

## OUR BODIES, OUR SELVES: MALEBRANCHE ON THE FEELINGS OF EMBODIMENT

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Malebranche holds that the feeling of having a body comes in three main varieties. A perceiver sensorily experiences herself (1) as *causally connected* to her body, in so far as the senses represent the body as causing her sensory experiences and as uniquely responsive to her will, (2) as *materially connected* to her body, in so far as the senses represent the perceiver as a material being wrapped up with the body, and (3) as *perspectivally connected* to her body, in so far as the external senses represent the world from the body's perspective. In addition to distinguishing these varieties of embodied experience, I explain why the perceiver experiences her connection to the body in these ways. Although Malebranche often casts the experience of embodiment in a negative light, his considered view is that this experience contributes to our survival and salvation.

**Key Words:** Malebranche, sense perception, a sense of bodily ownership, embodiment, theodicy

'After the Fall, the mind became, as it were, material and terrestrial . . .'  
(OCM II: 130/LO: 339)<sup>1</sup>

**S**UPPOSE that a human perceiver steps on a rusty nail and experiences a sharp pain in the foot. There will be a way that the foot feels to her. Suppose, for example, that she feels the foot's location, its approximate dimensions, the extent of the pain, and that the foot is being damaged. The perceiver's bodily awareness would then convey or represent to her that the foot has these properties.<sup>2</sup> Phi-

1. See the end of the paper for an explanation of abbreviations for primary texts.

2. By *bodily awareness* I mean the sense of one's own body 'from the inside', which results from bodily sensations like pleasure and pain, hunger and thirst, as well as kinesthetic or proprioceptive sensations of the position and movement of one's limbs.

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losophers disagree about whether the perceiver also feels that the foot belongs to her. That is, they disagree about whether the property of *bodily ownership* is represented by bodily awareness. Some philosophers argue that the perceiver does not feel that the foot belongs to her, but merely forms a belief with this content.<sup>3</sup> Other philosophers, in contrast, insist that there is ‘a distinctive phenomenology of ownership’ (de Vignemont 2013: 643). I argue that Malebranche carves out a distinctive position in this debate. According to Malebranche, the perceiver feels that a human body belongs to her, but this feeling comes in different varieties (OCM XII: 118/JJS: 78).<sup>4</sup>

Malebranche suggests three main ways in which the perceiver sensorily experiences herself as having a body. The perceiver sensorily experiences herself:

- (1) As *causally connected* to the body, in so far as the senses represent the body as producing the perceiver’s sensory experiences, and as uniquely responsive to her will.<sup>5</sup>
- (2) As *materially connected* to the body, in so far as the senses represent her as a material being wrapped up with the body.
- (3) As *perspectivally connected* to the body, in so far as the external senses represent the world from the body’s perspective.

The feeling of bodily ownership is the phenomenological genus: the feelings of causal, material, and perspectival connection are the species. Although other scholars recognize Malebranche’s interest in the human experience of embodiment, they have not grappled with the complexity of his account.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to distinguishing three species of bodily ownership, I offer an explanation of why, according to Malebranche, a perceiver experiences her connection to the body in these ways. Malebranche often casts the feelings of bodily ownership in a negative light, describing them as confused, false, and danger-

3. See, e.g., Bermúdez (2011: 161; 2015), and McDowell (2011).

4. The claim that sensory experiences represent, have contents, or convey information to the perceiver is metaphysically neutral about how it is that sensory experience are capable of conveying information for Malebranche. See Nadler (1992) and Simmons (2009) for discussion of Malebranche’s account of how human mental states come to be contentful. See Siegel (2010) for helpful present-day discussion of the claim that sensory experiences have contents.

5. Malebranche endorses occasionalism, which is the view that God is the only true or genuine cause, and that creatures are merely occasions for the exercise of God’s efficacy, typically in law-like ways. My use of causal language is intended to be neutral between occasional and genuine or true causation, unless otherwise specified. For more on Malebranche’s occasionalism, see Guérout (1959), Alquié (1974), Radner (1978), Pyle (2003), Peppers-Bates (2009), Nadler (2010), and Adams (2013).

6. See, e.g., Guérout (1959: Vol. 3, 65, 138–143), Alquié (1974: 178), Schmaltz (1996: 65, 80–81), Merleau-Ponty (1997: 22), Moriarty (2003: 154, 167, 221), Pyle (2003: 194–195), Simmons (2008: 90–91), Greenberg (2010: 202), Kolesnik-Antoine (2011), and Chamberlain (2016).

ous. If the experience of embodiment were all bad, it would be puzzling why a good and powerful God would condemn human beings to this experience. In response to this problem, Malebranche offers a theodicy of the senses, and an explanation of the experience of bodily ownership in particular. As Simmons (2008) shows, part of the story is biological: the feelings of bodily ownership help the perceiver conserve her body. Simmons's biological justification is incomplete, however, because she does not explain why conserving the body is worthwhile in Malebranche's framework. I argue that the feelings of bodily ownership play a theological role as well: they make the body a worthy sacrifice for God.

This paper is divided into three main parts. In part one, I clarify Malebranche's sensory terminology, and then argue that the Malebranchean perceiver feels, rather than merely believes, that a body belongs to her. In part two, I argue that Malebranche characterizes this experience of embodiment causally, materially, and perspectively, and I explain how these characterizations hang together. I conclude this part of the paper by considering prelapsarian Adam as a foil. In part three, I argue that the multifaceted experience of embodiment contributes to the perceiver's survival and salvation.

## 1. Bodily Ownership

### 1.1. Preliminaries

Suppose that a perceiver looks at a lime. Malebranche holds that the perceiver's visual experience as of a round, green object located some distance in front of her is a compound mental state, resulting from the combination of green sensations with natural judgments hardwired into her visual system.<sup>7</sup> A sensation is 'the passion, the sensation, or the perception of the soul, i.e. what each of us senses in spite of himself,' upon the occasion of changes in the perceiver's brain. Sensations result in the perceiver's conscious awareness of sensible qualities (e.g., colors, smells, tastes, sounds, tactile qualities, pains, pleasures, etc.) (OCM I: 129–130/LO: 52). Natural judgments transform sensible quality sensations into sensory experiences or perceptions as of three-dimensional objects.<sup>8</sup> Although Malebranche sometimes writes as though the perceiver were responsible for making natural judgments, these judgments occur automatically as a result of the occasional law coordinating changes in the body with changes in the soul: they occur 'in us and independently of us, and even in spite of us' (OCM I: 199–

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7. In discussing Malebranche's account of sensory experience, I follow the terminological conventions established by Simmons (2003; 2008).

8. See Bréhier (1938), Guérault (1959: Vol. 3, 66–88), Alquié (1974: 167–183), Pyle (2003: 239–242), Nolan (2012), and Ott (2017: 157–181) for helpful discussion of natural judgments.

120/LO: 46). Natural judgments are part and parcel of sensory experience, just as much as sensations are. ‘As the senses can only sense and never judge, properly speaking, it is certain,’ Malebranche writes, ‘that this natural judgment is only a compound sensation’ (OCM I: 97/LO: 34; see also OCM I: 119–120/LO: 46–47, OCM I: 130/LO: 52, OCM I: 156–158/LO: 68–69, OCM XII: 93–94, and OCM XV: 17).

Both sensations and natural judgments explain the way things sensorily appear. When the perceiver looks at the lime, the lime visually appears to be green and spherical to her. The sensational component of this visual experience explains the lime’s green appearance, the natural judgments its spherical appearance. I use *sensory perception*, *sensory experience*, and sometimes just *experience* or *feeling* for the overall conscious result of combining sensations with natural judgments, in virtue of which things sensorily appear thus and so to the perceiver.<sup>9</sup>

Malebranche contrasts natural judgments with free judgments, which often accompany sensory experience (OCM I: 130/LO: 52). These free judgments are constituted by the will’s assent to sensory experiences, and they explain the perceiver’s ordinary sense-based beliefs about the world. It is one thing for a lime to visually appear spherical to the perceiver, and quite another for her to believe that the lime is spherical. Natural judgments explain the visual appearance of sphericity; free judgments explain the belief.

### 1.2. *Natural versus Free Judgments of Bodily Ownership*

In this section, I argue that Malebranche holds that the perceiver feels, rather than merely believes, that a human body belongs to her. That is, I argue that he accepts:

*Ownership:* The perceiver sensorily experiences herself as having a body, or, equivalently, that a body belongs to her. In other words, the property

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9. Scholars disagree about whether sensations are intentional for Malebranche. Scholars defending the view that sensations are not intentional include Rodis-Lewis (1963: 103, 139), Alquié (1974: 505), Nadler (1992: 199), Jolley (1995: 131), Schmaltz (1996: 99, 107–108), and Ott (2017: 157–175). Scholars defending the view that sensations are intentional include Radner (1978), Reid (2003: 584), and Simmons (2009). However we settle this debate, Malebranche is fairly clear that the overall conscious result of sensory processing—sensory perception or sensory experience, in my terminology—conveys information to the perceiver about the objects in her vicinity and their properties, and, hence, that sensory experiences have contents in the sense of accuracy conditions conveyed to the perceiver. Malebranche commits himself to the view that sensory experiences have contents in this minimal, metaphysically neutral sense in passages where he refers to the ‘testimony’ or ‘reports’ of the senses (OCM XII: 30/JS: 4), when he claims that the senses ‘speak’ (OCM I: 16/LO: xxxvii), ‘represent’ (OCM I: 177–178/LO: 79–80), ‘inform us’ (OCM I: 92/LO: 32), and are ‘witnesses’ (OCM XII: 100/JS: 62). Again, see Siegel (2010) for present-day discussion of the relevant metaphysically neutral sense of contents.

of bodily ownership is conveyed or represented to the perceiver by her sensory experience.

