**Malebranche on Space, Time, and Divine Simplicity**[[1]](#footnote-1)

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**Abstract.**Malebranche doesn’t discuss his metaphysics of time in isolation from his religious metaphysics. I argue that Malebranche’s conception of how created beings have their properties commits him to saying that God is omnitemporal rather than atemporal. For just as bodies get their spatiality by participating in God’s omnipresence, so all creatures get their temporality by participating in God’s omnitemporality. Moreover, Malebranche is a substantivalist about space and time: infinite space and time are one and the same divinely simple substance, God (partially considered), who contains the world. My exploration of Malebranche’s metaphysics sheds light on his views of eminent containment, participation, and causation.

(147 WORDS)

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**§1.1 Introduction**

The central aims of this paper are two. The first is to argue that, given Malebranche’s metaphysics of how creatures have their properties—e.g., creatures have spatial properties in virtue of participating in God’s omnipresence—then Malebranche must be committed to God’s being omnitemporal, or located at all times. For creatures have temporal properties, and participating in something that is atemporal could not suffice for creatures’ temporality. Were Malebranche to follow out his metaphysical commitments on the nature of causation and participation, then he must say God is omnitemporal. I also defend against notable objections, such as that there are crucial disanalogies between space and time for Malebranche. My second aim is to illustrate how the doctrine of divine simplicity underpins Malebranche’s metaphysics. It is partly a commitment to divine simplicity that drives Malebranche to his striking understanding of God’s omnipresence, as well as (I argue) to God’s omnitemporality.

Our examination of Malebranche’s metaphysics clarifies his view of causation, participation, and eminent containment. For what does it mean for creatures to get their properties by ‘participating’ in God? For Malebranche, I argue, the participation relation is (*de re*) the causal relation, implying that the cause either has the realities found in the effects in a mundane way, in a higher way, or in a divine and infinite way. Malebranche denies Spinozism, and opts for the last of those options. This sheds light on Malebranche’s understanding of the doctrine of eminent containment. For God to eminently contain F is not for him to not be F, as some commenters believe Descartes held in practice;[[2]](#footnote-2) rather, it is for God to be F in an infinite and divinely simple way, such that all his perfections are identical.

This goes importantly beyond what multiple scholars think about Malebranchian eminent containment. They think that for God to eminently contain F is merely for God to have an archetypal idea of F.[[3]](#footnote-3) If I’m right that Malebranche’s God eminently contains F by being F in a divine way, this provides an answer to a longstanding Cartesian puzzle: How can a purely mental substance, God, stand in causal relations with extended creatures, if they have nothing in common? If I’m right, Malebranche’s answer is that God is spatial, though in a divine and simple (‘holenmeric’) way. Similarly, how can God stand in causal relations with temporal creatures if he is atemporal? The answer is that God eminently contains temporality, not by being atemporal and merely having an idea of temporality, but also by being omnitemporal. Most of the paper focuses on arguing that Malebranche thinks God has creaturely properties in this divinely simple way. I focus on temporality and spatiality.

The moderns’ views about God’s attributes influenced their spatial ontology. A variety of views of God’s omnipresence may have been held in this period, and there is considerable controversy about it.[[4]](#footnote-4) On the virtual presence view, called ‘nullibism’ by Henry More, and which he attributes to the Cartesians, God’s substance is transcendent; God is omnipresent only in the sense of being causally active at, or aware of, every spatial location. On a second view, God’s very substance is extended *partes extra partes*, and space itself was held to be divine. On a third view—holenmerism—God is substantially and wholly located at every part of space. The precursors of early modern holenmerism include Plotinus and Augustine. One variety of spatial holenmerism implies a particular view of spatial ontology: Space is God’s very substance, and each spatial location somehow consists of God’s entire substance.

I argue Malebranche maintains a kind of holenmerism about space and time. Space and time are God’s one divinely simple substance, such that every spatial and temporal location consists of God’s entire substance. This seems incomprehensible. Though Malebranche in multiple places professes the incomprehensibility of God’s divine simplicity and infinitude, which I argue implies the holenmerism, I think he has resources to dull the incomprehensibility to an extent. However, if there are vestiges of incomprehensibility, then that may be due to Malebranche’s view. At the furthest limits of his metaphysics, he embraces divine mystery regarding the simplicity doctrine (OC 6: 204), just as the Church Fathers do for other mysteries of the faith (LO 245-6).

One surprising entailment of my conclusion is that Malebranche believes God *qua* substance is omnitemporal, not atemporal. This conclusion may lend some credibility to Geoffrey Gorham’s (2008) view that Descartes thought God is omnitemporal, if we suppose that Malebranche’s philosophy is a cousin of Descartes’. Gorham doesn’t just argue that Descartes thinks God is omnitemporal. He also argues that, for Descartes, God’s duration is successive (e.g., God thinks one thought after another) rather than ‘all at once’. I distinguish God’s successive duration from his omnitemporality. I argue only that Malebranche is committed to God’s omnitemporality, but is wholly present or ‘all at once’ at each time.

Olle-Laprune in 1870 said that Malebranche takes God to be outside time, just as he is outside space (*Philosphie*, 382). Though commentators have not said much about Malebranche on God and time, they have mentioned it in passing in a debate about Malebranche’s view of the content of God’s lawlike volitions. Nicholas Jolley (2019, 131) says that an argument for the view that God’s natural laws are inefficacious without particularized contents (e.g., <at t1 let it be that X is F>) would rest on “feeble support,” if it required a premise that God acts in time; “Thus the atemporality of all God’s volitions is common ground between the parties to the debate” (ibid.). Steven Nadler, in the other corner, agrees that relying on such a premise fails. He briefly states that “God, after all, is an eternal, hence atemporal being” (1993, 44). I remain neutral about Malebranche’s view of the content of God’s volitions. What I wish to question is this assumption by influential Malebranche scholars, on both sides of an interesting debate, that Malebranche thinks God is outside time altogether.

**§1.2 Eternality Need Not Be Atemporality**

Malebranche scholars are certainly right about his belief in God’s eternality: “There is a sovereign reason that God necessarily loves, that is coeternal with him” (*LO*, 587). But eternality need not entail atemporality. Newton held that God’s eternality implies his omnitemporality (God exists at every time), rather than atemporality (God does not exist at any time), and that time itself is infinite and beginningless because of God:

His duration reaches from eternity to eternity; his presence from infinity to infinity … He is not eternity and infinity, but eternal and infinite; he is not duration or space, but he endures and is present. He endures forever, and is everywhere present; and, by existing always and everywhere, he constitutes duration and space … certainly the Maker and Lord of all things cannot be *never* and *nowhere*. (*Mathematical*, 545).

