After the Fall: Malebranche on the Law of the Body

Colin Chamberlain, University College London

19 Gordon Square
London
WC1H 0AG
colin.chamberlain@ucl.ac.uk

Abstract: Malebranche holds that the Fall changes the mind's relationship to the body from *union* to *dependence*. I argue that this change transforms the mind's normative relationship with its body. The mind *depends* on the body in that the mind feels subjected to the body's authority and obligated to satisfy its needs. In addition to reconstructing Malebranche's phenomenological account of the body's felt authority, I argue that for Malebranche the obligations springing from our bodily nature are genuine.

Key Words: Malebranche, the Fall, Original Sin, embodiment, sensory perception, bodily imperatives, passions

I

Introduction. In the beginning, when God created Adam and Eve, things were simple. God gave them *one* rule to follow, *one* command to obey, and the stakes were clear: Do not eat from the tree of knowledge, on penalty of death. But it was not long before they disobeyed. The bitter realities of human life were their punishments: for Eve, the pains of childbearing and subjugation to Adam's rule; for Adam, the toil of work; for both, shame, exile and death. Cast out from Eden, Adam and Eve missed their chance to eat from that other tree in the garden, the tree of life.

In Nicolas Malebranche's (1638-1715) retelling of the Fall, our punishment plays out in our relationship with our bodies: in a change from mind-body *union* to the mind's *dependence* on the body. 'We are no longer as God made us,' Malebranche writes, 'and the union of our soul with our body has changed to dependence, for since man disobeyed God it was right that his body ceased to be subject to him' (*Dialogues* IV.7, OC.xii.101-2/JS 64).[1] The mind's dependence on the body is supposed to be an obvious fact of human experience; the key to our being fragmented, divided selves; and evidence that Original Sin must have occurred (*Search* V.2, OC.ii.134/LO 342). But it is not so clear what dependence amounts to.

One aspect of the change from union to dependence is that we now have less control over our bodies. Before the Fall, Adam could switch his sensations and feelings off as easily as you or I might flip a light-switch, by stopping the motions in his brain that occasion them. Annoyed by the buzzing sound of a mosquito? Turn it off. Distracted by hunger, thirst, or sexual urges? Turn those off too. Adam's brain was subject to his will in much the same way that we control our hands and feet (*Dialogues* IV.18, OCM XII 102/JS 65). After the Fall, our brains and bodies have become unruly, and we no longer have the power to make ourselves impervious.[2] We are simply more vulnerable to the body's condition than Adam was. This aspect of the mind's dependence

[1] See also *Elucidation* VIII.5-7, OC.iii.72-4/LO 580-1; and *Prémotion*, OC.xvi.123-4. Malebranche uses 'mind' and 'soul' interchangeably.

[2] Moriarty (2006, pp. 147-50) traces St. Augustine's influence on Malebranche's account of the Fall and, specifically, of the idea that the body's disobedience is punishment for Adam's disobedience.

on the body is uncontroversial and widely recognized by commentators.[3] It is not the whole story. The transition from union to dependence also transforms the mind's normative relationship with its body. The mind now *depends* on the body in that the mind feels subjected to the body's authority and obligated to satisfy its needs.

Before and after the Fall, the senses offered the mind much needed guidance about how to care for its body.[4] The smell of baking bread, for example, beckons someone into the kitchen; a burning feeling tells them to separate themselves from the oven when they got too close:

> Through pleasure and pain, through agreeable and disagreeable tastes, and by other sensations, the senses so quickly advise the soul of what ought and ought not to be done for the preservation of life that it cannot be correctly maintained that this order and precision are a consequence of sin. (*Search* I.5, OC.i.76-7/LO 23)

The senses have always told us what we ought and ought not do for the preservation of the body. But the *force* of the 'ought' changes. Before the Fall, Adam experienced the senses' guidance as *advice* or *counsel*. After, we experience their guidance as having the force of *command, law*, or *obligation*. As teachers, we sometimes offer our students advice or counsel: here is what you should do to study for this test. But sometimes we give our students commands: you *must* write this paper yourself. On my reading of Malebranche, the senses switch from offering counsel to giving commands. After the Fall, the senses conspire with the passions to tell the mind what it *must* do when they speak on the body's behalf.

[3] See, for example, Bozovic (1998, pp. 155-8) Moriarty (2003, p. 169; 2006, ch. 2), Greenberg (2010, pp. 200-203) and Watson (n.d.).

[4] See Simmons (2003, 2008).