Although Malebranche is clear that the perceiver believes that a human body belongs to her on the basis of experiencing bodily sensations like pleasure and pain, he is not always explicit that bodily ownership is built into sensory experience itself. In the *Dialogues on Death*, for example, he writes,

Theotime: This arm that I hold, and which I squeeze between my hands, whose is it?

Aristes: It is assuredly mine.

Theotime: What, is it really your arm? I don't believe it.

Aristes: You believe whatever you like. But I beg you to release me, you're hurting me.

Theotime: I'll let go when I know that this arm belongs to you.

Aristes: It belongs to me so well that it's actually hurting me. (OCM XIII: 404; see also OCM XII: 118/JS: 78)

Aristes believes that an arm belongs to him because it hurts when Theotime squeezes it. But it is unclear whether the content 'this arm belongs to me' occurs exclusively at the level of free judgment, or is built into Aristes's experience of pain. Sometimes Malebranche writes as though the perceiver infers that a body part belongs to her from a more primitive sensory basis that does not itself represent bodily ownership:

Our hand is pricked, and we feel pain in it; therefore, our hand is part of ourselves. Our clothing gets torn, and we do not feel anything; therefore, our clothing is not part of ourselves. Our hair can be cut but not torn without pain. This bothers philosophers; they do not know what to say, but their dilemma proves that even the wisest of men judge by means of the instinct of sensation rather than by the light of reason as to whether something is part of themselves. (OCM II: 109/LO: 366; see also OCM I: 138–139/LO: 58)

This passage suggests that the perceiver feels pleasures and pains located in a single human body, and that she then infers that this body is part of herself, and, hence, belongs to her, resulting in belief, not feeling. Nevertheless, I contend that *Ownership* reflects Malebranche's considered view. For Malebranche, judgments can be either natural or free: the former are part and parcel of sensory experience, the latter are not. His use of inferential language is similarly equivocal: he describes natural judgments as the conclusions of inferences that God makes on

the perceiver's behalf (OCM I: 119–120/LO: 46–47). Thus, the passages we have looked at so far do not settle whether bodily ownership is represented by bodily awareness, or exclusively at the level of belief.

Natural judgment is 'a judgment of the senses or a compound sensation, which is within us, occurs independently of us, and even in spite of us,' whereas free judgment is constituted by the perceiver's free act of consent, 'which can be avoided, and which consequently we must not make if we wish to avoid error' (OCM I: 156/LO: 68). Sensory experiences happen to the perceiver, whereas she freely forms beliefs (OCM XII: 93–94/JS 57; see also OCM XV: 15, 17).<sup>10</sup> If Malebranche holds that the judgment that a body belongs to the perceiver occurs 'independently of us, and even in spite of us', this would be evidence that this judgment is natural, and, hence, sensory, rather than free. Consider the following passage from the *Search*:

the soul can hardly help realizing [pleasure and pain] belong to it in some way. As a result, the soul not only *judges* them to be in objects, but it also *believes* them to be in the members of its body, which it *considers* as a *part* of itself. (OCM I: 138–139/LO: 58, emphasis mine; see also OCM XII: 408–409 and OCM XVI: 38–39)

All the judgments mentioned here are unavoidable, and, hence, natural. The soul can 'hardly help' judging that bodily sensations 'belong to it in some way'. Similarly for the judgments localizing bodily sensations in the perceiver's limbs: 'It should not be imagined that it is up to us,' Malebranche writes, 'to affix the pain to the pricked finger rather than to the thorn that pricks it. All of this occurs in us independently of us and even in spite of us as the natural judgments I spoke of in the ninth chapter' (OCM I: 133/LO: 55; see also OCM I: 130/LO: 52). In

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10. The domain of free human activity is vanishingly small in Malebranche's system: it includes acts of consent—i.e., the decision to rest with a perception or a movement of the will—as well as acts of attention, as Greenberg (2008) and Peppers-Bates (2009: 82–89, 99–100) helpfully emphasize. Freely consenting to a perception results in a free judgment—i.e., what I am calling a belief, whereas consenting to a movement of the will results in a free love. Crucially, freedom and voluntariness come apart for Malebranche, if by 'voluntary' we just mean 'pertaining to the will'. Natural inclinations and passions are movements of the will, but they are not thereby free: strictly speaking, only the act of consent to a movement of the will is free. Thus, Pyle's (2003: 240) characterization of natural judgments as 'involuntary' is somewhat misleading—it's true that natural judgments are involuntary, since they don't involve the will. But what distinguishes natural judgments from free judgments is that free judgments involve a *free act of consent*, while natural judgments do not. I am indebted to an anonymous reviewer at *Ergo* for pressing me to clarify this point. Scholars disagree about whether Malebranche's occasionalism is compatible with human freedom. Kremer (2000) and Pyle (2003: 233) are pessimistic, whereas Peppers-Bates (2009) is more optimistic. For more discussion of Malebranche on the will, see Dreyfus (1958).

this context, we may surmise that the soul's judgment that a human body is part of itself and belongs to it occurs unavoidably as well, and, therefore, is sensory.

Someone might raise the following objection. Suppose we grant that bodily ownership figures in the contents of natural judgment. Still, it is unclear that bodily ownership is felt, rather than merely believed, since it is not obvious that natural judgment is sufficient for feeling. The fact that natural judgments occur automatically does not show that their contents are felt, since many of our responses occur 'within us, independently of us, and even despite of us', without being feelings in any meaningful way (OCM I: 156/LO: 68). Consider a snap judgment, or a first-impression of someone. These responses might be just as unavoidable as the prick of a needle, and yet they are not part of sensory experience.<sup>11</sup>

To respond to this objection, we need to clarify what is at stake in the debate about whether bodily ownership is felt or merely believed. As I understand this debate, it is about whether there is a sensory appearance of bodily ownership. Suppose that our perceiver closes her eyes, and allows herself to simply feel her body. There will be a way that her body sensorily appears to her in bodily awareness, say, as warm, relaxed, and as having certain dimensions. We can describe this sensory appearance by saying that the properties of being warm, relaxed and having certain dimensions are conveyed or represented to the perceiver by her bodily awareness, or, equivalently, by saying that these properties figure in the contents of her bodily awareness. But these are just alternative descriptions of the sensory appearance presented to the perceiver's point of view. The debate at hand, then, is about whether bodily ownership is among the properties that sensorily appear to the perceiver. Partisans of the mere belief view hold that this sensory appearance never includes bodily ownership, whereas partisans of the feeling view hold that this sensory appearance at least sometimes includes bodily ownership.

Given this construal of the debate, the question for Malebranche is whether a natural judgment of bodily ownership implies a corresponding sensory appearance of bodily ownership. If natural judgments inject their contents into the sensory appearances, as indeed they do, then Malebranche's view that the perceiver naturally judges that a body belongs to her will imply that there is a genuine feeling of bodily ownership. As we saw above, Malebranche holds that the perceiver's overall sensory experience is a compound of sensations and natural judgments. When she looks at a lime, green sensations explain the lime's appearing green, whereas natural judgments explain the lime's appearing spherical (OCM I: 129–130/LO: 52). More generally, natural judgments explain the appearance of

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11. I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer at *Ergo* for raising this objection.

size-constancy (OCM I: 97/LO: 34), of depth and three-dimensionality (OCM I: 109–120/LO: 41–47), and of sensible qualities being ‘in’ objects (OCM I: 130/LO: 52; OCM I: 138–139/LO: 58–59). These passages suggest that natural judgments infuse their contents into the appearances, and, hence, that the natural judgment of bodily ownership entails a corresponding sensory appearance. This commits Malebranche to the feeling view of bodily ownership.