Newton thinks God endures forever, and “cannot be never”; instead he exists at every time and so is omnitemporal. Newton and Malebranche were contemporaries. So let’s not rule out immediately that Malebranche thinks eternality entails omnitemporality. This could be so even if it turns out Malebranche and Newton diverge on God’s substantial or virtual presence at times and places. As we’ll see, they at least don’t diverge on substantial presence at places. For one, Newton says “He is omnipresent not *virtually* only but also *substantially*; for virtue cannot subsist without substance” (*Mathematical*, 545). I will later show that Malebranche believes God is substantially present at all places, and in a holenmerian way. For now, the point is that there is conceptual space for the view that Malebranche thinks eternality implies omnitemporality rather than atemporality.

There are numerous passages in which Malebranche seems to assume or imply that God is temporal. He says God “continuously” and “without variation” wills “everything He will do in the course of time” (DMR 115). “Continuously” is a temporal locution, suggesting an eternality that is (omni)temporal. And “It cannot be doubted that only God existed *before* the world was created” (LO 229, my emphasis). This suffices for God’s temporality, just as it suffices for my father’s temporality that he existed before me. I hope to show that Malebranche isn’t just being careless in passages like these.

**§1.3 A Map**

My main argument relies on Malebranche’s conception of how created beings have their realities, or properties that aren’t merely negations or lacks. After this is understood, we may see that just as Malebranche took it that bodily creatures get their spatiality from God’s Divine Immensity or substantial omnipresence, he took it that we get our temporality from God’s omnitemporality. The only way creatures could imitate God in this respect is if God is (omni)temporal. Otherwise, this is not imitation or participation. Malebranche’s acceptance of a general parallelism about space and time, I argue, also supports God’s whole-at-each-time omnitemporality. Here are summaries of the arguments I contend Malebranche accepts.

Participation Argument

D1. Creatures have all their realities by participating in God’s divine perfections.[[5]](#footnote-5)

D2. Creatures are temporal.[[6]](#footnote-6)

D3. Hence, creatures are temporal by participating in God’s divine perfections. (from D1, D2)

D4. If creatures are temporal by participating in God’s divine perfections, then God is omnitemporal, not atemporal. (supported by a principle of participation or causal likeness, §2.7; also supported by Parity of Perfections)

C1. God is omnitemporal. (from D3, D4)

Parity of Perfections

S1. God is divinely simple, such that all his perfections are identical.[[7]](#footnote-7)

S2. So, God’s omnipresence is identical with his [omnitemporality or atemporality]. (from

S1)

S3. God is omnipresent not virtually, but substantially, by being the infinite spatial container for all created extension. (see §2.3)

S4. There is a general parity between God’s immensity or omnipresence, and his eternity.[[8]](#footnote-8)

C2. So, God’s substance is omnitemporal, not atemporal; it is the infinite temporal container for all events. (from S2, S3, S4)

D4. So, if creatures are temporal by participating in God’s divine perfections, then God is substantially omnitemporal, not atemporal. (corollary of C2)

**§1.4 Divine Simplicity**

Much of what I will argue for makes sense in light of Malebranche’s view of divine simplicity. His view of divine simplicity is motivated by his idea that God is a perfect being who possesses all realities and never “nothingness.” Thus, Malebranche says,

[God] is Being without restriction, not finite being, a being composed, as it were,

of being and nothingness. Thus, attribute to God, whom we adore, only what you

conceive in infinitely perfect Being. Divest Him only of the finite, only of what

derives from nothingness. (*DMR*, 135-136)

God is simple because for something to have parts in the ordinary sense is for each part to contain the exclusion of other parts (*DMR*, 135). Similarly, to have a mode in the ordinary sense would be to exist in a particular way to the exclusion or negationof some other way of being: e.g., to be mental, in the ordinary way, is for that very mentality to exclude (e.g.) spatiality, and that exclusion is a negation of other, non-spatial ways of being. The “intelligible world,” though contained in God, “is not a modality, since there is no modality in the infinite, no nothingness in being, nor anything that limits infinite being” (*WG*, 85).Hence, Malebranche concludes, “The Inﬁnite Being is incapable of modiﬁcations” (*LO*, 625). Instead God possesses all, indeed infinite, realities or perfections—including his power, wisdom, presence, and (I argue) duration—in a divinely simpleway, such that all his perfections blend into one, without negation or exclusion of other perfections. “In His substance there is neither large nor small; everything is simple, equal, and infinite” (*DMR*, 132). “He is always one and always infinite, perfectly simple and composed, as it were, of all realities or all perfections” (*DMR*, 135). This is affirmed by Theotimus, whom Theodore subsequently agrees with regarding spirits, when he says that “it is a property of the infinite…to be composed, as it were, of an infinity of perfections, and so simple that each perfection it possesses contains all the others without any real distinction” (DMR, 137-138). One might say that, for Malebranche, God’s possession of all His perfections in this supremely simple, general way is how these perfections are “eminently present” (*OC* 6:118) in Him. As created beings, we could never have such divinely simple existence.

Malebranche’s notion of divine simplicity makes sense of why he opts for (i) a whole-in-each-part omnipresence (i.e. holenmerian omnipresence), why (ii) this coincides with whole-in-each-part omnitemporality, as well as why (iii) every idea that God contains is really *one* Idea, considered or perceived in various ways. (i) and (ii) ensure that God has no spatial or temporal parts that can be genuinely separated from him. (iii), and that (i) and (ii) are identical, maintain God’s one-ness. In Malebranche’s eyes, (i), (ii), and (iii) preclude God from having parts and modifications that contain “nothingness” or “exclusions.”

I later argue Malebranche thinks God has parts or modes only in the sense of having *intelligible*—not metaphysical—parts or modes. That is, God has parts or modes that may be separated in thought alone but not in reality. And I’ll show that just as the perfections in his Substance are not really separable from one another, but only in thought, God’s ideas of his individual perfections are not really separable ideas but different ways of considering one Idea blended into one, the Word.

My argument for God’s omnitemporality requires an understanding of Intelligible Extension and its relation to Divine Immensity, the subject of the next section. Among other things, I hope to show that Malebranche is a special kind of substantivalist—a holenmerian—about space and time.

**§2.1 Intelligible Extension**

Intelligible Extension is an idea. For Malebranche, ideas are representations that contain infinite content. They can therefore represent all the modes the thing represented is capable of (*LO*, 237; 319). Malebranche holds that the intellect clearly apprehends that Intelligible Extension is infinite, and that it has several other divine properties as well (*DMR,* 15; *OC* 284). So, to avoid the blasphemous claim that something other than God possesses divine properties, Intelligible Extension must reside in God (*DMR,* 20). Jasper Reid (2003, 584) notes that, in saying this, Malebranche echoes an argument about absolute (or ‘substantivalist’) space which was popping up in his time. Otto von Guericke put it this way.

