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Malebranche's "Vision in God"

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Abstract

Of Malebranche's many famous doctrines, his "Vision in God" (VIG) surely ranks among the most interesting. Inspired by Augustine and Descartes, he argues for it vigorously and gives it a prominent place in his system of thought. And although it won no converts it did win many critics, who, in criticizing, were compelled to clarify their own theories of cognition. Thus VIG is of interest for its own sake, for its role in Malebranche's philosophy, and for its general influence in the early modern period.

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I. Initial Sketch of the Theory

Malebranche invokes ideas in the strict sense only where clear and distinct representational content is in play.[3] So construed, "ideas" play at least three important roles for Malebranche:

(i) They are the eternal archetypes on the basis of which God created the world.
(ii) They are what the intellect grasps when contemplating, during "pure perception," the essences of things.[4]
(iii) They play a key role in ordinary sensory perception of the material world. (a) "When we perceive something sensible," Malebranche writes, "two things are found in our perception: *sensation* and pure *idea*."[5] Sensations are non-representational modes of the mind of which it is primitively aware; these correspond roughly to secondary qualities (such as color), which, not being modes of extension, are not genuinely in bodies.[6] The idea of extension itself, in contrast, concerns "primary qualities" which truly are in bodies; our grasp of extension, then, is

genuinely representational, and involves the intellect. Our sense perception of a body in some way combines sensations with the idea of extension. Further, (b) Malebranche holds a representational theory of sensory perception. Focusing on vision, he holds that we do not see material bodies "in" or "by" themselves; rather, we see them "by means of" ideas; or alternatively, we perceive ideas "directly" or "immediately" and by so doing perceive bodies "indirectly" or "mediately." Putting (a) and (b) together: that bodies are seen indirectly, "by means of" ideas, means that the sensory perception of a body involves the intellectual grasp of an idea.[7]

Finally, Malebranche claims that ideas, playing the roles above, must be located or grounded *in God*. Our grasp of essences, during both pure and sensory perception, thus involves our making cognitive contact with (something in) God. Hence Malebranche's famous dictum, that we "see all things in God."[8]

II. Some Arguments for the Theory

Malebranche's theory encompasses two main claims.

(A) "Malebranche's Representationalism" (MR): Both pure and sensory perception require ideas distinct both from the object perceived and from the state (or mode) of the cognizing mind.
(B) "Vision in God" (VIG): Ideas are located in God.

Malebranche's many arguments for these claims include these:

(1) *The Object of Perception*. "To see nothing is not to see,"[9] Malebranche writes, by which he suggests that every cognitive act has an actually existing "object." Since the objects of some cognitive acts cannot be bodies (as in standard cases of non-veridical perception, such as dreams), there must be other objects of perception, viz. ideas.[10] He seems just to assume this conclusion generalizes to veridical perception.[11]
(2) *The Strolling Soul*. Malebranche argued that (i) perception requires its object to be "present" to the soul (or mind), so since (ii) the soul cannot "stroll about" to behold bodies, (iii) there must be something distinct from the body which *is* present to the soul.[12]
(3) *The Argument(s) From Properties*. Malebranche argues that ideas are immutable, universal and general, infinite, eternal, necessary, etc.[13] Consider the idea of a circle. Its content is not up to us; truths about circles are unchanging, eternal, necessary, universal, and infinite in number; the idea of a circle is general (and infinite) in applying to the infinite number of actual and possible circles, etc. Contrast these properties now with those possessed by mental modes, which are changeable, transient, particular, contingent, finite, etc. The idea of a circle, then, cannot be identified with our mode of thinking of or

sensually perceiving a circle or circular body, since the idea has properties the mode lacks.[14] *What* we grasp when we grasp a circle, then, cannot just be something in ourselves, even if our *state* of grasping may itself be. Similar considerations ultimately apply to all ideas. Since all the properties above are also, plausibly, properties of God, and of God alone,[15] this argument leads to VIG: what we grasp in grasping an idea must be something in God.[16]

Malebranche argues, similarly, that ideas are causally efficacious, causing both our pure and sensory perceptions.[17] Given his occasionalism, it would follow that ideas must in some sense be (or be in) God, the one true cause.