Malebranche sometimes endorses *Ownership* without using the ambiguous language of judgment. ‘Through the instinct of sensation,’ Malebranche writes, ‘I am persuaded that my soul is joined to my body, or that my body is part of my being . . . . I do not know it through the light of reason, but only through the pain or pleasure I sense when objects strike me’ (OCM II: 172/LO: 365–366). Assuming that the ‘instinct of sensation’ persuades via representation, then the senses represent that ‘my soul is joined to my body, or that my body is part of my being’. Malebranche’s discussion of phantom limbs in *Elucidation VI to the Search* also suggests that he accepts *Ownership*. He describes an amputee who experiences himself as having an arm, despite believing otherwise:

it often happens that those who have lost an arm feel very severe pain in it even long after the loss of the arm. They know very well that *they* no longer *have* the arm when they consult their memory or look at their body; but the sensation of pain *deceives* them. And if, as often happens, we assume them to have entirely forgotten *what they were* and to have no other senses than that through which they feel the pain in their imaginary arm, surely they could not be persuaded that *they* do not *have* an arm in which they feel such tormenting pain. (OCM III: 56/LO: 570, emphasis mine; see also OCM VIII: 960–961)

Malebranche’s amputee believes that he lacks an arm, while his pain tells him that he possesses one, in much the same way that two lines look different lengths in the Müller-Lyer illusion, despite our believing that they are the same length. This discrepancy suggests that the amputee’s experience of pain represents the arm as belonging to him, and, hence, that this content is properly attributed to bodily awareness.<sup>12</sup> A few pages later, Malebranche is even more explicit: ‘God discloses creatures to us . . . as belonging to us . . . when the perception is very interesting and very lively, as is pain’ (OCM III: 66/LO: 575, emphasis mine).

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12. Actually, it is unclear whether the amputee’s experience of pain represents (i) merely that an arm exists, or (ii) that an arm exists, *and* that this arm belongs to him. Only the latter content supports *Ownership*. A better case for isolating *Ownership* would be if someone (i) believed that an arm exists, (ii) did not believe that this arm belonged to him, and nevertheless (iii) experienced this arm as belonging to him. De Vignemont (2013) presents an updated version of this argument along these lines, appealing to belief-independent illusions of bodily ownership generated by rubber hand experiments.



Despite the confusions introduced by Malebranche's equivocal use of the term 'judgment', the textual evidence shows that he accepts *Ownership*. When a perceiver steps on a rusty nail and experiences a sharp pain in the foot, there is a way the foot appears to the perceiver in bodily awareness. The foot sensorily appears to have a certain location, to have certain dimensions, and to be damaged, but also to belong to the perceiver.

## 2. Varieties of Bodily Ownership

Ownership comes in different flavors. A pair of socks is mine if it is my property and I have exclusive rights to their use. A hand is mine in one sense when it's attached to the rest of my body and responsive to my will, whereas it belongs to me in a different sense after it has been cut off and I am carrying it to the hospital on ice. A bodily action is mine if I perform it, a thought if I think it. A child is mine in one sense if I am their biological parent, in a slightly different sense if I've adopted them. *Ownership* says that the perceiver experiences herself as standing in some kind of ownership relation to a human body. Malebranche suggests three ways of spelling out the relevant kind of ownership:

- (1) *Causal Connection*: The perceiver sensorily experiences the body as causing her sensory experiences and as uniquely responsive to her will.
- (2) *Material Connection*: The perceiver sensorily experiences herself as a material being, whose materiality is wrapped up with the body.
- (3) *Perspectival Connection*: The perceiver sensorily experiences the world from the body's perspective.

*Ownership* is the phenomenological genus; *Causal*, *Material*, and *Perspectival Connections* are the species. *Ownership* says that the perceiver experiences herself as embodied in some sense; *Causal*, *Material*, and *Perspectival Connections* each suggest more precise characterizations of the connection the perceiver experiences between herself and her body. They describe various ways of experiencing a body as belonging to her.<sup>13</sup>

### 2.1. *Causal Connection*

In the *Search*, Malebranche refers to our 'inner experience of the union' (OCM I: 130/LO: 339), and writes that 'through the instinct of sensation, I am persuaded

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13. Cassam (2011: 148–151) suggests a similarly multifaceted account of the experience of embodiment, in so far as he distinguishes multiple strands in a perceiver's experience of her body 'qua subject'.

that my soul is joined to my body' (OCM II: 172/LO: 365).<sup>14</sup> But, for Malebranche, the union of soul and body consists in the coordination and mutual reciprocity of changes in the soul with changes in the body, grounded in occasional laws (OCM XI: 121–122; see also OCM I: 215/LO: 102; and OCM XII: 166/JS: 120).<sup>15</sup> Thus, a sensory experience of the union just is a sensory experience of the 'mutual and reciprocal action' between these substances, that is, their causal connection (OCM XI: 121–122). When a perceiver's body is pricked, for example, she experiences the body as causing her painful experience. When she voluntarily moves her arm, she experiences herself as causing this movement.

Sometimes Malebranche uses the term 'union' more narrowly to refer to the way the mind was causally connected to the body before the Fall, in contrast to the mind's postlapsarian dependence. 'We are no longer as God made us,' Malebranche writes, 'and the union of our soul with our body has changed to a relation of dependence, for since man disobeyed God it was right that his body ceased to be subject to him' (OCM XII: 101–102/JS: 64). The difference between union and dependence consists in the mind's degree of control over its body (OCM XII: 102/JS: 65; see also OCM III: 73/LO: 580 and OCM: XIII 396). Because prelapsarian Adam could determine the state of his brain in the way we now control our limbs, Adam could shut his sensory experiences off. 'But having sinned,' Malebranche explains, 'the first man lost this power' (OCM III: 74/LO: 581). Crucially, Malebranche holds that we have a sensory experience of dependence, and, hence, that we experience our postlapsarian causal connection to the body. In the *Search*, Malebranche juxtaposes the deliverances of reason and experience:

I grant that reason teaches that we ought to suffer exile without sadness, but this same reason teaches us that we should not feel pain when our arm is cut off. The soul is superior to the body, and according to the light of reason, its happiness or unhappiness should not depend on the body. But experience sufficiently shows us that things are not as reason says they should be, and it is ridiculous to philosophize against experience. Christians do not philosophize in this way . . . . They agree that it is a disorder for the soul to depend on its body; *but they recognize that it does depend on the body.* (OCM II: 134/LO: 342)

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14. In claiming that the senses represent the union, Malebranche is echoing Descartes's claim to Elizabeth that the union is known most clearly through the senses (AT III: 691–692/CSMK: III 226–227). For discussion of Descartes's view that the notion of the union is sensory, see Alanen (2003: 63–65), Kolesnik-Antoine (2009: 171–201) and Simmons (2017).

15. Commentators recognizing Malebranche's reduction of the mind-body union to an occasional law include Guérout (1959: Vol. 3, 37–41), Radner (1978: 26), Pyle (2003: 6), Simmons (2008: 107), Peppers-Bates (2009: 10, 77), and Greenberg (2010).

Reason tells us how things should be, sensory experience how things are. And sensory experience represents the perceiver as dependent on her body: as ‘joined and subjugated’ to the body (OCM II: 133/LO: 342), and as plagued ‘by involuntary and rebellious impulses’ that seem to originate in the body (OCM III: 74/LO: 581). Malebranche reiterates this point in the *Dialogues*:

experience convinces me that my mind depends on my body. I suffer, I am unhappy, I am incapable of thinking when I am pricked. It is impossible for me to doubt this. There is, then, a manifest contradiction between the certainty of experience and the evidence of Reason. (OCM XII: 101/JS: 64)

These passages suggest that the perceiver experiences herself as causally connected to her body.

Malebranche’s occasionalism complicates this dimension of the perceiver’s experience. He recognizes two kinds of causes: a single true or genuine cause—God—as well as many occasional causes—creatures. It is not yet clear which of the two kinds of causation figures in the perceiver’s experience of being causally connected to her body. At stake here is whether this experience is veridical. That is, does the perceiver falsely experience her body as the true or genuine cause of her sensory experiences, and her will as the true or genuine cause of her body’s movements? Or does the perceiver veridically experience her body as the occasional cause of her sensory experiences, and her will as the occasional cause of her body’s movements?<sup>16</sup>

Although the passages we have looked at so far do not settle this question, Malebranche holds that the senses misrepresent the ‘alliance’ of mind and body as involving true or genuine causal interaction. In Dialogue VII of the *Dialogues on Metaphysics and Religion*, Malebranche suggests that the senses falsely represent the body as the true cause of the perceiver’s sensory experiences. Near the beginning of this Dialogue, the naïve Aristes gives the following speech:

Aristes: It seems to me, Theodore, that there is nothing to which I am more closely united than my own body. For it cannot be touched without my being disturbed. As soon as it is wounded, I am aware of being injured. Nothing is smaller than the proboscis of those troublesome gnats that bother us on an evening walk and yet, however faintly they push the imperceptible tip of their venomous proboscis into my skin, I am aware in my soul of being pierced. The very sound they make in my ears alarms me: a sure sign that I am united to my body

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16. I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer at *Ergo* for pressing me to clarify this point.

more closely than to anything else. Yes, Theodore, this is so true that it is only by means of our body that we are united to all these objects surrounding us. If the sun did not disturb my eyes, it would be invisible to me; and were I unfortunate enough to fall deaf, I would no longer find as much pleasure in the company I keep with my friends. It is even through my body that I hold to my religion. For through my eyes and my ears faith has entered my mind and my heart. In short, it is by means of my body that I am connected to everything. I am, therefore, united to my body more closely than to anything else. (OCM XII: 148/JS: 105)

Malebranche often qualifies the term 'union' as 'immediate' or 'direct' to refer to the mind's true or genuine causal relation to God.<sup>17</sup> Thus, Aristes's claim that he is 'united to [his] body more closely than anything else' suggests that Aristes is articulating the un-Malebranchian view that the body is the true or genuine cause of the mind's sensory experiences. Malebranche's spokesperson Theodore is unimpressed:

Theodore: Have you meditated long, my dear Aristes, in order to make this great discovery?