It would indeed blaspheme God to declare that something else [besides God] is Infinite and Immense. For indeed, God alone admits of no boundaries to his extension (*Magdeburg,* 95).

To avoid blasphemy, Henry More concludes that space, being infinite, must be God’s Divine Substance (*Manual,* 57). Joseph Raphson concludes space or immensity is an *attribute* of God’s substance (*Spatio*, 72-80). Newton and Clarke identify space with God’s Divine Immensity, holding that space is a property of God’s substance or substantial consequence of God (Alexander 1956, 31, 34; *Mathematical*, 545; see also McGuire & Slowik, 2012). Malebranche thinks there are some important differences between Intelligible Extension and absolute space. For instance, Intelligible Extension is not really corporeally extended. Still, we shall see how there is a close relationship between Intelligible Extension and Divine Immensity: the former *represents* the latter in some way.

**§2.2 Divine Immensity**

What is Divine Immensity? Malebranche tells us clearly. “God’s Immensity is his very substance spread out everywhere and in its entirety everywhere, filling all places” (*DMR*, 136). The clause “in its entirety everywhere” is important. Malebranche rejects the notion that the Divine Substance is “s*pread out* beneath the world” (*Trois Lettres*, 233-4) such that there would be more of God in a square kilometer than in a square meter. That is, Malebranche rejects the view that God is omnipresent *partes extra partes*. For he does not exist “corporeally” in the way a creature does, having a body that exists partly in each part of space. Instead, “God is everything that he is wherever he is; and he is everywhere” (*DC,* 66; *OC* 9, 954; *DMR,* 133); he is somehow wholly present in every part of space. He “pervades” bodies in a way such that there is no more of him in a large elephant than in a small gnat (*DMR*, 132). These are expressions of what Henry More called ‘holenmerian’ omnipresence. It precludes non-holenmerian substantial omnipresence (*the partes extra partes view*), as well as the virtual presence theory, which is usually taken for the Cartesian view. But for Malebranche, if God is causally active at any spatial location, then his very substance must be there “completely and in every respect in which he operates”, and not just in respect of his causal operations (*DMR*, 133-4). Malebranche’s passage here in 1688 resembles closely Newton’s point from above, published in 1687, that God must be substantially present where he is virtually present (recall, virtual presence at place p is presence in the sense of being causally active at and aware of p). And here is Malebranche again: “If the act by which God produces or conserves this chair is here, surely God is here Himself” (*DMR*, 133). Divine simplicity entails God’s substantial omnipresence if God’s power, not just its effects, is really here. For if God’s substance is identical with his perfections, and God’s power is here, then his substance is here.[[9]](#footnote-9)

**§2.3 Substantivalism about Space and Time**

Now, everything exists in the Divine Substance, and this substance is the “inner place of creatures” (*DMR* 132.). More generally, Malebranche thinks “bodies are in His immensity” (*DMR*, 134). He seems to be saying that God’s Immensity is space, and the world and created beings are contained in God’s substance spread out in this holenmerian way:

He is completely whole in His immensity, and completely in all the bodies which are

locally extended in His immensity; completely in all the parts of matter, though they are

infinitely divisible. Or, to speak more precisely, God is not so much in the world as the

world is in Him or in His immensity. (*DMR*, 132)

Substantivalism about space most naturally accords with the thought that infinite space is a container for the world and created beings. By saying that “God is not so much in the world as the world is in Him or in His immensity,” Malebranche seems to imply that God’s Immensity isa spatial container for the world and created beings. So, passages like these are points in favor of substantivalism. Malebranche’s substantivalism about space is further confirmed when he says two more things. (i) before the world was created, God was everywhere he is currently, and where he would be were the world to be destroyed (*DMR*, 135). That is, the Divine Substance spread out in Malebranche’s holenmerian way (=Divine Immensity) always exists, whether the world or created things contained in his Immensity exist. The Divine Substance does not itself occupy some other space that is not God, for (ii) “the place of His substance is but His substance itself” (ibid.). (i), (ii), and *DMR* 132 cited above together imply that the space the world is contained in is a substance that exists in itself, and that substance is God. Space is not a relation between worldly objects or between God and worldly objects. Neither can space be relations between different parts of God’s substance, since God strictly speaking does not have (metaphysical) parts. Hence, Malebranche is a substantivalist about space. For him, space is a substantial container for the world and created beings, where each spatial location somehow consists of God’s entire substance (this is the holenmerism), which is not present merely locally and in part, and not present merely in a causal capacity.

It might seem that Malebranche identifies or grounds a body’s being somewhere with its bearing relationsof distance to other bodies, rather than in its being contained in a substance. That is, it might seem Malebranche is a relationalist about time.

It is a contradiction for a body to be neither at rest nor in motion. For even God—though

omnipotent—cannot create a body which is nowhere or which does not have certain

relations of distance to other bodies. (*DMR*, 111)

However, Malebranche’s point here is not that for a body to be in space it must bear relations of distance to other bodies. We can coherently imagine, after all, that God creates only one body. In the context of the passage, Malebranche is just arguing that God, and not other bodies, is responsible for the rest and motion of every body. A substantivalist-friendly interpretation pairs better with divine simplicity: a body that enters the arena of God’s infinite space must bear distance relations to whatever other bodies are in that one indivisible arena. Perhaps if Malebranche were a relationalist about time, then one could argue that God’s immutability[[10]](#footnote-10) entails his atemporality. But Malebranche is no relationalist.

Does Malebranche’s rejection of Spinoza’s metaphysics in his correspondence with de Marain tell against the view that God’s substance is space? No. For one, that God’s substance is wholly located at every space makes Malebranche impervious to the charge that God is extended in a way that is divisible, which the moderns viewed as an imperfection. What Malebranche does here is reject Spinoza’s claim that ideas of bodies should be identified with bodies (*WG*, 70). In a subsequent letter, Malebranche rejects Spinoza’s claim that bodies are modifications of God’s substance. Instead he says they are substances different from God. The picture, then, is that though created bodies exist *within* God’s infinite space, they are not God himself. He also indicates that a portion of space is in some sense part of a larger extension (*WG*, 77), which I have argued is Divine Immensity/infinite holenmeric space.

Allow me a brief detour into the distinction between God’s infinite extensional existence and created extension. It is God’s possessing all his perfections in a divinely simple way, where all of these perfections are somehow one, that allows him to be at once infinitely powerful, infinitely good, infinitely just—as well as infinitely *spatial* and infinitely *mental*. In contrast, the matter that exists in space is extension such that its parts are negations of its other parts. And a body, or the matter it is made out of, exists in such a way that it negates other ways of being, such as mentality. This can explain why Malebranche thinks ideas of finite bodies cannot be finite bodies, contra Spinoza, whereas an infinite Idea—the Word, as I’ll argue—can be an infinitely (noncorporeal) spatial substance. For Malebranche is clear that God possesses both mentality and extension, though “without their limitations” and “in a way completely different from his creatures” (*DMR*, 134). God’s divinely simple possession of his perfections is incomprehensible to us and not possessable by us. Similarly, God’s existing wholly as he is in each part of space, where each part does not negate any of the others, is incomprehensible to us (*DMR*, 135-136).