Malebranche investigates our embodiment in a theological idiom, tying it to Adam's fateful choice in the garden. I hope to show that a philosophically attractive picture of our relationship with our bodies emerges, which captures familiar experiences of the body's demands and psychic division. I begin by arguing that Malebranche offers a compelling phenomenological account of the *experience* of obligations springing from our bodily nature. It is a further question as to whether the body's felt authority is genuine or legitimate. I argue that, for Malebranche, it is.

II

Normative Reversal. In addition to passages where he laments the mind's *loss of control* over its brain, Malebranche frequently describes the change from union to dependence in a different, more normatively loaded way. He describes the mind and body as if they were two people standing in an asymmetrical relationship of authority—related as master and servant, or ruler and subject—which the Fall flips on its head. In this kind of situation, familiar from the garden in which we began, one person has the *authority* or *right* to give commands and the other is *obligated* to obey them. As Malebranche writes:

> When God created the first man, He united his soul to his body but He did not make it dependent. The soul was the master, and the body executed its orders, and asked for its needs respectfully . . . . because of his rebellion, God subjected man to his body, the most vile and impotent of substances. . . God deprives man of the power to command the body as master; and leaves to the body the power of involving man in its needs, and of mistreating him if it refuses them. It is through goodness that God leaves Adam his

> body. It is through justice that this body is in revolt, and that it is often a troublesome master**.** (*Prémotion*, OC.xvi.123-4)

Before the Fall, the mind was in charge, and the body was its dutiful servant. After, the body usurps the mind's rule and demands the mind's obedience. The body is now a 'troublesome master' to which the mind is 'subjected' (*ibid.*). Malebranche emphasises this role reversal by describing the mind as 'subjugated,' 'subordinated,' and even 'enslaved' or 'tyrannized' by the body.[5] 'Original Sin,' he writes, 'makes man the slave of his body' (*Elucidation* VIII, OC.iii.101/LO 596).

The term 'dependent' is still used in a similar, normatively loaded way when we refer to someone's children as their dependents. This meaning would have been salient to Malebranche's readers. The first edition of the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie Francaise*, published in 1694, highlights the connection between dependence and authority: '*To Depend:* to be under the authority, under the domination of someone. Subjects depend on kings, children on their fathers, servants depend on their masters, soldiers depend on their officers.' The *normative reversal* passages indicate that Malebranche has this meaning of *dependence* in mind.

The *normative reversal* passages should be taken *seriously* but not too literally. The human body, in Malebranche's framework, is not sufficiently person-like to *literally* stand in the kinds of interpersonal relationships he describes. The human body is a machine, not a person. The body cannot literally issue or follow orders because it cannot understand them, any more than an alarm clock can command someone to get out of bed, or a television can obey a remote control.

[5] See, for example, *Search* I.17, OC.i.173/LO 77; *Search* V.1, OC.ii.130/LO 339; *Search* V.2, OC.ii.133/LO 341; and *Elucidation* X, OC.iii.141/LO 620.

The need to offer a metaphorical reading of the *normative reversal* passages, along with a principle of interpretive parsimony not to multiply attributed claims beyond necessity, might suggest that these passages simply restate the uncontroversial loss of control. But such a reading does not sufficiently capture the normative character of these passages. Instead, I would like to suggest that the *normative reversal* passages express Malebranche's view that the mind's dependence alters normative dynamics that play out *within* the mind and between its various faculties. In addition to the loss of control, the mind's dependence entails that the senses and passions conspire to *rule* or *dominate* the mind on the body's behalf.

There are two main reasons for interpreting the *normative reversal* passages as expressing the reconfiguration of the mind's faculties and, specifically, the elevation of the senses and passions within the mind's economy. First, the senses and passions are the body's representatives within the mind. As Malebranche emphasizes, these faculties 'speak for' the body. Whatever way the body rules or dominates the mind will be through the mediation of these faculties. Second, Malebranche himself glosses the mind's changed relationship to the body in terms of sensory and passionate tyranny:

> after Adam had sinned, the pleasures that had served only to advise him respectfully, and the pains that, without disturbing his felicity served only to inform him that he might lose it and become unhappy, no longer had the same significance for him; they no longer obeyed his orders, and they enslaved him, as they do us, to sensible things. Thus, not the senses and passions themselves were generated by sin, but rather only their power of tyrannizing sinners… (*Search* I.5, OC.i.75/LO 22)

Where once the senses *respectfully advised* the mind about the body's needs, now the senses *enslave* and *tyrannize* it. Malebranche similarly contrasts Adam's absolute mastery over his passions with our present condition of subjugation:

> We know that before his sin man was not the slave but the absolute master of his passions . . . . At the present time nature is undoubtedly corrupted—the body acts too forcefully on the mind. Instead of respectfully representing its needs to the mind, the body tyrannizes it and tears it away from God. (*Search* V.1, OC.ii.130/LO 339)

Where once Adam was the 'absolute master' of his passions, the tables have turned and now we are their slaves.