Theotimus: All that can be very easily maintained, Theodore.

Theodore: Yes, Theotimus, *by those who consult only their senses*. What do you take Aristes for, approving from his lips what any peasant might say? I no longer recognize Aristes in this reply. (OCM XII: 148–149/JS: 105, emphasis mine)

Theodore gestures towards an explanation of how Aristes arrived at his mistaken position, namely, by consulting only his senses. This suggests that the senses falsely represent the body as the true cause of the perceiver's sensory experiences.<sup>18</sup>

The senses also falsely represent the perceiver's will as if it were the true or genuine cause of her body's movements. In Elucidation XV to the *Search*, Malebranche criticizes a variety of 'proofs' for the 'efficacy of secondary causes', and, more specifically, for the claim that 'man acts through his own efficacy' (OCM III: 224/LO: 668). One of these proofs suggests that 'I know through the inner sentiment [*sentiment intérieur*] of my action that I truly have this power' to move my body. Crucially, Malebranche accepts his opponents' description

17. See, e.g., the title of Dialogue VII: 'The inefficacy of natural causes, or the impotence of creatures. We are immediately and directly united only to God alone' (OCM XII: 147/JS: 104).

18. In general, Malebranche holds that the senses misrepresent bodies as true or genuine causes. See, e.g., OCM II: 78/LO: 308 and OCM III: 207/LO: 660.

of the phenomenology, namely, that the experience of voluntary movement includes a feeling of efficacy or causal oomph. Instead, Malebranche disputes this experience's veridicality:

But I deny that this effort, which is only a modification or sensation of the soul, which is given to us to make us understand our weakness, and to give us an obscure and confused sensation of our strength, is by itself able to impart motion to animal spirits or to determine them. (OCM III: 227–228/LO: 670)

Malebranche is an occasionalist. Of course he will deny that our effort is able to 'impart motion to animal spirits or to determine them'. I want to emphasize the common ground Malebranche shares with his opponents, namely, that the senses represent the perceiver's will as the true cause of the body's movements. Malebranche reiterates this point in the *Christian Meditations*:

I sense in myself an infinity of changes . . . . And since there can be no effect or change without a cause or without the actual action of some power, I imagine that all the objects which surround me have in themselves some force, since . . . they often act on me despite all my resistance. I am also strongly inclined to believe that I myself have a true force or power, since I produce in my body at least those movements that we call voluntary: since it seems that those movements which contribute to digestion and respiration and so forth occur in me without me. Nevertheless, when I enter into myself to find some clear idea of this force or power; . . . of the force that fire has to produce pain in me, or the power that I have to unite myself to the bodies which surround me or to separate myself from them; when I make, say I, a serious reflection on all these things, I find myself in a strange muddle. My senses tell me that sensible objects act on me; I say to myself that it's me who moves my arm. (OCM X: 46–47)

Malebranche's framing of this passage — 'I sense in myself . . .' — indicates that he is describing a perceiver's sensory experience of her embodiment. One misleading aspect of this experience is the perceiver's feeling that she has a 'true force or power' to move her body. In other words, the senses misrepresent the perceiver as the true cause of 'at least those movements which we call voluntary'.<sup>19</sup>

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19. See Kolesnik-Antoine (2009: 236, 246–250) for discussion of Malebranche's phenomenology of voluntary movement. Kolesnik-Antoine (2009: 249) rightly insists that human beings lack an 'inner sentiment' (*sentiment intérieur*) in the narrow sense of 'consciousness' of the soul's power to move the body, which allows Malebranche to maintain the infallibility of consciousness. But, again, this restriction is compatible with a perceiver's overall sensory experience misrepresenting

## 2.2. Material Connection

In addition to representing the perceiver's mental life as causally connected to the body, the senses represent the perceiver as materially connected as well. 'After the Fall,' Malebranche writes, 'the mind became, as it were, material and terrestrial . . .' (OCM II: 130/LO: 339). The 'as it were' is crucial. The mind is an immaterial substance, devoid of parts, and capable of existing apart from the body (OCM I: 123/LO: 49; see also OCM II: 161/LO: 359 and OCM XII: 33/JS: 6). The mind cannot literally become material: 'One need not imagine, as do most philosophers, that the mind becomes material when united with the body, and that the body becomes mind when it unites with the mind' (OCM I: 215/LO: 102). Rather, the mind *experiences* itself as 'material and terrestrial'.<sup>20</sup>

Malebranche reiterates this point throughout the *Search*:

the soul is so closely joined to its body and has even become so carnal since the Fall and consequently so incapable of concentration that it attributes to the body many things that belong only to itself, and hardly distinguishes itself from the body anymore. (OCM I: 137/LO: 57)

Because we are 'constantly affected by bodies', we consider 'the soul to be material, that is to say, extended in the whole body and shaped like the body' (OCM I: 476/LO: 253). The claim that the perceiver experiences herself as a material being, or, equivalently, as materially connected to a single human body, is abstract. Malebranche suggests three more precise characterizations:

- (a) *Composite*: The perceiver sensorily experiences herself as a composite whole that includes the body as a part.
- (b) *Identity*: The perceiver sensorily experiences herself as identical to the body.

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the soul as having a true power to move the body. As Kolesnik-Antoine writes, there is 'an illusion of real causality' between the soul and body—i.e., a false sensory appearance—which is precisely the point that I'm insisting upon (Kolesnik-Antoine 2009: 249). As Kolesnik-Antoine points out, Malebranche's negative assessment of this experience of the causal connection between soul and body—and, more specifically, his view that it involves a healthy dose of illusion—marks an important difference from Descartes, who argues that the soul's power to move the body is known through the senses (AT III: 691–692/CSMK III: 226–227; cf. AT V: 163/CSMK III: 364 and AT V: 222/CSMK III: 357–358).

20. Malebranche often blames the experience of materiality on the human mind's lack of a clear idea of a soul, suggesting that the mind would no longer feel material *if* the human mind had access to such an idea, though he never fully explains why this counterfactual is true. See, e.g., OCM I: 127–128/LO: 51–52, OCM VI: 155–156, and OCM X: 103–104. For more extensive discussion of Malebranche's view that we lack a clear idea of a soul, see, e.g., Schmaltz (1996), Pyle (2003: 194–195), and Nolan and Whipple (2005).

- (c) *Aspect*: The perceiver sensorily experiences herself as an aspect, state, or part of the body.

Just as *Ownership* comes in different varieties, so too for *Material Connection*. *Material Connection* is the genus; *Composite*, *Identity*, and *Aspect* are the species. These options suggest different accounts of the perceiver's materiality, transposed into a phenomenological register.

### 2.2.1. Composite.

In some passages, Malebranche claims that the senses represent the perceiver as a composite whole that includes a human body as a part. In the *Search*, for example, he argues that when the soul feels bodily sensations as located 'in the members of its body', the soul thereby 'considers [its body] as a part of itself' (OCM I: 138–139/LO: 58, emphasis mine). He reiterates this point later in the *Search*:

Through the instinct of sensation, I am persuaded that my soul is joined to my body, or that my body is part of my being; I have no evidence for this. I do not know it through the light of reason, but only through the pain or pleasure I sense when objects strike me. . . . Only through the instinct of sensation, therefore, do we regard our body and all sensible things to which we are joined as parts of ourselves, i.e., as parts of what thinks and senses in us, for what is not cannot be known with the evidence of reason, which never reveals anything but the truth. (OCM II: 172/LO: 365–366, emphasis mine)

Sensory experience falsely represents the mind — that is, 'what thinks and senses in us' — not as ghostly or immaterial, but as including a bodily part. The intellect cannot be this content's source, since it 'never reveals anything but the truth'. Indeed, Malebranche predicts that the perceiver would experience just about anything as part of herself if she felt bodily sensations within it:

if the idea that you have of that wall struck you with a sentiment of pain, instead of touching you only with a sensation of whiteness, you would regard that wall as part of yourself: because you cannot doubt that pain does not belong to you, as you can now with regards to whiteness. (OCM XII: 408–409)

If the perceiver felt pain located in the wall, she would experience the wall as part of herself.