It seems incomprehensible that a portion of space is a proper part ofDivine Immensity, which is really indivisible and has no parts. I later argue that, for Malebranche, a portion of space is just a *partially considered* Divine Immensity/infinite space. That is, a portion of space is just an intelligible part of the Divine Immensity/infinite space, separable in thought from the rest of the Divine Substance but not in reality. Consequently, I think, bodies are located in different spatial locations, x and y, from each other (even though God is entirely present at each spatial location) in virtue of being located in the Divine Immensity partially considered x-ly and partially considered y-ly.

If one is worried that this reeks of idealism about spatial locations, then one need not. Idealism would say that spatial locations are mental in a way that rules out their being, at bottom, spatial. But for Malebranche, God’s substance is at once fully spatial and fully mental. These are really the same perfection given divine simplicity. If one urges that my interpretation of Malebranchian spatial locations still doesn’t make sense, Malebranche might profess that the Divine Immensity is incomprehensible because it is forever infinite in everysense (*DMR*, 137). Its incomprehensibility is just a consequence of his view that God possesses all perfections in a divinely simple way.

Suppose Malebranche takes space to be analogous with time. Then one has a reason to believe he subscribes to substantivalism about time as well. Theodore, Malebranche’s spokesperson, does say that “Created extension is to divine immensity what time is to eternity” (*DMR*, 132). He also compares God’s omnipresence with God’s eternality, and claims he is trying to help Aristes understand God’s omnipresence by understanding his eternality (*DMR*, 133). We thus have a reason to think Malebranche is a substantivalist about time. If Malebranche’s analogy holds—and the rest of the paper will argue it does—then God’s substance exists wholly at every time, just as it exists wholly at every space. Given Malebranche’s take on simplicity, we should think of God’s infinite temporality as really one with God’s infinite spatiality.

**§2.4 Intelligible Extension Represents Divine Immensity**

Let’s get back to Divine Immensity and Intelligible Extension, which will be important for the Participation Argument. How does Divine Immensity relate to Intelligible Extension? I have so far argued that Intelligible Extension is an idea, and Divine Immensity refers to God’s holenmerically omnipresent substance that is the container for the world. Malebranche says that Intelligible Extension is the Immensity not of the Divine Being or Father,but the Divine Word, the second person of the trinity (*Trois Lettres*, 6:234). Intelligible extension is only the “immensity” of the Divine Being

(R)“in so far as [it is] infinitely participable by the corporeal creature, in so far as [it is]

representative of an immense matter” (*OC* 10:99).

To say Intelligible Extension is the Immensity of the Divine Being is thus a way of expressing that Intelligible Extension *represents* the Immensity of the Divine Being. Intelligible Extension is therefore a thought or idea that conceptualizes or represents Divine Immensity, or God’s holenmerically omnipresent substance. Since, as I have argued, Divine Immensity is infinite space, we can clearly see why Theodore identifies Intelligible Extension with the “idea of space” (*DMR*, 15).Moreover, the way Intelligible Extension represents Divine Immensity is *qua* something that is “participable by the corporeal creature” (more on this soon). Intelligible Extension therefore represents Divine Immensity in such a way as to enable the Father to understand the ways in which finite creatures might participate in Divine Immensity/God’s holenmerically omnipresent substance.

How does Intelligible Extension enable the father to do this? We know that Malebranche thinks creatures exist partly at each space, while God exists whole in each part. It seems that Intelligible Extension must represent God’s holenmerically omnipresent substance *non-holenmerically*. This accords with Theodore’s saying in *DMR* 136-138 that there is an “infinite difference” between Intelligible Extension and Divine Immensity. This isn’t to say that Intelligible Extension represents anything false about Divine Immensity. Rather it represents God’s substance *qua* that which is participable bybodies, with the limitations or imperfections that pertain to bodies (*DMR*, 137).However, let us be careful. Malebranche does not take Intelligible Extension’s representing the Divine Immensity non-holenmerically to imply that Intelligible Extension is, taken absolutely, extended locally like bodies, existing only partly in each part, such that it is “larger in a larger space, and smaller in a smaller” (*OC* 6:210). He insists to Arnauld that he is not so stupid as to believe something as impious as this (ibid.).

**§2.5 How Do the Divine Word, Divine Being, and their Immensities Relate?**

Our picture of the interrelations between the Divine Word, the Divine Being, and their respective Immensities will come into focus with Malebranche’s understanding of God as a perfect being.[[11]](#footnote-11) Since it is a perfection to know oneself, God eternally contemplates himself and only himself (*DC*, 87). He eternally contemplates himself by attending to an eternal idea of himself—the Divine Word—which is begotten in him by this contemplation: “The necessary perception which He has of His own substance is the generation of His word” (*OC*, 9: 968). The Divine Word is therefore an Idea that perfectly represents God’s own substance to himself: “For there is no other idea of God at all but His Word. The Son of God is the perfect expression and resemblance of His Father” (*OC* 6: 166). Intelligible Extension is therefore an idea contained in the Divine Word that represents the Divine Substance in some capacity. Elsewhere, Malebranche goes as far as to say that Intelligible Extension just *is* the substance of God *qua* representative of finite bodies and participable by them (DMR, 137). The Word remains consubstantial with the Divine Being/Father, but the Word is distinct in the sense that it is considered or conceived qua the direct object of the Father’s contemplation. In other words, the Word is God qua perfect idea of himself. And the Immensity of the Word, or Intelligible Extension, is God qua idea of Divine Immensity. Intelligible Extension is an idea contained in the Divine Word that represents God’s Divine Immensity qua that which is participable by finite creatures; that is, Intelligible Extension represents God’s omnipresent substance in a partial, non-holenmeric way.

Divine Word 🡪 Divine Substance/Being

^perfectly represents

Intelligible Extension 🡪 Divine Immensity

(^God’s holenmeric omnipresence)

^non-holenmerically represents

(^‘immensity of the Word’, an idea)

Intelligible Extension is the result of God’s partially considering or conceiving of the Word, focusing specifically on his substance participable *spatially*. As Reid (2003, 594-595) explains, such partial consideration is also how the ideas of individual bodies arise: “Certainly, you cannot will to think of a circle, unless you already have the idea of it, or at least the idea of the extension of which you can consider certain parts without thinking of others” (*DMR*, 12). To have an idea of a circle is for us or God to partially consider Intelligible Extension, analogous with how one can carve out a sphere from a block of marble. Because our minds are finite, we only ever partially consider or conceive Intelligible Extension. Our partial *considerations* of Intelligible Extension do not indicate that it has genuine parts that are really separable from the rest, but only separable in thought. Intelligible Extension, in turn, represents an absolute and immense space that is not truly divisible. For each part of Intelligible Extension exists whole in each part, even though we considerportions of space without considering the whole of it (*OC* 6:210).