(4) *The Elimination Argument*.[18] Malebranche surveys what he takes to be all the ways in which we might perceive bodies and finds fatal flaws in all, except for VIG.[19]

> We assert the absolute necessity, then, of the following: either (a) the ideas we have of bodies . . . come from these bodies . . . ; or (b) our soul has the power of producing these ideas; or (c) God has produced them in us while creating the soul or produces them every time we think about a given object; or (d) the soul has in itself all the perfections it sees in bodies; or else (e) the soul is joined to a completely perfect being that contains all intelligible perfections, or all the ideas of created beings. (*Search* 3.2.1, 219 (*OC* 1:417))

Option (e) refers to VIG; (a) refers to the scholastic doctrine that bodies transmit species; (b) to the view that the mind (or intellect) creates ideas upon being roused to do so by the senses;[20] (c) to nativism and occasionalism; and (d) to Arnauld's identification of ideas with mental modes. Malebranche offers many arguments against each of (a)–(d), but some of these do double-duty as positive arguments for (e). For example, Malebranche claims that VIG both best respects God's simplicity and rightly places our minds "in a position of complete dependence on God."[21] Similarly, he argues that from the fact that we can think of "all beings, now one, now another, it is certain that all beings are present to our mind," and this can be so only because "God, i.e., He who includes all things in the simplicity of His being, is present to it."[22] One reading of this argument might be that in order to direct our attention to some object x, we must first form the desire to think of x, but this we cannot do unless we already have the idea of x; and since we can turn our attention to any object at all, it follows that we already have access to every idea. But our finite mind could not itself contain this infinity within it; thus we must have access to that which can and does, viz. God. This argument's invocation of an infinite capacity would clearly tell against most of (a)–(d) above.

III. Deeper Sketch of the Theory

In fact VIG is rooted in Malebranche's fairly traditional Trinitarian metaphysics.[23] Briefly, God is an infinite being, an indeterminate "being in

general,"[24] one whose being "contains" all beings,[25] yet is itself no being in particular. Being infinitely perfect, only one object is worthy of His contemplation, viz. His own essence. God's eternally reflecting on Himself "generates" an idea of Himself, and this idea is the second person of the Trinity, or the Word.[26] In reflecting on Himself, further, God sees the infinite ways in which His own infinite perfections might be imperfectly imitated; thus His idea of Himself contains His ideas of all possible creatures, which are these imperfect imitations.[27] Through also knowing His will, the third person of the Trinity, God knows which of these possible creatures He made actual. As Malebranche puts it, prior to creation God must have had ideas of all possible beings, otherwise He wouldn't have known what to create. But prior to creation there was only God, who contemplates only Himself. Therefore ideas of all possible beings must be "in" God.[28]

But now human beings can also grasp the ideas of all possible bodies, at least, insofar as we clearly grasp the idea of extension and its modifications. Just how is that possible? God has these ideas because, as an infinite and indeterminate being, He "contains" all possible beings in virtue of containing the perfections they imperfectly imitate. But human beings, as finite determinate beings, do not and cannot. If we can be said to grasp something infinite, then, we cannot do so by looking into ourselves, for we cannot see in ourselves what simply is not there.[29] The only alternative is that we are grasping something in God. Malebranche's key move is then to argue that *all* grasp of ideas, including during sense perception, involves grasp of the infinite. Thus *any* cognition involving ideas will put a human mind in cognitive contact with the infinite. Thus we see all things in God.

IV. Topics of Particular Interest

Here are some of the aspects of VIG which have attracted the most critical attention, both traditionally and recently.

(1) *The ontological status of ideas*. Malebranche accepts the Cartesian ontology, according to which everything is either substance (body or mind) or mode (of extension or of thought).[30] So what are ideas? They are neither bodies nor minds. Nor may they be identified with modes of our minds, as Malebranche argues above. Nor are they modes or parts of God, since the infinite yet simple God is susceptible to neither modification nor division.[31] Nor can they be identified with the substance of God *simpliciter*, since ideas are diverse yet God is simple, and since Malebranche denies Arnauld's objection that in VIG, we see God Himself.[32] So what are they?

The "traditional" interpretation reads his ideas as spiritual objects either precluding us from, or somehow mediating, perception of bodies.[33] More recently scholars have read ideas as being like logical concepts, i.e. abstract entities which are not "objects of perception" in the same sense in which bodies are.[34] But all such readings sit poorly, I think, with Malebranche's ontology, occasionalism, and belief that ideas are efficacious.