### 2.2.2. Identity.

Whereas *Composite* says that the senses represent the perceiver as partly material, thereby leaving open the possibility that the perceiver is capable of existing apart from the body, *Identity* claims that the senses represent the perceiver as identical to the body, and, hence, as wholly material, and as inseparable from the body. In the *Search*, Malebranche writes that ‘Original Sin has so strengthened our soul’s union with our body’ that we ‘blindly follow the judgments of the senses’ (OCM I: 11/LO: xxxiv). As a result, ‘it seems to us that these two parts of us are but one and the same substance’ (OCM I: 11/LO: xxxiv; see also OCM I: 137/LO: 57). Later he argues that

the majority of men pay little attention to the properties of thought, and being continually affected by bodies, regarded the soul and the body as one and the same thing. (OCM I: 476/LO: 253)

The majority of people represent themselves as ‘one and the same thing’ with their bodies as a result of ‘being continually affected by bodies’. But sensory experience results from bodily affection. Malebranche defines sensation as ‘a modification of our soul in relation to what takes place in the body to which it is joined’ (OCM I: 143/LO: 61; see also OCM I: 67/LO: 17, OCM II: 126/LO: 337, and OCM XI: 117). Hence, Malebranche is saying that the senses represent soul and body as identical, or, in other words, that the perceiver is a body. In the *Treatise on Morality*, Malebranche writes that ‘the body of man is his own victim: since it seems to him that he sacrifices himself through pain, and that he annihilates himself through death’ (OCM XI: 118; see also OCM III: 105/LO: 598–599, OCM IV: 41, and OCM XI: 121). The perceiver experiences damage and the destruction of her body as damage and the destruction of herself, which betrays an experienced identity of body and self.

### 2.2.3. Aspect.

Whereas *Identity* claims that the senses represent the perceiver as identical to the human body as a whole, there are some passages where Malebranche suggests that the senses rivet the perceiver to a single aspect, state, or part of the body. After staring at a computer screen for many hours, someone might feel like she is trapped inside her body, staring out through the eye sockets. When trying to thread a needle, a tailor might be so absorbed by this task that he feels like he is wholly in his hands. When trying to finish a heavy set of squats, a weightlifter might feel like she is all legs. Malebranche hints at these kinds of experiences in the *Search* as well:



When, therefore, our soul wishes to represent to itself its own nature and its own sensations, it tries to form a corporeal image of them. It looks around among corporeal beings: it takes itself now for one, now for another, now for air, now for fire, now for the harmony of its body's parts. Thus, bent on being located among bodies and on fancying its own modifications as modifications of bodies, the soul should cause no wonder if it loses its bearings and altogether misunderstands itself. (OCM I: 146/LO: 62–63)

Malebranche is talking about natural judgments. The soul's 'fancying its own modifications as modifications of bodies' is automatic, and, hence, a matter of natural rather than free judgment. Thus, Malebranche's description of the soul taking itself 'now for air, now for fire, now for the harmony of its body's parts' is presumably a description of its natural judgments, and, hence, of the way things sensorily appear. Malebranche reiterates this point later in the *Search*, arguing that the perceiver experiences herself as diffused through the body: 'most men . . . being continually affected by bodies . . . considered the soul to be material, that is to say extended in the whole body and shaped like the body' (OCM I: 476/LO: 253; see also OCM I: 146/LO: 62–63).

To sum up: Malebranche suggests that the perceiver experiences herself (a) as a composite whole that includes the body as a part, (b) as identical to the body, or (c) as an aspect, state, or part of the body. What should we make of these apparently contradictory specifications of the way the perceiver experiences her materiality? My proposal is that the perceiver's experience of her material connection to the body can change from one situation to the next. As Malebranche writes, the soul 'looks around among corporeal beings' and 'takes itself now for one, now for another' (OCM I: 146/LO: 62–63). This passage describes a dynamic experience rather than a static one, according to which the senses consistently describe the perceiver as a material being, but vacillate between different ways of representing her materiality.

### 2.3. *Perspectival Connection*

In addition to experiencing herself as causally and materially connected to her body, Malebranche suggests that the perceiver experiences herself as perspectively connected, in so far as the senses represent the world from the body's perspective.<sup>21</sup> 'Our sight,' he writes, 'does *not* represent extension to us as it is in itself, but *only* as it is in relation to our body' (OCM I: 84/LO: 28, emphasis mine).

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21. I will follow Malebranche in focusing on vision. But since Malebranche treats vision as a proxy for the other senses, similar points should apply to them as well (OCM I: 79/LO: 25). Commentators who recognize that, for Malebranche, the senses represent the world from a dis-

In the *Dialogues on Metaphysics and Religion*, he argues that God provides us with ‘instinctive proofs’—that is, with sensory experiences—that do not tell us anything about ‘the nature and properties of the bodies around us’ or ‘the relation between objects’, but only about ‘the relation they have to our body’ (OCM XII: 99/JS: 62; see also OCM I: 186/LO: 85, OCM I: 488–489/LO: 261, OCM X: 113, and OCM XII: 119/JS: 80). When a perceiver looks at a palm tree, for example, the perceiver’s visual experience represents nothing but the various ways in which the palm tree is related to her body. The proposal, then, is that the perceiver experiences herself as perspectively connected to her body in so far as her visual experience—and, indeed, the senses more generally—represents only relations to her body.

Consider the visual experience of size (*la grandeur*) or extension (*l’étendue*). When the perceiver looks at a palm tree, she does not see its absolute size, but that the palm tree is looming above her: ‘it is a groundless prejudice to believe that we see bodies as they are in themselves. For our eyes, which were given us only for the preservation of our body, perform their duty quite well by providing us with ideas of objects proportioned to the idea we have of the size of our body’ (OCM I: 87/LO: 29). This point comes out nicely a few paragraphs later:

Let us learn, then, that . . . we are quite uncertain of the true size of the bodies we see, and all we can know about the size of bodies by means of sight is *the relation between their size and our size*, a relation by no means exact: in a word, that our eyes were not given us to judge the truth of things, but only to let us know which things might inconvenience us or be of some use to us. (OCM I: 88/LO: 30, emphasis mine)

The perceiver’s visual experience of the palm tree’s size is restricted to representing the ratio or proportion between the palm tree’s size and the size of her body, namely, that the palm tree is taller than her body. This visual experience is accurate, as it would be if she were a denizen of Lilliput confronted by a miniature palm tree, so long as the experience gets the proportion or ratio between her body and the palm tree right (OCM I: 87–88/LO: 29–30). Sight represents not absolute size, but scale relative to the perceiver’s body.

Malebranche advances similar body-relative accounts of location and shape. When a perceiver sees ‘*at about a hundred steps from me a large white horse running towards the right*’ (OCM III: 343–344/LO: 744–745), the perceiver does not see the horse’s location in a ‘cosmic coordinate system’ (Simmons 2003: 400). The perceiver sees the horse’s location relative to the axes and orientation of

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tinctively bodily perspective include Guérout (1959: Vol. 3, 63), Alquié (1974: 177), and Simmons (2003; 2008).

her body: to the right of her body, and roughly a hundred steps away. The perceiver's visual experience of the horse's location is accurate, as it would be if the perceiver and the horse were in California or on the far side of the moon, so long as her experience accurately represents the way the perceiver and the horse are located relative to each other. The perceiver sees an object's shape in virtue of seeing where the object's parts are located relative to each other and to her body. When a perceiver sees a rectangular table, for example, she sees some parts of the table as closer to her and other parts as farther away: in effect, she sees the table's rectangular shape as it is oriented relative to her body (Simmons 2003: 402). Shape perception thus reduces to seeing relations to the perceiver's body as well.

Malebranche also offers body-relative accounts of the sensible qualities—that is, color, smell, taste, hot, cold, etc.—represented by the senses. A perceiver's experience of a glass of wine as cool, sweet and red represents different ways the wine is related to her body. She experiences the wine's temperature not in Celsius, Fahrenheit, or Kelvin, but, rather, as *hotter* or *colder* than her body, 'according to [her body's] disposition at the time' (OCM XII: 99/JS: 62). The perceiver's experience of the wine as 'pleasant-tasting' is a sign that 'wine is then good for [her]' (OCM III: 186/LO: 647). More generally, taste is 'a short and incontestable proof of whether certain bodies are, or are not, proper to consume' (OCM XI: 131). The perceiver's visual experience of the wine's redness is partly constituted by an actually red sensation, and this experience represents the wine as eliciting this sensation in her, which depends on the nature of the perceiver's body. The wine might look red to one perceiver, and green to another, as a result of 'diversity in different people's organs of sight' (OCM I: 152 /LO: 66).

Malebranche's view that sight represents only relations to the body has profound implications for the perceiver's experience of her body. First, this thesis implies that visual experience contains a wealth of information about the perceiver's body, although this information is often implicit and attentively recessive. When a perceiver sees a palm tree as bigger than her body, her visual experience represents the ratio or proportion between the palm tree and her body. This experience tells her something important about the palm tree: that the palm tree is bigger than her body! But it also tells her something important about her body, namely, that her body is smaller than the palm tree. These are just two aspects of a single experiential package, corresponding to the two poles of the 'bigger than' relation. This structure is ubiquitous. When the perceiver sees a palm tree to be located twenty paces ahead, she learns something about the palm tree's location, but also something about her body's location, namely, that her body is in the vicinity of a palm tree. When the perceiver steps on a rusty nail, she learns that the nail is harmful to her body, but also that her body is vulnerable to nails.