**§2.6 Participation and Creaturely Properties**

God as he examines himself in the Divine Word sees he can be imperfectly imitated in various ways.

(P)God’s ideas of creatures are, as Saint Thomas says, only His essence, in so far as it is participable or imperfectly imitable, for God contains every creaturely perfection, though in a divine and infinite way (*LO* 625, Elucidation 10).

How did God endow creatures with finite versions of his perfections? By having them participate in, or resemble to a lesser extent, the Divine Substance itself. Indeed, (P) seems to say that God’s ideas of creatures just are his very substance conceived of as participable by finite beings. It is the Divine Word that contains all of God’s ideas or archetypes of possible creatures. (R) and (P) together indicate that Intelligible Extension is one of these ideas contained in the Divine Word. Spatial creatures have the property of being spatial in virtue of participating, finitely and “imperfectly,” in God’s Divine Immensity. This participation is God’s way of endowing finite creatures and bodies with finite and non-holenmeric spatial extension, existing partly in each part of space rather than whole in each part. Extended creatures, no matter how large they get, will never have the holenmeric spatial existence that God does. Nor will they ever possess any of their perfections in God’s divinely simple way. The Intelligible Extension contained in the Divine Word is an “infinitely participable” archetype of corporeal creatures. It represents God’s holenmeric omnipresence in such a way that God understands how finite creatures could participate non-holenmerically and finitely in his own infinite spatiality.

Malebranche’s metaphysics does not just explain creatures’ spatiality. He also thinks intelligent minds exist as finite imitations of God’s own infinite intelligence: “For God does nothing without the Word’s wisdom, and this wisdom is the universal reason which all minds participate in” (*LO*, 587). This Wisdom turns out to be identical with the Word, who is begotten: “This wisdom is not created. God who creates all things did not create it, although He is always begetting it through the necessity of His being” (LO 586). Participating in God’s wisdom is what makes us rational. The Word’s Wisdom enables God to understand how we might participate finitely in his rationality, just as Intelligible Extension enables him to understand how we might participate finitely in his omnipresence. We may think of the Word’s Wisdom as an idea contained in the Divine Word, the result of God’s partially considering the Word and focusing on his substance participable *rationally*.

Malebranche says “God contains every creaturely perfection” in a “divine and infinite way,” and that we imitate these perfections by “participat[ing]” in God’s essence or substance (LO 625). That is, we have *all* our realities in virtue of participating in, or resembling to a lesser extent, God’s substance. Now Malebranche recognizes we are temporal beings. He says, for example, that we use time to know ourselves (LO 90), that some of our actions are a waste of time (LO 144), and that we may pass the time by thinking (*DMR*, 51). We may conclude there is another way that God can partially consider himself—by reflecting on what we might call ‘Intelligible Duration’—which enables God to see how we may participate in his substance *temporally*. This is what enables us to be temporal beings. If God were atemporal then we would not be participating or imperfectly imitating God in the temporal respect. After all, as spatial creatures, extended bodies do not imitate God’s omnipresence by being *non*-spatial. Neither is God non-spatial, for he is holenmerically and substantially omnispatial. God must be temporal, though “in a divine and infinite way” (P). This is an eternality that entails omnitemporality, not atemporality.

Admittedly, Malebranche does not speak of Intelligible Duration explicitly. But he does speak of God’s “duration.” He likens it with God’s own spatiality or immensity. God’s duration is the likely property of God’s substance that we participate in to get our temporality.

(D) We could say that God was in past time; but He was then everything He will be in future time. For His existence and duration, if it is permitted to use that term, is completely in eternity, and completely in every passing moment in His eternity. Likewise, God is not partly in heaven and partly on earth. He is completely whole in His immensity, and completely in all the bodies which are locally extended in His immensity. (DMR 132)

Malebranche is careful to say God’s duration is not such that God exists partly at each time. For this would violate divine simplicity. Instead, God’s duration is whole-in-each-part, just as he is wholly present at each space rather than partly. As indicated here, God’s duration is supposed to be like his presence. Since God’s presence is substantial and holenmeric rather than merely virtual (see §2.3), Malebranche must conclude that God’s substance has holenmeric duration at all times. That omnipresence implies omnitemporality, not atemporality, is not surprising given Malebranche’s understanding of divine simplicity. It says that God’s perfections are all identical and blend into one (DMR 137-8).

That Malebranche drops talk of multiple ideas in 1678 when explicating his theory of vision is no reason to think he believes the Divine Word does not contain other ideas like Intelligible Duration. Nor does it indicate that the Word does not contain other ideas to serve as the truthmakers for moral truths (a la *LO*, 233-34). For we may keep in mind that each of these ideas are just ways of God’s considering one divine and simple idea, the Word, in keeping with divine simplicity.

**§2.7 The Causal Likeness Principle and Participation**

In this section I further support a premise in the Participation Argument: if creatures get their temporality by participating in a perfection of God, they participate in his omnitemporality rather than atemporality. I argue that participation is a kind of causal relation for Malebranche, one that requires that the cause contain as much or more reality as its effect, and in this way resembles or far exceeds the effect. Now Malebranche doesn’t accept causal overdetermination. For accepting causal overdetermination would contradict his claim that God always acts in the simplest of ways and never “uselessly” (LO 230; TNG 116). So this causal relation between God and creatures just is the participation relation that grants creatures their properties.

Malebranche holds a version of the like from like, or ‘causal likeness’, principle. It is a scholastic axiom that something cannot come from nothing. This axiom implies that a cause must be like an effect to the extent that it is cause of the effect, and that an effect cannot be unlike the cause to the extent that it is its effect.[[12]](#footnote-12) Insofar as a cause gives rise to an effect that is F, then, it better have as much (or more) F-ness than the effect; otherwise, this is tantamount to getting something from nothing.

For it ought to be carefully noted that it is no more difficult to produce something from nothing than to produce it by positing another thing from which it cannot be made and which can contribute nothing to its production. For example, it is no more difficult to create an angel than to produce it from a stone, because given that a stone is of a totally contrary kind of being, it can contribute nothing to the production of an angel. But it can contribute to the production of bread, of gold, and such, because stone, gold, and bread are but the same extension differently configured, and they are all material things. (LO 223)

So Malebranche accepts causal likeness. A problem arises, however, when we find Malebranche claiming that God is the true cause of all things (LO 450; OC 2:316). How can God create extended beings like stone, gold, and bread if he is a spiritual substance, altogether unlike extended beings? The answer is that God is a being that contains all realities, though to a greater extent than his creatures.