To understand the mind's dependence on the body, we need to explain what this transition amounts to. We need to explain how the senses and passions' prelapsarian advice differs from their postlapsarian tyranny. To set the stage for my own account, I will briefly consider two alternative explanations that do not work. First, someone might think that the difference is merely one of phenomenological volume or intensity. Malebranche's claim that, in our current state, 'the body acts too forcefully on the mind' might suggest that the senses and passions are simply *noisier* or *more intense* after the Fall. But this does not adequately capture the difference between respectful advice and tyranny. Advice can be shouted ('Don't forget your keys!'); commands can be whispered ('Don't you *dare* do that again'). Second, someone might argue that the difference is that the senses and passions are simply more insistent after the Fall, again because of the mind's *loss of control*. Before the Fall, Adam could swich his sensations off after they had delivered their message. When Adam bit into a piece of nutritious fruit, he would have experienced a sensation of sweetness telling him *to eat the fruit*. Message received, he could turn this sensation off and decide how to proceed without being distracted by the intoxicating

sweetness. When we bite into a piece of fruit, we too experience a sensation of sweetness telling us *to eat the fruit*. But in our case the sensation is relentless: *eat the fruit, eat the fruit, eat the fruit, eat the fruit*… The tyranny of the senses and passions, on this proposal, is their inescapability.[6] While this is in the right ballpark, it does not exhaust Malebranche's account of the difference either.

Neither proposal adequately captures Malebranche's view that we presently experience our body—or, better, its sensory and passionate representatives—as speaking with the force of law. Malebranche points to this law-like character when, following St. Paul, he describes the experience of our Fallen state in terms of a *law* felt in our bodies, which conflicts with the law of the mind or reason. Malebranche exhorts his readers to 'reflect on the combat you feel in yourself, of you against you, of the law of the mind against the law of your body; of you according to the interior man, against you according to the exterior and sensible man' (*Christian Conversations* V, OC.iv.111). Similarly, he writes that 'Original Sin, or the disorder of nature, therefore has no need of proof: for each of us is sufficiently aware of a law in himself that captures and disorders him' (*Elucidation* VIII.3, OC.iii.72/LO 580). The body's dictates have the feel of a *law* for us. The tyranny of the senses and passions consists in the fact that their guidance about what we ought to do and ought not to do for the preservation of life acquires the *feel* of commandment or obligation. Neither intensity nor insistence do justice to this this law-like character. The mere repetition of advice, no matter how incessantly, does not turn it into a command any more than shouting it does.

We can make progress explaining the law-like feel of the senses and passions by looking at what Malebranche says about the paradigmatic case of a mental state with a law-like character: clear and distinct perception. Clear and distinct perceptions, according to Malebranche, *actually* have

[6] I am grateful to John Callanan for pressing this option.

the force of law within the mind: they *demand* assent. The senses and passions *feel* like they have the force of law because of their *resemblance* to clear and distinct perceptions: because they have a similar psychological shape.

III

Clear and Distinct Perception. Malebranche develops his account of clear and distinct perception in response to Descartes. For Descartes, judgment—the act of taking something to be true—requires the joint exercise of understanding and will (*M4*, AT VII 56/CSM II 39).[7] A judgment is a perception (understanding) with assent (will). The perception provides the subject matter or content for the judgment: that *1+1=2*, for example, or that *there is a coffee mug in front of me*. The will then decides whether to accept the perception as true (or not). Perceptions can be sensory, imaginative, or intellectual.

Some perceptions are more persuasive than others. Some perceptions elicit a stronger inclination to assent. Seeing a coffee mug with your own eyes and feeling its heft in your hand provides more convincing evidence that a coffee mug is in front of you than idly imagining a mug. Clarity is the feature of perceptions that makes them persuasive by making their content seem *more plausible* or *more true-seeming*.[8] The clearer a perception, the more persuasive it is. The clearer a perception, the more vivid the appearance of truth. A sensory perception like the feeling of pain in the foot may be very clear and, hence, persuasive (*Principles* I.46, AT VIIIA 22/CSM I 208). But this appearance is not so convincing as to be irresistible. We can doubt the truth of this

[7] See also AT VII 34/CSM II 26; AT VII 56/CSM II 39; and AT VIIIA 18/CSM I 204.