Second, this bodily perspective implies that the body occupies a special place

in the contents of visual experience. In short: Malebranche's view implies that the senses represent a system of relations in which the body is always and invariably a relatum. When a perceiver walks down a street, she sees a diversity of objects: first a palm tree catches her eye, then a house, then some shrubs, then a few more palm trees, and then another house. But one thing remains constant in the ebb and flow of her visual experience: her body. When the perceiver sees the palm tree, she sees that the palm tree is bigger than her body, located and oriented relative to her body. She walks a little further. The palm tree disappears from view. She sees a house. Again, she sees the ways the house is related to her body: the house too looks bigger than her body, and looks to be located relative to her body. The external objects change as she traces a path through her environment; the body relative to which these objects are represented remains the same.<sup>22</sup>

The perceiver's sensory experience of the body as the fixed point relative to which everything else is represented is the third, perspectival dimension of the perceiver's experience of embodiment. Gueroult puts this point beautifully:

By the introduction of the senses, the collection of existing things, instead of being related to the world of clear and distinct ideas in God, is related and reduced to the little universe of biological needs of which my body is the center, that is, to the world of sensations, or of the obscure modifications of our soul. (Gueroult 1959: 63)

In Gueroult's terminology, the perceiver experiences herself as perspectivally connected to the body in so far as she experiences the body as 'the center' of the 'world of sensations'. My proposal, then, is that the perceiver experiences herself as *having* a body in so far as her sensory experience represents the world *relative* to this body's perspective.

#### 2.4. A Foil: Adam Before the Fall

So far, we have mostly been looking at passages where Malebranche describes our current, postlapsarian experience of embodiment. To bring this experience into focus, it will be useful to consider a contrast case, namely, prelapsarian Adam. Even Adam before the Fall experienced a body as belonging to him. But his experience of bodily ownership differed in a few respects.<sup>23</sup>

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22. Descartes hints at a similar point in *Meditation 6*: '[a]s for the body which by some special right I called "mine", my belief that this body, more than any other belonged to me had some justification. *For I could never be separated from it, as I could from other bodies . . .*' (AT VII: 76/CSM II: 52, emphasis mine).

23. I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer at *Ergo* for encouraging me to consider Malebranche's accounts of alternative forms of embodiment.

Consider, first, the causal dimension of Adam's experience of embodiment. Whereas the human mind is now dependent on the body, Adam was merely united—in the narrow sense of the term—to his body (OCM XII: 101–102/JS: 64). The body now enslaves the human mind; Adam was the body's master. And just as the human mind presently experiences its subjugation, Adam experienced his mastery over the body:

the inner sentiment [Adam] had of his own volitions and of the respectful and submissive action of these objects taught him, therefore, that they were inferior to him, because they were subordinate to him, for then everything was perfectly in accordance with the divine order. (OCM XII: 139/JS: 97)

Another important difference is that Adam's experience accurately represented the 'alliance' and 'natural correspondence' between his mind and body for what it truly was: the correspondence of occasional causes. 'Adam before his sin,' Malebranche explains, 'was not stupid enough to imagine that bodies were the cause of his pleasures' (OCM III: 96/LO: 593). In general, Adam veridically experienced created things—including his body—as merely occasional causes, whereas human beings are now condemned to falsely experiencing created things as having genuine causal efficacy (OCM I: 133–134/LO: 267, OCM II: 318–319/LO: 451, OCM III: 203/LO: 657, and OCM XII: 139/JS: 97).

Second, Adam's experience of his materiality differed as well. Before the Fall, Adam 'had a body that God willed he should preserve' (OCM I: 70/LO: 19), and, indeed, Malebranche suggests that Adam was 'composed of mind and body' (OCM I: 72/LO: 20; see also OCM XII: 104/JS: 66, OCM IV: 36, OCM IV: 111, OCM XI: 67, and OCM XI: 130). Adam experienced himself as a composite being: he 'had a body . . . which he regarded as part of himself' (OCM I: 70/LO: 19). But Adam experienced his materiality without any illusions. Now, this might seem puzzling. Malebranche insists that the self (or *I*) is an immaterial mind or soul, devoid of bodily parts, and capable of existing apart from the body (OCM I: 123/LO: 49; see also OCM II: 161/LO: 359 and OCM XII: 33/JS: 6). So how could Adam veridically experience the body as part of himself? To make things even more confusing, Malebranche holds that since the Fall human perceivers falsely experience the body as part of themselves (OCM II: 172/LO: 365–366). But how could this experience—of including the body as part of oneself—be veridical before the Fall, and false afterwards?

The solution to this puzzle is that Malebranche, like Descartes, employs two distinct concepts of self: (i) a narrow concept that refers only to the mind, and (ii) a broader concept that refers to the composite of mind and body, that is, what

Descartes and Malebranche call 'the human being' or 'man'.<sup>24</sup> Malebranche distinguishes these concepts of self in the *Christian Meditations*:

This you [*Ce toi*] to whom I speak, and who understands me, is a spiritual substance, who can subsist entirely whole without your body. This substance is united to a body, and makes with this body what is called a man: but that which you see of man is not man. Never forget these words filled with sense, which you learned while still a child. Man is a composite of two substances, of this you [*ce toi*] who conceives what I am telling you, and your body, that terrestrial, animal, insensible substance. (OCM X: 190)

With this distinction in hand, we may read Malebranche as saying that Adam truly experienced the body as part of himself qua human being, while human perceivers since the Fall falsely experience the body as part of themselves qua mind. This reading derives additional support from Malebranche's claims that postlapsarian perceivers confuse the mind with the body in a way Adam did not. 'Now this is what the first man did not do before his sin,' Malebranche argues (OCM XII: 105/JS: 67). 'For undoubtedly he did not confound the modalities of which his mind was capable with those of extension. His ideas were not then confused, and his perfectly subjugated senses did not prevent him from consulting Reason' (OCM XII: 105/JS: 67). In contrast, postlapsarian human perceivers consistently misrepresent the nature of the mind or soul. 'Since Original Sin,' Malebranche argues, 'the soul has become corporeal, as it were . . . . It looks around among corporeal beings — it takes itself now for one, now for another, now for air, now for fire, now for the harmony of its body's parts . . .' (OCM I: 146/LO: 62–63; see also OCM II: 130/LO: 339).

Consider, finally, the perspectival dimension of Adam's prelapsarian experience of embodiment. Even before the Fall, Adam's external sensory experience was restricted to representing relations to his body, since this kind of body-relative information enabled him to efficiently care for his body. 'As the soul is united to the body and must interest itself in its conservation,' Malebranche writes, 'it must be informed by instinctive proofs, I mean short but convincing proofs, of the relation that the bodies surrounding us have to the one we animate' (OCM XII: 98/JS: 61). If Adam were responsible for working out the relations between his body and its environment, he would not have any time left over for thinking about God:

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24. For discussion of Descartes's two concepts of self, see, e.g., Baier (1981), Bitpol-Hespéries (1996), Skirry (2005: 140–141), Carriero (2009: 81–97), Thiel (2011: 37), and Brown (2014).

Adam cannot be said to have been led to seeking out and using sensible things through exact knowledge of the relation they might have had to his body. For in the final analysis, had it been necessary for him to examine the configurations of the parts of some fruit, then those of the parts of his body, and then the resulting relation between them, in order to judge whether, with the present temperature of his blood and the thousand other dispositions of his body, the fruit was nourishing, then clearly things unworthy of its attention would have exhausted his mind's capacity; to do so would have even been useless enough, because he would not have preserved himself for long by this means alone. (OCM I: 74/LO: 22; see also OCM XII: 98/JS: 61)

Hence, Malebranche concludes, 'Adam had the same senses as we do, by which he was advised of what was necessary for his body,' namely, about various relations to the body (OCM I: 75/LO: 22).

Nevertheless, the perspectival character of Adam's experience differed from ours. Before the Fall, Adam experienced his body as a standard relative to which he experienced other material things. But he did not experience his body as an objective standard that revealed the absolute, true, or non-relational properties of these material things. For example, when Adam looked at a palm tree, he saw the palm tree as bigger than his body. He saw this proportion or ratio, and there was nothing about his visual experience that suggested he was seeing more than that. After the Fall, in contrast, the human perceiver tends to misleadingly experience her body as an objective standard. When a Fallen perceiver looks at a palm tree, for example, she too sees only the relation between the size of the palm tree and her body (OCM I: 88/LO: 30). But her visual experience confusedly suggests that the palm tree's relative size is its true, absolute, or non-relational size, as if her body were the one true unit of measurement for material things, inscribed into the nature of the universe. The senses, in effect, suggest that bigger than the perceiver's body equals big simpliciter. As Malebranche writes,

because these animals are small in relation to our bodies, we are led to view them as absolutely small, and consequently as despicable because of their smallness, as if bodies could be small in themselves. Let us try, then, not to follow sense impressions in judgments we make about the size of bodies; and when we say, for example, that a bird is small, let us not understand this absolutely, for nothing is either large or small in itself. Even a bird is large in relation to a fly, and if it is small in relation to our bodies, it does not follow that it is so absolutely, since the body is not an absolute standard against which one should measure other things. (OCM I: 91/LO: 31, emphasis mine)

Of course the idea that our bodies could be the universe's measure is confused and narcissistic. But that's the senses for you. They purport to provide more insight into the nature of reality than they really do.