(a) Thus, God, the infinitely perfect Being, including eminently within himself all there is of reality or perfection in all beings, can represent them to us. (DC 88)

(b) Extension, Aristes, is a reality, and all realities are found in the infinite. Thus, God is extended as well as bodies, since God possesses all absolute realities or all perfections. But God is not extended like bodies. For, as I just told you, He does not have the limitations and imperfections of His creatures. (DMR 135)

(c) He even contains within himself whatever reality or perfection there is in matter,

the least and most imperfect of beings; but without its imperfections, its limitation, its nonbeing; for there is no nonbeing in Being, no limitation of any kind in the infinite. My hand is not my head, my chair, my room nor my mind or yours. … But in the infinitely perfect Being there is nothing of nonbeing. Our God is everything that he is wherever he is; and he is everywhere. (DC 65-6)

God has extension because it is a reality rather than a limitation or lack (b); he has it in a way that far surpasses his creatures (b). That is, he contains extension ‘eminently’ (a), without the non-holenmeric restriction of his creatures (c): “Our God is everything that he is wherever he is,” unlike creaturely bodies, the parts of which exclude its other parts—e.g., “my hand is not my head” (ibid.); and his holenmeric extension or spatiality is such that it does not exclude his other perfections, for his extension is identical with his other perfections, in accord with divine simplicity (DMR, 137-8).[[13]](#footnote-13) So, for example, causal likeness for Malebranche implies that we should be able to see how material (part-in-each-part) extension can come from holenmeric (whole-in-each-part) extension. The effect is a limited, particularized, and non-divinely simple version of the infinite and general cause.

Crucially, Malebranche ascribes “duration” to God—with some hesitation, admittedly, but only because he does not want his readers to think he is ascribing a limited, successive duration to God (DMR, 132). Because Malebranche says that God contains all realities and no lacks (DMR, 135), he must think of God’s duration as a reality or perfection; it cannot be a lack or negation like atemporality. Malebranche also conjoins “duration” with “existence” (D), confirming duration is a reality. Thus, it is an omnitemporal God who confers a limited and successive version of his temporality to his creatures. Otherwise, we would get something (temporality) from nothing (atemporality). That atemporality is a privation is not merely a play on words (‘*a*-temporal’). For the omnitemporality argued for is such that God is the real infinite temporal container for all events, which is at all times *qua* (holenmeric) container for events. Thus, we get our successive and limited duration from God’s own whole-in-each-part duration.

There might seem to be an important exception to Malebranche’s rule that God causes all realities: a soul’s volitions. Andrew Pessin (2000) argues that God’s refraining from causing our volitions leaves room for genuine freedom of the will; God is thus not responsible for all our modes, of which some are volitions. But Malebranche reveals, in the context of a discussion of the problem of evil, that “what causes us to sin”—presumably one’s evil volition or consent (e.g. to pleasure, see TNG 151)—is only a “lack,” not a reality or “new modification” caused by God; we only “cease using the impulse” toward the good placed in us by God (LO 550-1). And “when we do not sin … we do everything God does in us” (LO 551). Again, our “will … towards indeterminate good, towards God” is “God … carr[ying us] towards himself” (TNG, 169-170). “But it seems to me that there is no more reality in the consent we give to good than in that we give to evil” (LO 551). There is no counterexample to God causing all realities here.[[14]](#footnote-14)

What, then, is the picture? Malebranche says “God is not so much in the world as the world is in Him or in His immensity, just as eternity is not so much in time as time is in eternity” (*DMR*, 132). He also says that “Created extension is to divine immensity what time is to eternity” (ibid.). We should think of created events like one’s first birthday party as being contained in God’s infinite temporal substance (i.e., in his eternity); and created bodies are contained in God’s infinite spatial substance (i.e., in his immensity). Moreover, the doctrine of divine simplicity would have it that God’s temporality or “duration” is his immensity is his mentality. It is fitting, then, that Malebranche also tells us that “He might be said to be the place of [created] minds as space is, in a sense, the place of bodies” (LO 230). The qualification “in a sense” is appropriate since space is God’s substance partially and non-holenmerically considered.

Given Malebranche’s metaphysics of how created beings have their realities, we have an argument that Malebranche was sensitive to God’s relationship to both space and time. God is holenmerically omnispatial and omnitemporal, and infinite time and space are one and the same Divine Substance. God is space and time in the sense that he is the infinite spatial and temporal container for extended objects and events. This is incompatible with God’s atemporality, just as a portion of space in which extended objects reside is not aspatial.

**§3.1 An Objection to Parity**

One might object that there is a salient difference between space and time, and that this difference makes the parity argument inconclusive. Some think that time is bound up with existence in a way that space is not. Time was traditionally conceived to be an order of coming into being and passing away. This motivates the Augustinian view that the past no longer exists and, with that, the doctrine of continuous creation. God must continually recreate the entities in the world; otherwise, as it falls into the past, they would go out of existence. Malebranche endorses the doctrine of continuous creation (DMR 112, 115), which might then be taken as evidence he endorsed the view that the past is oblivion.

Given that Malebranche recognizes this difference between space and time, then there is an objection to God’s being omnitemporal. For holenmerism about time might have implications Malebranche finds objectionable. Supposing that God exists wholly in each time, and that God must continuously create temporal things, this entails God must recreate himself from moment to moment to preserve himself in existence. Worse, given a specific interpretation of the doctrine of continuous creation, this implies that God is mortal. For on that interpretation, everything in time goes out of existence with each passing moment, and it takes special effort to bring those things (including God) back into existence. Time is thus more powerful than God, forcing him to recreate himself along with the rest of the universe. This makes it theologically attractive for Malebranche to say God is outside time and only acts in time, even if God is substantially spatially present.[[15]](#footnote-15)

I make two points in reply. First, Malebranche is clear that God is not *in* time, in the sense of existing successively. For as DMR 132 discussed last section indicates, God is wholly *at* all times (*qua* container of events). If the doctrine of continuous creation applies to entities that pass through time successively, i.e. that are *in* time, then God cannot be threatened by time; rather, he is the infinite temporal container for events, just as he is the spatial container for extended beings. Malebranche is clear that finite creatures, who have successive duration and thus undergo change in time, are the ones threatened by time:

Matter infinitely extended, without motion, and consequently without form and without corruption, would manifest the infinite power of its Author, but it would give no idea of His wisdom. For this reason, all corporeal things are corruptive, and all bodies have some change taking place in them that with time alters and corrupts them. (LO 256)

For Malebranche, it is things that have changing parts that are threatened by time, such as bodies that can break down. But God’s infinite substance has no spatial or temporal parts, only intelligible ones. God, whose duration is whole-at-each time, just as his immensity is whole-at-each-space (DMR 132; see §2.6), does not have the metaphysically distinct parts that are necessary for change. Hence God cannot be threatened by time.