Malebranche has good reasons to distinguish ideas from God *simpliciter*, as just noted, and also good reasons to identify them with God, as the arguments for VIG suggest.[35] His Trinitarian metaphysics supplies the reconciliation, since, being grounded in epistemology, it provides a third category of being without giving up the Cartesian ontology.[36] Although God is one, simple, infinite substance, there is a multiplicity of limited ways of *conceiving* that substance; an idea is God's substance conceived (by Him or, in VIG, by us) in relation to its imperfect or limited imitation by some possible creature.[37] This is what Malebranche repeatedly says: God's ideas are "His essence, insofar as it is participable or imperfectly imitable."[38] Further, this reading fits better with occasionalism and the efficacy of ideas, given that God's essence is efficacious.[39] In short, the efficacy of ideas is really just a way of speaking of *God's* efficacy.[40]

(2) *Intelligible Extension*. Malebranche refers to ideas as divine archetypes, which perhaps suggests they are universals. Yet, as Arnauld objected, divine creation would require God to have ideas of the particulars He creates.[41] Then again, Malebranche often speaks as if God has ideas of every particular creature. But then the world of ideas, in God, would seem as mutable and imperfect as the created world. In response to this concern Malebranche explained that God does *not* have discrete ideas in this way.[42] Rather, He has the single, unchanging idea of extension, an idea which includes all the modifications of which extension is capable. When we think of or see different particular bodies, we are in cognitive contact with different "parts" of this idea of extension, or of "intelligible extension." When we grasp the circularity of the moon, for example, we are grasping the idea of a circle, which just is to grasp intelligible extension, or a portion thereof; as the moon moves and appears to change size, or when we look at the larger sun, it is the same intelligible extension we grasp, if perhaps another portion. The one intelligible extension, Malebranche claims, obviates the need for God to have different particular ideas.

But not so fast. Intelligible extension is in God, and has distinguishable parts; how can Malebranche avoid holding that God has parts, and specifically *extended* parts?[43] Further, ideas are the essences of creatures that, in existing, realize those essences.[44] If intelligible extension is in God, and is realized in bodies, then it would seem that God Himself is realized in bodies. Similarly, Malebranche accepted divine omnipresence, and sometimes suggested that intelligible extension was identifiable with God's immensity, which together might suggest that God Himself was everywhere insofar as intelligible extension was everywhere.[45] Finally, Malebranche holds that God "eminently contains" all possible creatures, and sometimes suggests both that such containment requires some sort of resemblance between container and contained and that ideas resemble their objects in some way.[46] Put all these together and Malebranche seems to hold that God is Himself extended, and that particular bodies are modifications of God's substance. Malebranche's theory collapses into that of the dreaded Spinoza![47]

Malebranche denied this charge repeatedly, insisting that he avoided it by distinguishing the intelligible extension (or idea) that is in God from the created extension (or creature) that is not. He particularly denied that intelligible extension literally contained distinguishable parts; rather, it contained only *intelligible* parts, meaning that we can intellectually distinguish parts within the idea of extension even though these parts are not *really* separable from each other. Significant debate remains, though, over whether Malebranche provides a clear or intelligible account of intelligible extension, with commentators disagreeing on just what intelligible extension is, exactly. Some see it as the axioms and inference rules of geometry, with ideas of particular bodies being construed as theorems, and ideas being "in" intelligible extension in the way theorems are "in" axioms.[48] Radner (1994) rejects such readings, arguing that intelligible extension so construed couldn't be an immediate object of cognition. According to Pyle (2003), Malebranche wants intelligible extension to play two distinct and incompatible roles: as the logical concept of extension and as something "akin to the Kantian notion of space as the pure form of outer intuition, i.e. as an a priori particular and not a concept at all" (66). Reid (2003) construes intelligible extension as a "partial consideration of the Word which corresponded specifically to God's immensity" (607), while Pessin (2004) identifies intelligible extension with God's capacity to create extended matter.[49] With such unclarity about Malebranche's basic notion, it remains unclear whether he *successfully* denies the charge of Spinozism.