Let me sum up: prelapsarian Adam's experience of embodiment was illusion free. The postlapsarian experience of embodiment is not:

- (1) *Causal Connection*: Adam's experience of embodiment accurately represented the 'alliance' and 'natural correspondence of changes in the body with changes in the soul' as the coordination of occasional causes; postlapsarian experience misrepresents this correspondence as the interaction of true or genuine causes (OCM XI: 121–122).
- (2) *Material Connection*: Adam's experience accurately represented the self *qua* human being as partly material; postlapsarian experience misrepresents the self *qua* mind as material.
- (3) *Perspectival Connection*: Adam experienced his body as the standard relative to which external objects are represented, but he did not experience his body as an absolute standard. Postlapsarian experience misleadingly represents the body as an objective or absolute standard that provides insight into what material things are like independently of the body.<sup>25</sup>

By contrasting our postlapsarian experience to Adam's, we can see more clearly the ways our experience falls short of the ideal—of 'the model of a perfect man, such as our father was before the sin'—and the various errors our experience of embodiment contains (OCM XII: 103/JJS: 65).

### 3. A Sensory Problem of Evil

Malebranche often casts the feelings of bodily ownership in a negative light. He describes bodily awareness as 'confused', 'imperfect', and 'false' (OCM I: 453/LO: 239). He writes that 'the mind's union with the body . . . infinitely debases man and is today the main cause of all his errors and miseries' (OCM I: 9/LO: xxxiii). This is unsurprising, given the various errors embedded in the

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25. In addition to prelapsarian Adam's experience of embodiment, Malebranche mentions many other experiences of embodiment which are ripe for phenomenological investigation: e.g., Eve's experience of embodiment (OCM III: 108–109, 112–115/LO: 600–601, 603–605), the experience of the glorious bodies post-Resurrection (OCM XIII: 392, 427), the embodiment of the fetus in the womb (OCM II: 232–255/LO: 112–124), as well as the expansive sense of self that occurs as a result of sympathy (OCM II: 113–114/LO: 330–331). Discussing these alternative forms of embodiment would take us beyond the scope of the current paper, but I hope to investigate them in future work. I am indebted to an anonymous reviewer at *Ergo* for reminding me of this diversity of experiences in Malebranche.



postlapsarian version of this experience, as the comparison to Adam shows. The problem is not merely theoretical. Human beings are liable to go wrong about what is in their best interests if they take their experience of embodiment at face value. In the *Christian Meditations*, Malebranche argues that the experience of bodily ownership can lead to a life overly concerned with bodily things:

You almost always act as if your body were part of your own being, as if your food and your life were the material by which you nourish yourself, and as if you could find your good among the objects which impinge on your senses. Seduced and blinded by the body to which you are united, you naturally think that its goods and evils are your own. (OCM X: 190; see also OCM I: 11–12 /LO: xxxiv–xxxv)

This experience can lead someone to ‘impulses of pride and vanity, to scorn others, and to relate all things to himself (OCM III: 105/LO: 598–599). It can lead to an irrational fear of death (OCM XIII: 361, 404). In short: the experience of embodiment is trouble.

We might then reasonably ask why a good and powerful God would create human beings so that they experience their bodies as they do. To solve this local version of the problem of evil, Malebranche needs to explain how this confused experience of embodiment is compatible with God’s benevolence and power: he needs a theodicy of embodiment.<sup>26</sup> Malebranche might argue that prelapsarian Adam’s experience of embodiment wasn’t a problem for him, and that all the badness of the postlapsarian experience is a punishment for sin (see, e.g., OCM I: 137/LO: 57 and OCM I: 146/LO: 62–63). But, as we saw above, even Adam before the Fall ‘had a body . . . which he regarded as part of himself’ (OCM I: 70/LO: 19), and, hence, even Adam would have been inclined to think that his body’s ‘goods and evils’ were his own (OCM X: 190). Moreover, Malebranche argues that our present feeling of bodily ownership is on balance good. In the *Christian Meditations*, for example, he writes, ‘it is good that you take yourself so to speak for your body’ (OCM X: 104). The question is: why? What’s so great about the experience of bodily ownership, and, more specifically, the three varieties—causal, material, and perspectival—discussed above?

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26. Malebranche could appeal to his more general theodicy. In the *Treatise on Nature and Grace*, he argues that in creating the world, God is trying to balance the perfection or goodness of creation against the simplicity of laws (OCM V: 27–37; OCM IX: 1085). This balancing act inevitably leads to defects in creation, and maybe the feeling of bodily ownership is among them. But, in fact, Malebranche provides a more pointed justification of *Ownership*. For discussion of Malebranche’s general theodicean strategy, see, e.g., Guérout (1959: Vol. 2, 99–113), Rodis-Lewis (1963: 302–318), Alquié (1974: 278–285), Rutherford (2000), Pyle (2003: 118–121), Peppers-Bates (2009: 32–37), and Nadler (2010: 189–207).

### 3.1. *Survival*

As Simmons (2008) shows, part of the story is biological. The senses were ‘given to us for the preservation of the body’ (OCM I: 76/LO: 23; see also OCM I: 99/LO: 36, OCM I: 376/LO: 195, OCM XII: 106/JS: 68, and OCM XI: 130). The feeling that a human body belongs to the perceiver contributes to the preservation of the body by making the perceiver care about her body (Simmons 2008: 92–93; see also OCM I: 127–128/LO: 51–52, OCM XII: 98/JS: 61, OCM XI: 104, and OCM XI: 130–131). But Simmons’s explanation is incomplete. Simmons does not distinguish the various dimensions in the experience of bodily ownership, and so she does not fully explain how these dimensions contribute to the biological function of the senses. So let me try to fill in some of these details.

First, a perceiver’s experience of being causally connected to her body tells her that she has control over her body, and, hence, that she can do something to preserve it. The experience of causal connection reminds her that ‘the movement of our feet and hands is subject to our will’, and that she is not merely a spectator to her body’s fate (OCM XI: 133).

Second, a perceiver’s experience of being materially connected to her body funnels her self-interest to her body, and, hence, makes her care about preserving it. As Simmons writes, ‘perceiving the destruction of *a foot* is one thing. I can take an interest or not. Perceiving the destruction of *my foot* or *me*, on the other hand, commands my concern’ (Simmons 2008, 92–93). That seems right as far as it goes. But we have not yet explained why a perceiver’s experience of her materiality fluctuates between representing the perceiver as a composite being with a bodily part, as identical to the body as a whole, or as an aspect, state, or part of the body. My proposal is that this fluctuation contributes to the preservation of the body because these different ways of experiencing one’s materiality allocate self-interest in slightly different ways, as the situation demands. ‘When we consider something as part of ourselves or ourselves as part of something else,’ Malebranche argues,

we judge that our good consists in being joined to it, we have a love for it, and our love increases as the thing in question seems to be a greater part of the whole that we make up together with it. (OCM II: 171/LO: 365, emphasis mine)

Thus, when the perceiver experiences her body as part but not the whole of herself, she will thereby experience her body as requiring some but not all of her concern, and her concern for the body will increase as the body ‘seems to be a greater part of the whole’. This partial identification is adequate for preserving the body when there is no immediate danger: the body still requires food

and drink, but its preservation does not require her complete attention. When the perceiver experiences herself as wholly identical to the body, the preservation of her body will seem more urgent, and will monopolize her self-concern. Complete identification is helpful when the body as a whole is in grave danger, when the perceiver is being chased by a tiger, for example, or skirting the edge of a cliff. Finally, when the perceiver experiences herself as an aspect, state, or part of the body, her sense of self—and, hence, her self-interest—will be wholly focused on the relevant region of her body. Suppose, for example, that the perceiver has placed her hand on a hot burner. If she experienced herself as wholly in her hand at that moment, she would do everything she could to save it.

Third, a perceiver's experience of being perspectively connected to her body contributes to her bodily survival in so far as experiencing relations to the body is useful.<sup>27</sup> When a perceiver is running away from a tiger, she does not need to know the absolute or true sizes of things, but only whether her body will fit through a gap in the rocks. The tiger's absolute location and motion are irrelevant to the perceiver's ability to preserve herself: all she needs to know is where the tiger is located in relation to her, and how quickly the tiger is gaining on her. Similarly, when a perceiver bites into a rotten apple, all the perceiver needs to know is that the apple is bad for her body. Given that the perceiver's experience of being perspectively connected to her body just is an aspect of these sorts of body-relative experiences, we may vindicate the third dimension of bodily ownership by pointing towards the usefulness of being informed about these sorts of relations.