Second, the objection assumes that Malebranche buys into Augustine’s view that time is an order of coming into being and passing away. This should not be taken for granted. Malebranche departs from Augustine on occasion.[[16]](#footnote-16) If we take Malebranche’s claim of parity between God’s immensity and duration seriously (DMR 132), then just as God is the infinite spatial manifold that contains creatures (§2.3), he is the infinite temporal container for all events. He contains past, present, and future events ‘all at once’ in his eternity. Compare:

For God is only in Himself, only in His immensity. If He creates new spaces, He does not thereby acquire a new presence because of these spaces. He does not increase His immensity, He does not make Himself a place. He is eternally and necessarily where these spaces are created, but He does not exist there locally, like these spaces. (DMR 135)

By saying God “does not make Himself a place,” is Malebranche denying that God is spatial? I don’t think so. He clarifies that God doesn’t exist “locally” at the end of this passage, which is compatible with his holenmeric spatiality. And I’ve argued these spaces, indeed all of infinite space, are only God partially and non-holenmerically considered. More importantly at present: given Malebranche’s claim of parity between space and time, and identification of God’s presence with duration, then just as God does not increase his immensity or spatial presence, he does not increase his duration. He cannot ‘fall’ into the past as if it were a realm of nonexistence. For he is still wholly there, as he is already wholly at future times, *qua* holenmeric and unchanging container for all events. This might seem to conflict with Malebranche’s saying that “In a word, God was not, He will not be, but He is” (DMR 132). But he clarifies later in that paragraph (discussed in §2.6), via a comparison with God’s presence, that he is only denying that God exists partly in the past and partly in the future. If God is wholly at past, present, and future times, then time cannot be an order of coming into being and passing away, contra the objection. “A single act of His will is referred to the differences of time contained in His eternity” (DMR 130). Again, Malebranche seems to say all times, not just the present, exist in God’s unchanging eternity. So he seems to reject Augustine’s view: time is not an order of coming into being and passing away, such that only the present exists. That the present exists, and the past is oblivion, cannot then be Malebranche’s motivation for the doctrine of continuous creation; instead his motivation must be that created beings require a source of their being that is not themselves, God’s volitions (DMR 112). The doctrine of continuous creation is compatible with this.

From all eternity God willed, He will continue to will eternally; or, to put it more

precisely, God wills continuously—but without variation, without succession, without

necessity—everything He will do in the course of time (DMR 115).

God “continuously” sustains all beings at their various times and places, with an eternal and unchanging volition that refers to all times. Moreover, since all times exist, and we persist through time, it seems Malebranche thinks we exist partly at each time, not whole-at-each time as God does.

Here is another objection to parity between space and time. Perhaps there’s a reason Malebranche has a lot more to say about God’s extension than God’s eternality. For he says in the *Search* that, in doing metaphysics, we should “rely solely on the distinct, particular ideas of thought and extension, and those ideas contained in them or that can be deduced from them” … “it is better not to meditate at all than to meditate on chimeras” (LO 250). This might indicate that Malebranche doesn’t have a considered view of God’s eternality; perhaps I am taking his metaphysics further than he’d be comfortable with in concluding that God is omnitemporal. However, Malebranche maintains our idea of God’s eternity can be just as clear, if not clearer, than our idea of God’s extension. For Theodore tries to help Aristes understand God’s omnipresence by comparing it with God’s eternity (DMR 132-3). So it can’t be that, on principle, Malebranche isn’t willing to draw conclusions about God’s eternity. I’ve argued he is willing. My argument is based partly on parity of reasoning between space and time, which he seems to allow for even in LO 250. What he’s against is “employ[ing] *only* ideas of logic” in metaphysics (LO 250, my emphasis).

**§3.2 Objection from Eminent Containment**

Arnauld thought it problematic for Malebranche to say creaturely perfections are “in” God. He took Malebranche to be saying that creaturely perfections are formally contained inGod, not just known by him. But it would be blasphemous to say God instantiated creaturely perfections, since these are beneath God (OA 38:246; K, 67). We can adapt this Arnauldian objection and say it is blasphemous to say God is temporal by formally containing the creaturely perfection of temporality. Malebranche’s reply (OC 6: 118) adapted to this context will suffice. He replies by saying that God doesn’tformally contain creaturely perfections after all. Instead they are “eminently present” in him (ibid.). Malebranche is drawing on Descartes’ stipulation that an object eminently contains a property just in case it:

(i) lacks the property in question, and

(ii) contains something that “is such that it can stand in the place of such [a property]”

(AT 7:161; CSM 2:114).

Tad Schmaltz (2000, 63) remarks that Descartes tended to ignore (ii), instead requiring only that the eminently contained property be had by some object that is higher on the ontological “scale of reality” than any object that formally contains the property (ibid.). (ii) was important for Malebranche, however, since he wanted to say God eminently contains creaturely perfections and thereby has something that stands in place ofthe creaturely perfections (ibid). Schmaltz thinks Malebranche’s God eminently contains creaturely perfections in virtue of having ideas that serve as the archetypes for such perfections. That is, he interprets Malebranche as thinking that to say ‘God eminently contains creaturely perfections’ is to say ‘he has these archetypal ideas’. Similarly, Daisie Radner interprets Malebranche to say that for God to “eminently” possess properties is for him to merely possess “something representative of those properties” (1978, 116).

But from our exploration, we saw that these ideas are partial considerations of the Divine Word, and that they represent realities had by God’s divine substance itself (see §2.4). God not only has archetypal ideas of space and duration. His substance is also the infinite spatial and temporal arenas that contain all extended bodies and events. But let us be careful. The infinite spatial arena, as we perceive it, does not exhaust all of God’s nature; it is only God partially considered. For one, God is really holenmerically extended, which we can never fully comprehend or perceive (DMR 133). For another, God’s holenmeric extension is also his holenmeric temporality is all his other perfections. We thus offer an alternative understanding of eminent containment:

EC1: God eminently contains F if and only if he has an archetypal idea of F.

EC2: God eminently contains F if and only if God has an archetypal idea of F, and God is F, though in a holenmeric and divinely simple way, such that F is identical with all God’s perfections.