[8] My discussion of Cartesian clarity is indebted to Paul (2018, 2020, 2024).

feeling and withhold our assent by reflecting on phantom limbs (*M6*, AT VII 77/CSM II 53). Clarity and distinctness is the highest degree of clarity, at which point a perception becomes wholly or maximally persuasive and the appearance of truth is overwhelming. A clear and distinct perception *compels* or *demands* the will's assent.

Descartes scholars disagree about whether the *maximal persuasion/compulsion* of clear and distinct perceptions is *psychological*, *normative*, or *both*.[9] According to a *psychological reading*, a clear and distinct perception *causes* or *forces* the will's assent, acting as an efficient or mechanical cause.[10] According to a *normative reading*, a clear and distinct perception *obligates* the will's assent, such that it would be a mistake or failure to doubt the perception's truth.[11] According to *hybrid readings*, the pressure clear and distinct perceptions exert is simultaneously *normative* and *psychological*, although commentators disagree about which is prior: I must because I can do no other, or I can do no other because I must.[12] Malebranche formulates his own views about judgment and clear and distinct perception in this conceptual space.

[9] I adapt this taxonomy from Paul (2024).

[10] See Larmore (1984) and Bennett (1990).

[11] See Radner (1982) and Alanen (2003, pp. 242-6).

[12] Scott (2008), and Newman (2019) argue that the psychological force of clear and distinct perceptions is prior to their normative force, whereas Paul (2024) takes their normative force to be fundamental. According to Paul's (2024) reading, clear and distinct perception does *not* cause assent; rather, clear and distinct perception provides the will with such a powerful, overwhelming reason to assent that the will—because of its rational nature—*inevitably causes itself* to assent. See also Schmaltz (2007, pp. 198-9).

Malebranche accepts the Cartesian picture of judgment as requiring the joint exercise of understanding and will. But where Descartes refers to the will's *assent*, Malebranche refers to the will's *consent* instead (*Search* I.2.2, OC.i.51-2/LO 8). This difference is largely terminological. By comparison to Descartes, however, Malebranche more explicitly holds that clear and distinct (=wholly clear, evident) perceptions exert *normative* pressure on the will. As Malebranche writes, 'complete consent should be given only to things that appear altogether clear, and from which we cannot withhold consent without realizing with complete certainty that we should *misuse our freedom* in not granting it' (*Search* I.20.2, OC.i.187-8/LO 86, emphasis added).[13] Clear and distinct perceptions (i) *obligate* the will's consent, (ii) without *causing* or *forcing* its consent, while at the same time (iii) *paving the way* for consent by making this act easy to perform.

Malebranche also offers a richer account of the psychological mechanisms by which clear and distinct perceptions move the will. These mechanisms do not force the will's consent. They make consent much (much) easier. They help the will to fulfil its obligations without taking away its freedom to do so (or not). In this vein, Malebranche introduces the *reproaches of reason*: '*we should never give complete consent except to propositions which seem so evidently true that we cannot refuse it of them without feeling an inward pain and the secret reproaches of reason;* that is, unless we clearly knew that ill use would be made of our freedom if consent were not willed' (*Search* I.2.4, OC.i.55/LO 10,

[13] See also *Search* I.2.2, OC.i.53/LO 9; *Search* I.2.5, OC.i.56/LO 11; *Search* VI-I.1, OC.ii.246-7/LO 409; and *Elucidation* VI, OC.iii.60/LO 572. Lennon (1980; 2001) rightly emphasizes that clear and distinct perceptions, for Malebranche, have normative/obligatory force. But I agree with Scott (2008; 2009) that Lennon goes too far by insisting that clear and distinct perceptions have purely normative force: that they are all rational *ought* and no *psychological oomph*. *Pace* Scott, however, the psychological oomph of clear and distinct perceptions need not make them (psychologically) irresistible.

emphasis original).[14] If someone clearly and distinctly perceives that *1+1=2*, their will is moved to consent on two fronts. On the one side, there is a *pull*. This perception *entices* the will by making its content—that *1+1=2*—seem obvious, evident, or true. In addition to the pull of clarity, Malebranche adds a *push*. The clear and distinct perception is simultaneously *enforced* by the reproaches of reason that make withholding consent painful.[15] Withholding consent feels wrong. Malebranche suggests *both* factors are needed to obligate the will: pull and push, carrot and stick.