(3) *Malebranche's Representationalism*. The decades-long debate between Arnauld and Malebranche began with Arnauld's 1683 book, *On True and False Ideas*, which attacked every aspect of VIG.[50] Arnauld especially targeted Malebranche's distinguishing ideas from the modes of the cognizing mind, arguing instead that our mental modes are *intrinsically* representational.[51] He challenges all of Malebranche's arguments for MR and VIG above: (1) our intrinsic representational capacity accommodates the "object of perception"; (2) the "strolling soul" is based on the false premise that mental representation requires something "present" to the perceiving organ; (3) the "argument from properties" as well as (4) the "ability to think of anything" fail to appreciate that something itself formally finite might represent the objectively infinite,[52] etc. Moreover, on VIG we actually *fail* to perceive bodies at all – we only perceive ideas – and worse, VIG wrongly entails that we are capable of seeing God.[53]

Malebranche replied in force. First, we *do* see bodies, just not "by themselves" or "directly" (see IV.4 below). Nor do we "see God": what we see, as above, is not God's substance *simpliciter*, but only insofar as it is imitable. Moreover, Arnauld's granting our mental modes intrinsic representationality itself provides no *explanation* of our ability to represent;[54] worse, it leaves us only, ultimately, perceiving our own modes, which in turn yields skepticism problems: we'd lack both guarantee that our perceptions correspond to the external world and explanation for the

objectivity and universality of the eternal truths.[55] And finally, to allow something finite to represent something infinite is to put in it what just isn't there.[56] This latter claim is rooted, of course, in Malebranche's Trinitarian metaphysics, as we've seen.

Arnauld replied again at length, but the debate soon moved onto other matters. It is perhaps possible, however, to isolate what's at the heart of much of the debate. Arnauld was initially vexed at Malebranche's theodicial account of divine grace, in particular at his presumption that we can grasp the principles governing divine action.[57] This latter in turn seems based on VIG's doctrine that we grasp the same ideas, and ultimately wisdom, that God grasps within Himself;[58] thus VIG provides the grounds for Malebranche's theodicy. For Arnauld, to the contrary, God's actions are deeply inscrutable; Malebranchean theodicy is arrogant in presuming to evaluate them. At its deepest core, then, the debate is a theological one. Nevertheless, it contains much of interest concerning matters of perception and mental representation.

(4) *Direct v. Indirect Perception*. Very roughly, one's perception of object x is "direct" if one perceives x without perceiving some distinct object y representing x, and "indirect" if one's perception of x does involve the perception of such an object y. The traditional reading takes Malebranche as a proponent of the indirect perception of bodies, as he often writes that we perceive ideas directly while we perceive bodies only indirectly.[59] In the extreme version, Malebranche is read as an idealist: *strictly* speaking we perceive *only* ideas, and not bodies. But in a more moderate version, Malebranche is what Nadler (1992) calls a "representative realist": we perceive ideas of bodies directly, but we still *do* perceive the bodies themselves, if only indirectly, for example on the basis of interpretation of or inference from the directly perceived ideas. Insofar as Malebranche does insist that we do see *bodies* (if indirectly),[60] this version is both more plausible and more popular than the idealist version.

Yet in recent years it has come under attack.[61] Malebranche is vague on just how indirect perception occurs; nor does he seem to posit any inferential relation from the perception of the idea to the perception of the body. Without that, Malebranche would lack resources to distinguish the representative realist theory from the idealist theory. Since he clearly rejects the latter, that suggests the traditional interpretation is wrong. Nadler goes on to argue that the traditional interpretation would require the perception of ideas to be something like the perception of "sense data," which simply cannot be; rather, he claims, Malebranchean ideas are like concepts which provide certain necessary conditions for categorical perception, which mediate our perceptions, for example, when we bring sensations "under" concepts, but which do not themselves serve as objects of perception.[62] If so, then Malebranche supports the *direct* perception of bodies. True, he writes of "indirect" perception, but all that now means is that our perception

of bodies is mediated by ideas as just described, not that bodies are not the objects of our perception.

One drawback to Nadler's account, perhaps, is that he makes no effort to relate this reading to Malebranche's overall (Trinitarian) metaphysics. This is perhaps no surprise, since Nadler thinks that Malebranche has no coherent account of the ontology of ideas.[63] Pessin (2004) defends an account of Malebranche's ontology of ideas which has the added virtue, ultimately, of supporting the direct perception interpretation in somewhat different ways from Nadler's.[64]

Notes

[1] From Augustine he inherits the notions of divine illumination, of seeing eternal truths "in" God, and of construing ideas as archetypes in God's mind; from Descartes he inherits the notion of extension as the essence of matter which we grasp fundamentally by means of the intellect. Put these together, with some twists, and we get VIG. (For discussion, see Schmaltz 2000, 61–8.)