Schmaltz (2000) and Radner (1978) endorse EC1, while I have argued for EC2. For Radner, EC1 implies that God cannot be “really extended but in such a way as not to preclude him from also being really mental” (ibid., 115). As evidence, she cites Malebranche’s denial that God is one and all things formally, “for that would be a contradiction” (OC 6: 251). Indeed it would be a contradiction for God to formally contain spatiality, which negates mentality, while being formally mental, which negates spatiality. But on EC2, Malebranche’s God is at once fully spatial, fully mental, and fully temporal. For these are the same perfection.

**Conclusion**

How can the atemporal interact with the temporal? It turns out, for Malebranche, this is closely related to asking how the mental can interact with the material. They cannot interact, at least not the finite limited versions, which have “no essential relation to each other except through God” (DMR 134). But they need not interact, for God is the sole cause. To do this, God must possess all realities, though in a way that far surpasses his creatures. Participation is thus a causal relation that confers limited, non-holenmeric and non-divinely simple versions of the realities of the cause (God) onto its effects (his creatures).[[17]](#footnote-17) This includes his “duration” (DMR 132) and “presence” (DMR 135). For God is the holenmeric container for extended and temporal things, and so is wholly at every space and time.

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2. E.g., Schmaltz (2000, 63). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. E.g., Schmaltz (2000, 63, 75) and Radner (1978, 116). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. It is controversial whether the absolute space theorists rejected nullibism by holding to God’s being extended *partes extra partes*, or whether they held to holenmerism. For example, Leech (2013, 187) thinks Clarke believes in God’s non-holenmeric presence, while Reid (2012, 229) thinks Clarke is holenmerian. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. ‘his essence … is participable or imperfectly imitable, for God contains every creaturely perfection, though in a divine and infinite way.’ (LO, 625) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. LO 90; LO 144; DMR 51 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. DMR 137-8 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. DMR 132-3 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. There is an upshot for contemporary defenders of such divine simplicity (e.g. Wolterstoff 1991, Leftow 2006, Brower 2008), who likewise identify God’s perfections with one another and with Him. For since simplicity implies that wherever God’s power is, all of him is there, this would imply his whole-in-each-part omnipresence. If one maintains divine simplicity, the only way to abscond from holenmeric omnipresence, which seems incomprehensible, is to say God’s power is everywhere only in the (diluted?) sense that his effects are everywhere. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. *DMR* 132. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. In this paragraph I follow Reid (2003) closely. I have added to his interpretation with the aid of some quotations from *DMR*. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. C.f., Descartes’ causal principle (CSM 2: 28). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. This includes also his mentality (DMR, 134; see my discussion above regarding Spinoza). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. What of evil itself? Denis Moreau (2001, §2.1) argues that Malebranche absconds from Augustine’s view that physical evil is a privation. If so, then physical evil is a reality, and given my interpretation of Malebranche on causation, that abhorrently implies God is physically evil in a divine and infinite way. Moreau cites OC 8: 770, where Malebranche says “a monster is an imperfect work,” saying the ‘*is*’here implies rejecting imperfection as mere privation (2001, 87). Further, that a monster “disfigures” the world it inhabits (OC 8: 765) indicates that disfigurement is a genuine property (Moreau 2001, 88), and Malebranche says “nothingness has no properties” (OC 12: 32). Moreau suggests Malebranche would say physical evils are “worse than nothingness” (Moreau 2001, 88), but admits in footnote 18 that Malebranche only ever says this about the state sinners find themselves in.

    In reply: To say a monster is an imperfect work or disfigurement might well be a loose way of speaking, just as to say ‘there is a hole or blemish in the wall’ doesn’t commit one to anything more than a local privation of cement or paint. Indeed, Malebranche explicitly says that when we “ordinarily” speak of evil, we mean evil things, which are “but privations of good” (LO 348). In the very next section of his article, Moreau (2001, 88) cites Malebranche again: “There are monsters whose deformity leaps to the eye ... A world made up of creatures who lack nothing that they ought to have is more perfect than a world full of monsters” (OC 8: 770). But this passage seems precisely to clarify that the deformity is a “lack” of something: among other realities, it lacks holenmeric extension, which is extension *par excellence*. Moreover, some privations are obviously “worse” than others. A lack of friendship or physical comfort is worse than a lack of cement. Privations can be said to have properties only derivatively on the way the realities are.

    What Malebranche seems to have a problem with is evil understood not as “things” but as “sensations of … pain,” which he terms “a real and true evil” (LO 348). But he freely admits that God as Christ suffers pain, and that he does so “in honor of the true good” (TNG, 190). As for why there is any pain at all, Malebranche may have recourse to the simplicity of God’s ways (LO 230). He may also point to Adam in his unfallen state, who had “pain” that could “neither enslave him nor make him unhappy”; Adam could even stop such pains once they had “performed their advisory function” (LO 22). This may indicate that what reality may be found in pain God must have in an eminent way that doesn’t make him unhappy, and which isn’t evil. Perhaps, in God, pain consists in “the horrors or distastes” that gives Him, as for us, an appropriate “aversion” to things *qua* falling short of Himself (TNG 151); there Malebranche seems to contrast the sinner’s pleasures and pains with appropriate ones that God replaces them with, which confers on us “the grace of feeling” (ibid.). Alternatively, it may even be that just as holenmeric extension isn’t material unless particularized or *qua* partially conceived, eminent pain isn’t painful in its characteristic way unless particularized and thus limited. Malebranche does, after all, equate particularity with finitude, and being in general or “universal being” with infinite being (LO 251). The point is that there is some combination of moves available to Malebranche that allows God to confer limited or imperfect versions of the perfections he has onto creatures, including pain, while adhering to his causal likeness principle. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Thanks to an anonymous referee for this objection. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. For example, he explicitly rejects Augustine’s view that God is truth and that we see God in virtue of seeing truth. Instead, Malebranche says that truths are *relations* between (God’s) ideas, truths are not God himself, and that we see God in seeing the *ideas* of these eternal truths (LO 233-4). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. By buying into the causal likeness principle, thus requiring that God have all realities including extension, it seems to me Malebranche is at least partly motivated by the mind-body and body-body interaction problems, contra Nadler’s suggestion (2000, 136). For he requires a kind of resemblance between cause and effect, such that the reality of the effect may be found in the (partially conceived) cause: e.g., we can see how part-in-each-part extension can come from whole-in-each-part extension. And unlike creaturely extension which lacks power, Malebranche identifies God’s holenmeric extension with his power, according with simplicity. Now some think Malebranche identifies God with his ideas (e.g. Jolley 1990, Cook 1998: 531, Yang 2005: 35). Together with the causal likeness principle, this seems to imply that Malebranche maintains that ideas, to represent, must resemble (though far exceed) the represented. Nadler (1992, 46), Ott (2017, 203), and Nolan (2022, §7) say Malebranche rejects resemblance-representation. I demur (e.g. DC 54, 88), but that is for another time. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)