Why does Malebranche complicate the clean picture he inherits from Descartes by adding the reproaches of reason? My proposal is that Malebranche thinks that an obligation must have *teeth* to be an obligation. Suppose, for example, that you could have a clear and distinct perception that *1+1=2 without* the reproaches of reason. In this scenario, it would seem totally obvious to you that *1+1=2*. But who cares? What is that to you? You could take it or leave it. The obviousness of this fact does not yet *obligate* you to consent. Sanctions—in the form of the reproaches of reason—are required to transform the *obviousness* of clear and distinct perceptions into *obligations* to consent.

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[14] See also *Search* I.2.5, OC.i.57/LO 11; *Search* I.3, OC.i.60/LO 13; *Search* V.3, OCM II 156/LO 356; *Elucidation* I, OCM III 19/LO 548; *Christian Conversations* III, OCM IV 80; *Christian Conversations* III, OCM IV 84; *Treatise on Morality* I.6.2, OC.xi.71/W 83; and *Dialogues* III.4, JS 33/OC.xii.64-5.

[15] Though Malebranche emphasizes the painful edge of the reproaches of reason, he suggests that the mind also experiences rational delight when it uses its will correctly and is in its proper state (*Search* V.3, OCM II 156/LO 356). Thus, reason metes out punishments *and* rewards. Malebranche likely emphasizes the pains of reason over the pleasures because we often fail to meet our rational obligations. I am grateful to Susan James for pressing me on this point.

Here it is useful to consider three broad approaches to what makes a *directive* or *instruction* (for example, consent to this clear and distinct perception!) a *law*, *obligation*, or *command*:

1. *Power*: because the directive is enforced by sanctions so that violations are punished (for example, by a bully).
2. *Authority*: because the directive is issued by an appropriate or genuine authority (for example, by a boss or parent).
3. *Hybrid*: because the directive is (a) issued by an appropriate or genuine authority, *and* (b) enforced by sanctions (for example, by a strict parent, one who *lays down the law*).

To briefly return to the garden where we began, each model gives a different explanation of why the original commandment—do not eat from the tree of knowledge—was a *law* or *obligation* for Adam and Eve. On the first option, it is because of the penalty God establishes for violating this commandment, death. On the second, it is because this commandment was issued by the ultimate authority, God. On the third option, it is both. The original commandment is a *law* or *obligation* for Adam and Eve because it is issued by the ultimate authority who backs it up with sanctions.

Commentators—like Lennon (1980; 2000), Watson (n.d.), and Schmaltz (2024)—have tended to assume that Malebranche accepts an *authority view* of obligation, according to which clear and distinct perceptions derive their obligatory character wholly because of their source in the authority of Reason. It is easy to get this impression because of how vehemently Malebranche rejects *power views*, which he associates with the work of Thomas Hobbes, as well as Malebranche's emphasis on God's understanding or wisdom. I would like to suggest, however, that Malebranche accepts a *hybrid view* of obligation that builds the enforcement mechanisms into

the fabric of our own minds. Clear and distinct perceptions *obligate* the will to consent *partly* because of (a) their source in Reason, and *partly* because (b) their violation is punished by the reproaches of reason. This reading offers the best explanation for why Malebranche introduces the reproaches of reason into his picture. Specifically, it offers a better explanation than the view—put forward by Watson (n.d.)—that the reproaches of reason play a primarily evidentiary role by helping us to distinguish genuine clear and distinct perceptions from counterfeit ones. As we shall see below, Watson's explanation does not work because the reproaches of reasons do not help draw this distinction.

Further evidence that Malebranche accepts a *hybrid view* of obligation emerges in his discussion of Order. Order is the hierarchy of perfections, in which every being has its rank and position, grounded in Divine Ideas or Reason. A man is more perfect than a horse, for example, and a horse is more perfect than a stone. In *Elucidation X*, Malebranche argues that Order does not on its own have 'the force of law.' A horse's greater degree of perfection implies that a horse is more loveable, more worthy of esteem, than the stone. But this relation of perfection does not itself *obligate* minds to love the horse more. As Malebranche puts it, 'order seems to be more of a speculative truth than a necessary law' (*Elucidation* X, OC.iii.138/LO 618-9). Obligation only enters the scene when God *wills* Order. Order acquires the force of law *for God* because He necessarily loves Himself and, in so doing, has more love for things that are more like Him, as 'He cannot contradict himself' (*ibid.*). Order acquires the force of law *for human minds* because God '*wills* that our will conform with His . . . His law, the immutable order of His perfection, is therefore also *ours*' (*Elucidation* X, OC.iii.139/LO 619).[16]