When we consider how well the senses—including the feelings of bodily ownership—fulfill their biological function, they look pretty good:

if it be considered that [the senses] are given us for the preservation of our body, it will be seen that they fulfill their purpose perfectly well, and that they conduct us in so faithful and appropriate a fashion to their end that it seems wrong to accuse them of being corrupt and disordered.  
(OCM I: 76/LO: 23)

Still, even once we've granted that a tool—like the senses—is good relative to its proper function, there is a further question about whether it is good that someone be given a tool. Does a woodcutter need a whisk, or a child a knife? To complete his theodicy of embodiment, Malebranche needs to explain why it is good that human beings be equipped with senses at all. This further explanatory

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27. Simmons (2003) defends the claim that perceiving objects' spatial relations to the body is biologically useful.

demand is difficult to meet, since the mind does not seem to require a tool for conserving the body, nor the body any help from the mind.<sup>28</sup>

As we saw above, Malebranche often describes the senses—and, particularly, the feelings of bodily ownership—as a corrupting influence on the mind, precisely because they make the mind overly focused on preserving its body. We are ‘blinded by the body’ into thinking ‘that its goods and evils are [our] own’ (OCM X: 190). The senses are an extremely effective tool that human minds end up using to harm themselves, like a beautifully sharp knife in a child’s hands, which hardly seems compatible with God’s benevolence.<sup>29</sup> Surprisingly, human bodies would also be better off without any help from the mind. Non-thinking animals, Malebranche argues, are better at preserving themselves than human beings are, because they do not have souls meddling with their bodies’ natural mechanisms:

animals catch their prey and act with as much and more adroitness than do men. I concede that their machine operates even better than does ours; but that is because nothing interferes with its action. This is so because they have no soul, and, as a result, no impulse contrary to those excited in them by the presence of objects as a result of the remarkable construction of their body by Him whose wisdom knows no limits. (OCM II: 149–151/LO: 352)

God, then, is not doing human bodies any favors by entrusting them to the mind’s care. From the body’s perspective, it is good that human beings be equipped with senses, on the assumption that God has established the will as the occasional cause of the body’s movements, since otherwise ‘we would be very content to see [our body] destroyed’ (OCM I: 127–128/LO: 51–52). But we have not explained why God puts the human in charge of the body’s movements in the first place. Thus, the biological justification of the senses in general, and the feelings of bodily ownership in particular, is incomplete.<sup>30</sup>

### 3.2. *Salvation*

Malebranche has another explanation for why the experience of embodiment is good. He argues that God institutes the mind-body union so that human beings can follow Christ’s example, by sacrificing themselves:

28. The following discussion is indebted to Guérout (1959: Vol. 3, 88–142).

29. Guérout (1959: Vol. 3, 108–112).

30. Malebranche hints at a social justification for the soul’s union with the body. On this proposal, God unites the soul to the body so as to make society possible (OCM X: 63 and OCM XII: 286–287). One objection here is that embodiment isn’t necessary for society and communication, as the angels show. More needs to be said about the social dimension of the union, but that would take us beyond the scope of the current paper. See Guérout (1959: Vol. 3, 104–108) for helpful discussion.

Apparently God desired to give to us, as He gave to His Son, a victim we could offer to Him. He desired to have us merit the possession of eternal goods, through a kind of sacrifice and annihilation of ourselves. (OCM XII: 97/JS: 60; see also OCM X: 118–119)

The body provides human beings with a sacrificial victim by serving as the occasional cause for the soul's sensations of pleasure and pain:

God demands a spiritual sacrifice from rational creatures: the annihilation of the soul, the privation of pleasures, the suffering of pains . . . . God is spirit and wants to be worshiped in spirit and truth. Because the soul receives an infinity of diverse sensations from its body, it was necessary that the soul be united to the body, so that it might have something to sacrifice, and to merit its eternal enjoyment of the sovereign good . . . (OCM X: 119; see also OCM IV: 119 and OCM XII: 97/JS 60)

Suppose, for example, that someone is in the midst of prayer and meditation, when she catches a whiff of freshly baked apple pie. Her stomach growls. She feels temptation. And now she is faced with a choice: God or apple pie? She can walk away from the apple pie, or towards it; deprive herself of the pleasures of pie, or wallow in them; suffer the pangs of hunger while she continues praying, or satiate her appetite.<sup>31</sup> The choice is real because her will is established as the occasional cause of her body's movements, and she can decide whether to join or separate herself from the objects that induce sensations of pleasure and pain (OCM XI: 133).<sup>32</sup> Her body provides her with the opportunity to prove herself, by choosing her relationship with God over apple pie and other bodily goods.<sup>33</sup>

The experience of bodily ownership raises the stakes for this choice. Because pleasure and pain are the natural marks of what is good and bad for the body, foregoing pleasure and suffering pain is typically bad for the body (OCM I: 72/

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31. The problem with wallowing in pleasure is that we are inclined to love pleasures' apparent causes and then consent to this love (OCM XVI 39). The sweetness of the apple pie, e.g., could easily lead to our loving the pie freely and too much. For more extensive discussion of the dangers of consent than possible here, see Pyle (2003: 218–233) and Peppers-Bates (2009: 92–93).

32. Objection: Malebranche's occasionalism implies that we don't really have a choice in this or any other situation. A full response to this objection is beyond the scope of this paper. But, as I mentioned in Footnote 10 above, there is significant scholarly controversy about whether Malebranche's occasionalism is compatible with human freedom.

33. We should not completely ignore our body's needs, however. God does not want us to destroy our bodies, since then we would be deprived of the pleasures and pains that provide the stuff of our merit (OCM XI: 126). This implies that our minds require a tool for preserving the body after all; we just shouldn't allow ourselves to be wholly absorbed and enslaved by the senses. See Guérout (1959: Vol. 3, 142).

LO: 20–21). The feelings of bodily ownership make us experience this violence to the body as violence to ourselves:

the body of man is his own victim: since it *seems* to him that he sacrifices himself through pain, and that he *annihilates* himself through death. (OCM XI: 118, emphasis mine)

you regard your body as your own substance as a result of the laws of the union of soul and body. Thus when you sacrifice your body to the love of order, it seems to you that you sacrifice yourself. (OCM X: 122; see also OCM IV: 183–184 and OCM VII-1: 411–412)

When we deprive ourselves of the pleasures of apple pie, we aren't just missing out on pleasurable feelings. We experience this deprivation as harm to our bodily selves. For Malebranche, our experience of ownership is important not merely because of its biological utility, but also because it transforms the sacrifice of a body into something far more significant, namely, 'a kind of sacrifice and annihilation of ourselves' (OCM XII: 97/JS: 60).<sup>34</sup>

#### 4. Conclusion

Malebranche provides a rich analysis of the sensory appearance of bodily ownership, teasing apart three dimensions in the experience of having a body. A Fallen human perceiver experiences the body as belonging to her in so far as her senses represent the body (1) as the true cause of her sensory experiences, and as uniquely responsive to her will, (2) as the focus of her fluctuating materiality, and (3) as the anchor and origin of the sensory world. Each of these dimensions plays an important biological role in the life of the human being, and contributes to the preservation of the body. Even more important for Malebranche, however, is the theological significance of the human experience of embodiment, which justifies this experience despite the moral dangers to which it makes us vulnerable. As Merleau-Ponty argues in his lectures on Malebranche,

if I had a clear idea of the soul, I would not consider my body as part of myself, and I wouldn't be able to offer this body as a victim to God. "If you saw clearly what you are," says the Word, "You could no longer be so tightly with your body. You wouldn't regard it as part of yourself"

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34. For helpful discussion, see Guérout (1959: Vol. 3, 138–143), Alquié (1974: 49), Merleau-Ponty (1997: 22), and Pyle (2003: 194–195).

(*Christian Meditations* IX.19, OCM X 104). This is thus to avow that our body is legitimately taken for ourselves. (Merleau-Ponty 1997: 22)

Despite Malebranche's ambivalence towards the body, or perhaps even because of it, he develops a multifaceted phenomenology of embodiment, for which he deserves a place among the philosophers of the body.

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## Abbreviations

AT = Descartes, René (1996). *Ceuvres Complètes*. Vrin. Cited by volume and page.

CSM = Descartes, René (1984–5). *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes* (Vols. 1–2). John Cottingham, Robert Stoothof, and Dugald Murdoch (Eds. and Trans.). Cambridge University Press. Cited by volume and page.

CSMK = Descartes, René (1991). *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes* (Vol. 3). *The Correspondence*. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothof, Dugald Murdoch, and Anthony Kenny (Eds. and Trans.). Cambridge University Press. Cited by volume and page.

JS = Malebranche, Nicholas (1997). *Dialogues on Metaphysics and on Religion*. Nicholas Jolley and David Scott (Eds. and Trans.). Cambridge University Press.

LO = Malebranche, Nicholas (1997). *The Search After Truth*. Thomas Lennon and Paul Olscamp (Eds. and Trans.). Cambridge University Press.

OCM = Malebranche, Nicholas (1958). *Oeuvres complètes*. André Robinet (Ed.). Vrin. Cited by volume and page.

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