to be a real cause of the outcome. Lesser knowledge can do, in my view.

Against this criticism, I want to suggest that though we may find the idea of having such detailed knowledge of bodily events highly improbable, two of Malebranche's most prominent contemporaries might not have agreed. First, though not directly related to Malebranche's RP, Spinoza might be thought to hold an interestingly related view in advocating his thesis of parallelism. According to Spinoza's parallelism, for each and every finite mode of extension, there is a corresponding finite mode of thought.³⁰ This entails that if the movement of my arm consists in a series of movements of minute bodies, there is a corresponding series of ideas representing these finite modes of extension. And insofar as a given set of finite modes of extension could be said to constitute my body, there would be a corresponding set of ideas that would constitute my mind, comprised of the ideas parallel to the finite modes of extension comprising my body. Now the finite mode of thought that is my mind, then, includes all the ideas of the modes of extension constituting my body, thus perfectly representing them. Obviously, for Spinoza, my mind does not *cause* any movement in my body but this does not stop Spinoza from claiming that my mind *knows* what's going on with all the movements of the parts that constitute my body in the sense that it represents all these movements. Representation is not sufficient for causation in Spinoza's case but the representations are nonetheless there.

Moreover, something of a kindred spirit to RP appears to be operative in Leibniz as well, for, according to Leibniz, each and every perception of a given monad represents each and every other perception (or state) of its own as well as those of all the other monads in the universe. This thesis of universal expression guarantees that the dominant monad that is my soul perceives each

³⁰ See his *Ethics*, Part II, particularly Propositions 7, 12, and 13.

and every monad that makes up my body along with all their states.³¹ In Leibniz's case, then, as with Spinoza, I do represent all the changes involved in the movement of my body.

Now at this point one might, against Leibniz, bring up the obvious objection that it just seems blatantly false that I have representations of all the changes going on in my body. How could it be that I have such universal perceptions of all that is going on in my body when I'm not aware of anything even close to something like the perceptions completely mirroring my body? This objection coincides with the move Malebranche makes in the NR argument as I have described it, namely, that of denying the possession of these mirroring representations.³² What interests us, however, is that Leibniz appears to have something along the lines of a plausible response here: Leibniz could accommodate this objection by suggesting that we, unfortunately, are not aware of all of our perceptions, in that many of our perceptions are confused and obscure. The perceptions that universally express are all there; but their being there doesn't guarantee our being aware of them and, as a matter of fact, we are not conscious of many of our perceptions. The response is interesting for the following reason: rather than surrendering the claim that there are complete representations of all bodily occurrences in the face of the problematic testimony of phenomenological experience, Leibniz is modifying the extent to which we are conscious of our own states. With this move, Leibniz apparently is moving away from what is typically taken to

³¹ For instance, see the following claim from his correspondence with Arnauld: "each individual substance envelops forever all the accidents that will occur to it and expresses the entire universe in its own manner" in *Die philosophischen Schriften von Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz*. Ed. by C. I. Gerhardt (Berlin: Weidman, 1875-90), vol. II, p. 70.

³² Leibniz could even agree with Malebranche on the point that, as long as intelligent soul-like agents are concerned, having such representations is a minimal requirement for bringing about the events represented. For all instances of genuine creaturely causation for Leibniz, i.e. *intrasubstantial* causation, satisfy this minimal requirement, since the thesis of universal expression implies that not only does every monad represent all the other substances in the universe, it represents all of its own states, past, present, and future, those very states of which the monad itself is a cause. Leibniz obviously would not hold that the satisfaction of the requirement of representation is *sufficient* for causation since he denies that a finite substance causes a state of a *different* substance, despite the fact that every substance universally expresses each and every other substance. But as for the issue of whether the requirement of representation is sufficient for causation, Malebranche might have denied it as well.

be a characteristic feature of “Cartesian” minds, namely, the transparency of the mental,³³ but the fallout for our discussion is that the suggestion that minds could and actually do have representations of all that is going on within their bodies would not have been foreign to Leibniz at all.

Therefore, for both Spinoza and Leibniz, if Malebranche’s RP were implausible to them at all, the implausibility would not have rested on the fact that there obviously are not such complete representations of bodily events within our minds. Given their acceptance of our minds completely representing all bodily events, they would have had to locate the implausibility elsewhere.

One final point about the representation argument. As I have discussed, this is an argument to establish the occasionalist thesis for alleged causal agents that are intelligent, mind-like beings. If successful, however, this argument and its attribution to Malebranche would seem to be at odds with many other passages in Malebranche, where he appears to endorse some sort of real causality within souls, which, as a kind of moral power, accounts for the free acts of the will.³⁴ The immediate question, then, is about consistency, that is, whether Malebranche can consistently argue that the mind, just like matter, is devoid of causal powers, while at the same time holding that the minds possess a volitional power to act freely. This question of whether Malebranche can consistently maintain a genuinely occasionalistic stance toward the causal

³³ For a detailed and illuminating discussion on this important difference between Leibniz and Descartes, see Alison Simmon’s “Changing the Cartesian Mind: Leibniz on Sensation, Representation and Consciousness,” *The Philosophical Review*, 110 (2001).

³⁴ For instance, Malebranche says “since we have an inner sensation of our freedom while a particular good is present to our mind, we must not doubt that we are free with regard to this good.” (*Elucidation 1, LO 552*) For more on this difficult topic of Malebranche on the freedom of the will, see Elmar Kremer’s “Malebranche on Human Freedom”, *Cambridge Companion to Malebranche* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) and Tad Schmaltz’s *Malebranche’s Theory of the Soul* (Oxford: New York, 1996), pp. 217-234 (Hereafter, abbreviated as “Kremer” and “Schmaltz” respectively, followed by page number).

powers of the mind while advocating a real volitional power is a difficult issue, one that will not be addressed in this paper.