[2] Such as Locke, Bayle, Foucher, De Mairan, etc., and, most importantly, Arnauld.

[3] He'll often use the term in looser senses, though; cf. *Elucidations* 3, 561 (*OC* 3:44).

[4] Grasping the essence of a thing allows one to grasp the modifications of which the thing is capable. Following Descartes, Malebranche holds that in grasping mathematics we grasp the essence of extension, and so become able to grasp the infinity of possible material creatures. Diverging from Descartes, Malebranche denies that we have any similar grasp of the essence of mind and thus denies we have an idea of the mind.

[5] *Search* 3.2.6, 234 (*OC* 1:445).

[6] Jolley (2000) reads Malebranche as holding an adverbial theory of sensation. A similar view may be found in Scott's (1996) denial that Malebranchean sensations are themselves objects of perception.

[7] How exactly sensation and ideas are related, and exactly what Malebranche means by "(in)direct perception" (see IV.4), are matters of debate. Are primary qualities grasped only intellectually, or sometimes sensually as well? (Jolley (1990, 91–2) defends the former; Schmaltz (2000, 68) critiques.) When Malebranche suggests that ideas "become sensible" by means of sensation (*Elucidations* 10, 626 (*OC* 3:152)), does he mean that ideas merely cause sensory experience, or do they also "inform" it in some way? How exactly are pure perceptions related to sensory perceptions, particularly given Malebranche's claim that modes of the soul are not representational? (See Schmaltz 1996, 114–24 for useful discussion.)

[8] *Search* 3.2.6, 230 (*OC* 1:437).

[9] *Search* 4.11, 320 (*OC* 2:99).

[10] *Search* 3.2.1, 217 (*OC* 1:413–14); *Conversations* III (*OC* 4:73); *Lettre III* (*OC* 9:946).

[11] Nadler (1992) sketches ways Malebranche might support this generalization (79ff.).

[12] *Search* 3.2.1, 217 (*OC* 1:413–14). What this "presence" comes to is not very clear. Arnauld savagely critiqued this argument (*True/False*, Ch. 4 (*OA* 38:190ff.)), in part for conflating corporeal vision (the physical processes leading to perception, requiring spatial contiguity or "presence") with spiritual vision (the mind's cognitive activity, requiring merely "objective [i.e. epistemic] presence"). Although Malebranche responded that the argument was meant as a joke (*Recueil* 95–6), somewhat sympathetic reconstructions of it are available, reading "presence" in its perhaps intended causal or ontological senses. Cf. Nadler (1992, 66ff.), Pyle (2003, 49ff.); cf. Kendrick (2002) for analysis of Arnauld's critique of Malebranche.

[13] *Search* 4.11, 322–23 (*OC* 2:103); cf. Pyle (2003 58ff.).

[14] *Elucidations* 10, 613–4 (*OC* 3:130).

[15] *Dialogues* 2, 20 (*OC* 12:50–51).

[16] Here Malebranche explicitly invokes Augustine. (Cf. *Search* 3.2.6, 234 (*OC* 1:444); *Dialogues* 1, 16–17 (*OC* 12:45); *Recueil* 79–80; cf. note 1 above). See Schmaltz (2000) for comparison of Malebranche and Augustine.

[17] *Search* 3.2.6, 232 (*OC* 1:442). There is some debate over just when Malebranche introduced the efficacy of ideas. Robinet (1965) and Lennon (1980) date it to Malebranche's 1695 *Réponse*;

Jolley (1994) finds it present in the 1688 *Dialogues*; Alquié (1974) offers at least one 1684 text; Schmaltz (2000) argues that the doctrine is anticipated in earlier texts; Fafara (1978) argues that even the early Malebranche held it; Watson (2005) agrees, arguing that the efficacy of ideas is grounded in the traditional conception of the efficacy of God's knowledge.

[18] This argument is developed in *Search* 3.2.1–6, 217–35 (*OC* 1:413–447), *Méditations Chrétiennes*, and the *Réponse*. Lennon (1980) provides a critical overview.

[19] Malebranche seems to take the list to be exhaustive; whether it is, or even needs to be, is a matter of some debate. Locke objected that we cannot know that the list is exhaustive ("Examination," 8.212); McCracken (1983) argues that it isn't (129); Watson (2005) argues it needn't be, but need only limit the space of possible positions; similarly, Nolan (2003) stresses that its negative arguments also serve as positive arguments for VIG. An additional question concerns the source of Malebranche's enumeration. Connell (1967) traces its structure to Suarez's account of angelic knowledge (110–29); Nadler (1992) analyzes the probable sources of each of the particular doctrines on Malebranche's list (108–40).

[20] Nadler (1992, 117ff.) traces this view to Arnauld and Nicole's critique of Gassendi, in their *Logic*, taking it to be a form of nativism. As such it would be compatible with (d), which is an account of the nature of ideas, not their origin. Schmaltz (2000), to the contrary, reads (b) as propounding that the mind creates species, which (d) would then reject (71).

[21] *Search* 3.2.6, 231 (*OC* 1:439). As Nadler (1992) has noted, VIG is the epistemological correlate of occasionalism (141); both doctrines reflect our great dependence on God. Cf. McCracken (1983, 66) and Pyle (2003, 56).

[22] *Search* 3.2.6, 232 (*OC* 1:440).

[23] Reid (2003) provides a detailed account (588ff.); cf. also Cook (1998) and Watson (2002).

[24] *Search* 3.2.6, 231 (*OC* 1:439); *Search* 3.2.8, 241 (*OC* 1:456).

[25] What precisely "containment" comes to is a matter of debate. Arnauld argued that bodies are merely "objectively" contained in God, which means only that God knows of them, but took Malebranche to be mistakenly committed to bodies' being "formally" in God. Malebranche replied that God "eminently" contains such beings, but did little to explain. See *Search* 3.2.5, 228–9 (*OC* 1:433–4); also *Recueil* 118ff., *Lettre III*, 952; *True/False* Ch. 14 (*OA* 38:247ff.).

[26] *Lettre III*, 968.

[27] *Elucidations* 10, 625 (*OC* 3:149); *Search* 4.11, 319 (*OC* 2:97–8). Thus Malebranche also refers to VIG as the "union of our mind with the Word of God" (*Search* 3.2.6, 235 (*OC* 1:446)).

[28] *Search* 3.2.5, 229 (*OC*: 1:434–5).

[29] *Elucidations* 10, 625 (*OC* 3:149); cf. *Lettre III*, 954.

[30] *Elucidations* 12, 639ff. (*OC* 3:173).

[31] *Elucidations* 10, 625 (*OC* 3:149).

[32] *True/False*, Ch. 17 (*OA* 38.247ff.).

[33] Arnauld, Locke, and Berkeley seemed to read him the first way, for example, while Nadler (1992) cites, amongst others, Lovejoy (1923), Church (1931), Connell (1967), Gueroult (1955), etc. as reading him the second way.

[34] Cf. McCracken (1983), Jolley (1990), Nadler (1992), Jolley (1994, 1996), Pyle (2003). Watson (2005) argues that such readings ignore ideas' grounding in Malebranche's Trinitarian metaphysics, as we'll see.

[35] Cf. "The intelligible world is in God and is God himself, for what is in God is, substantially, all of God" (*Correspondence*, 85 (*OC* 19:883); cf. *Recueil*, 118).

[36] This is basically the line taken implicitly by Cook (1998); more explicitly, see Reid (2003, 592).

[37] As Reid (2003, 592) puts it: "Because these distinctions were . . . grounded in *God's* epistemology . . . Malebranche was able to avoid the Scylla of the Sabellian heresy, according to which there were not true personal distinctions in God Himself, but only different ways in which *we* conceived Him. At the same time, by strongly insisting on the consubstantiality of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, Malebranche could avoid the Charybdis of the Arian heresy, according to which the latter two persons were separate created substances".

[38] *Elucidations* 10, 625 (*OC* 3:149); *Dialogues* 2, 21 (*OC* 12:51).

[39] *Conversations* 79.

[40] Cf. Peppers-Bates (2005). Pessin (2004) argues, similarly, that Malebranche's ideas ought to be identified with "possible divine volitions," or, roughly, God's capacities to create different

creatures. This claim is a more "active" way of saying that ideas are "God's essence insofar as it is imitable."

[41] *True/False* Ch. 13 (*OA* 38:241ff.).

[42] *Elucidations* 10, 627 (*OC* 3:153–4).