But there is another, somewhat different question lingering in the background that focuses on Malebranche's mature account of free, volitional action. How does something like the NR argument relate to our volitional actions, which, roughly speaking, seem to consist in the consent or the suspension of consent to a particular good?³⁵ In order to exercise this power of directing our will, do we have to satisfy something akin to RP? If not, why not? Tad Schmaltz has suggested through correspondence that Malebranche might have held the view that a representation of the effect is required only in cases where the effect has some "real" or "physical" being. If so, given that for Malebranche, no real or physical being is produced in the case of the free actions of the will,³⁶ there is no need for the soul to be able to represent the effects of its free action.

This suggestion, however, raises a further question. Schmaltz himself had pointed out that it might be questionable whether such a restriction of the NR argument is legitimate and one might think that the very idea behind an act of volition seems to strongly suggest that something like RP should be met, in that an act of genuine intentional volition minimally requires or presupposes that I represent this effect, regardless of whether the effect has real being or not. To suggest that I need not be aware of what I freely consent to (or withhold consent from) seems to

³⁵ Malebranche's complex and evolving views concerning freedom can not be fully treated here but I agree with what seems to be the scholarly consensus that his mature account of freedom takes as central the idea that each and every determinate mode of soul is produced by God and our only power is to consent or the withholding of consent to these particular goods. See Kremer 210-214.

³⁶ See the *Reflexion on Physical Premotion* (1715):
There are in the soul two different powers or activities. The first is properly only the action of God ... [who] continually creates the soul with the invincible desire to be happy, or continually moves it toward the good in general. But the second ... which is the essence of freedom, is ... very different from the first. It consists in a true power, not to produce, by its own efficacy, new modifications in itself, that is, new interesting perceptions or new movements in the will, but ... a true power of the soul to suspend or to give its consent to the movements that follow naturally upon interesting perceptions. (OCM XVI 46-7)

go against the very idea that this consent (or the withholding of the consent) is an action that I am intentionally performing according to my free volitional power, the objection would go.

Of course, one easy way for Malebranche to meet this objection would be to affirm that, in cases of volitional action, RP is indeed satisfied—that is, we do represent the effects of our consent or withholding of consent. One might even add that, in meeting RP and our awareness of such, we get a glimpse of how it is that there is such genuine volitional activity in the soul. In other words, that we know what is going to happen adds credibility to the fact that our volition plays a role in this occurrence.

Despite its plausibility, this response, however, seems to conflict with another important strand in Malebranche’s analysis of the nature of minds that commentators have taken note of. Schmaltz, for instance, argues that the attribution of such moral powers to souls is possible for Malebranche only on the admission that “we do not have clear knowledge of the soul,” because it is “since we do not have a clear idea of the soul, we cannot rule out the claim that God creates and conserves our will without fully directing it. Thus, it is the fact that our mind differs from matter in an inexplicable manner that allows us to posit an equally inexplicable power in ourselves to direct our own will.”³⁷

If Schmaltz’s analysis is correct, then the fact that Malebranche thinks we lack clear knowledge of the soul raises further questions with the NR argument itself, since the claim that it is the inexplicability of our minds that allows us to attribute some sort of genuine causal power to our volitions seems to go against the very idea that we have knowledge of a key principle governing our volitional actions like RP. I will not attempt to provide a full answer here but will suggest that the inconsistency might not be as obvious as it seems. To say that there is an inexplicable power within us that determines the “direction” of the “moral motion” of the soul

³⁷ Schmaltz 233.

does not in itself imply that this power of the soul has no idea of the outcome of its action. For one could acknowledge that our souls clearly have the ability to represent certain outcomes—that is, the consent to or withholding of consent from a particular good—but how it is that our soul, through this step of representation, causes such an outcome could still be mysterious and inexplicable. In other words, Malebranche could well agree that for the moral powers to be there, one does have to represent the particular outcome towards which the soul is to be directed, despite the fact that these powers themselves are mysterious and inexplicable.

Some brief concluding remarks. In this paper, we have examined Malebranche's two local arguments for occasionalism. We have seen how Malebranche attempted to argue for why we ought to adopt the occasionalist position with regard to the two finite substances of body and mind, even if we might not be convinced of the grander hypotheses concerning, say, the nature of causation itself (the NNC argument) or the nature of divine causal activity in this world (the CCC argument). In the end, we have seen that both arguments leave us asking more questions, though it might be said that the PN argument seems more successful than the NR argument: while the PN argument presents what seems to be a fairly persuasive reason why we should think of Cartesian bodies as essentially passive, the NR argument seems to raise as many issues as it addresses. Nonetheless, I hope to have shown that both arguments reveal how diverse, rich, and resourceful Malebranche's thoughts were about why we ought to be occasionalists when it comes to the dual Cartesian finite substances. And in so doing I also hope I have contributed to the continued interest in this marvelous philosopher of the early modern period.³⁸

³⁸ Some of the material of this paper is based on the first chapter of my dissertation "Leibniz on Individual Substances and Causation: An Account of Divine Concurrence" (Yale University, 2001). I thank Robert Adams, Michael Della Rocca, and Tad Schmaltz for many helpful discussions. I also thank the National Humanities Center for supporting my research while writing this paper.