[43] It doesn't help when Malebranche sometimes speaks as if intelligible extension is itself extended (*Recueil* 78, 208), and says that what is in God, *is* God (*Correspondence*, 85 (*OC* 19:883); *Recueil*, 118).

[44] Thus Malebranche sometimes writes as if the distinction between intelligible and created extension is merely one of reason (*Correspondence*, 86 (*OC* 19:884); *Dialogues* 2, 29 (*OC* 12:60)).

[45] Reid (2003, 589) gives a detailed account here in terms of Malebranche's Trinitarian metaphysics: extension is bodies' way of imperfectly imitating God's immensity. Cf. Rome (1963, 203–4).

[46] *Search* 3.2.5, 228 (*OC* 1:433). Nadler (1992, 46–7) denies that Malebranche holds that ideas must resemble their objects, while Reid (2003, 596) disputes Nadler's reading of the texts.

[47] Arnauld makes this charge in *Défense* V (*OA* 38:537), as do De Mairan (*Correspondence* 83 (*OC* 19:878)) and Locke ("Remarks," 11, 253). For more recent versions of the charge, see Iorio (1980, 21) and Nadler (1992, 150). For a useful discussion of Malebranche's alleged Spinozism, see Moreau (1947).

[48] Lennon (1980, 787) writes, similarly, that it is "the set of specifications to which any extended thing must conform," comparing it to the axioms and postulates of geometry. Cf. Schrecker (1938), Bracken (1991), Watson (1991), and discussion by Reid (2003, 598ff.).

[49] Overall, recent scholars critical of Malebranche's account of intelligible extension include Radner (1978), Iorio (1980), Schmaltz (1996, 2000), and Pyle (2003); those offering at least partial defenses are Ablondi (1998), Charles (1998), Reid (2003), and Pessin (2004).

[50] The debate was one of the great intellectual events of the time. Moreau (2000) offers a chronology and overview; Lennon (1980) summarizes that part of the debate concerning ideas; Wahl (1988) explores its implications for the exegesis of Descartes on ideas. There has been much disagreement over how to interpret Arnauld's position and indeed the whole debate itself. Many read Arnauld as a representationalist and see the debate as concerning whether to locate ideas in the human mind or in God (Lovejoy 1923, Church 1931; cf. Lennon's account of Bayle, Reid, and Hamilton (1980, 794)); more recent scholars read Arnauld to support direct perception, and see the debate as concerning whether representationalism is true (Cook 1974, Nadler 1989). Malebranche himself sees the debate somewhat more narrowly: the key issue is whether the mind's modes are capable of representational content (*Recueil*, 50).

[51] *True/False* Ch. 5 (*OA* 38:198).

[52] *True/False* Ch. 5 (*OA* 38:198); cf. *OA* 40:88–9, where Arnauld borrows the same point from Régis.

[53] *True/False* Ch. 11 (*OA* 38:226ff.); *True/False* Ch. 19 (*OA* 38:280ff.).

[54] *Recueil* 142.

[55] *Elucidations* 10, 619–20 (*OC* 3:139ff.). On VIG what we grasp are God's own archetypes, so we are assured that our knowledge maps onto reality; further, we all access the same ideas, thus grounding the objectivity and universality.

[56] *Lettre III*, 954; *Méditations Chrétiennes* I, 16.

[57] Cf. Alquié (1974, 186).

[58] *Search* 5.5, 364 (*OC* 2:168). See Moreau (2000, 104ff.) and Pyle (2003, 90ff.) for development of this point.

[59] Nadler (1992, 158–9) provides a healthy list of such passages. It's thus no surprise that the traditional interpretation has largely held sway starting with Arnauld, Locke, and Berkeley, and continues through to the present day: Connell (1967), Radner (1978), Lennon (1980), Scott (1996), Pyle (2003) etc.

[60] Cf. *Recueil*, 959.

[61] Cf. Nadler (1992), Pessin (2004). I read Cook (1991) as challenging the representative realist interpretation as well, although, unlike Nadler and Pessin, he offers no account of what it is to perceive a body indirectly, by means of an idea, if it is not to perceive an idea *in lieu of* a body – which seems equivalent to not perceiving the body.

[62] Scott (1996) critiques Nadler here, arguing that ideas *do* count as objects of perception. (Cf. Pyle's critique of Nadler (2003, 71–3).)

[63] Nadler (1992, 96–7).

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