[16] Schmaltz's reading of this passage shifts from Schmaltz (2013, pp. 110-1) to Schmaltz (2024, p. 599). In the earlier text, Schmaltz appears to give God's will a role in *constituting* the normative force of Order, whereas in the later texts he suggests that 'moral truth *has* the force of law in

In *Elucidation X*, Malebranche does not elaborate on what is involved in God's willing that His law is also ours, which might give the impression that this willing is simply the bare decree: 'Do as I do.'[17] In the *Treatise on Morality*, however, Malebranche indicates that the institution of this law requires more than just the bare decree. Order only has the force of law for us when it is enforced by sanctions: when violation is punished and obedience is rewarded. Thus, when God wills *that* Order has the force of law for us—when He wills that His law is also ours—He wills that these sanctions be established. God sets things up so that we feel pleasure when we follow Order, pain when we abandon it, and these feelings are part of what makes Order a law for us rather than just a 'speculative truth.' As Malebranche writes:

> For Order, taken speculatively and only insofar as it contains the relations of perfection, enlightens the mind without striking it. But *Order, when considered as the law of God, as the law of all minds, considered precisely insofar as it has the force of law* (for God loves and invincibly wills that we love Order . . .); *Order, I say, as principle and as necessary rule of all movements of the soul touches, penetrates and convinces the mind without illuminating it*. Thus we see order by clear idea, but we know it also by sentiment [*sentiment*]. Since God loves Order and constantly impresses on us a love or movement similar to His own, *it is necessary that we be instructed*

virtue of relations of perfection revealed by reason alone,' that is, independently of God's will (2024, p. 599).

[17] To be clear, God does not institute *Order*—the hierarchy of perfections—via a bare decree. God's ideas wholly determine facts about what is more perfect than what. Rather, the issue is about what, in addition to these immutable facts, is required to imbue them with the force of law.

[nous soions instruits] by the short and certain means of sentiment when we follow or abandon the immutable Order. (*Treatise on Morality* I.5.19, OCM XI 68/W 80-81, emphasis added)[18]

Malebranche's claim that 'it is necessary that we be *instructed* by the short and certain means of sentiment when we follow or abandon the immutable Order' spells out the sense in which we must know Order by sentiment if it is to have the force of law for us; namely, Order must be able to teach us a lesson.

To sum up: Malebranche accepts a *hybrid view* about obligatoriness, or the force of law, which he applies to clear and distinct perceptions. Clear and distinct perceptions *obligate* the will to consent *partly* (a) because they issue from an authoritative source (Reason), and *partly* (b) because violation is punished by inward pain and the reproaches of reason. This account of clear and distinct perceptions provides a template for interpreting Malebranche's view that we experience the body's dictates as having a law-like character.

IV

Passions and the Law of the Body. After the Fall, sensory perceptions *feel* like they have the force of law or obligation because they exhibit a similar psychological architecture as clear and distinct perceptions, which really *do* have the force of law. Sensory perceptions *feel* like they obligate the mind in a similar way as clear and distinct perceptions, because they too are accompanied and enforced by inner sanctions.

[18] See also *Dialogues* IV.15, OC.xii.99/JS 62.

When someone bites into a piece of fruit—a peach, say—their senses tell them *to eat the fruit*. Following this directive requires consent. As in the case of clear and distinct perceptions, their will is moved to consent on two fronts. On the one side, there is the *pull* of plausibility or clarity. This sensory perception makes eating the fruit seem like a good idea or the thing to do. But there is also a push. This perception *demands* consent because it is accompanied by painful and pleasurable feelings that punish the mind if it refuses consent and rewards the mind for going along with it.

Malebranche traces these feelings to the passions. When someone bites into the fruit, their perception of the sweet taste unleashes joy in the possession of this good and desire for more of it. These passions—joy and desire—unleash a pressure campaign to convince the mind to follow the senses' advice to eat the fruit: Just do it! Where's the harm? It tastes so good! You deserve a little treat… The passions, for Malebranche, are complex psychophysiological states that include: the will's movement or attraction towards the perceived good, inclinations to interact with this good (namely, by eating it), bodily preparation to act on these inclinations, as well various feelings and associations that support and justify the original assessment of the fruit as good to eat.[19] Crucially, the passions *culminate* in pleasurable and painful feelings, of delight and distress, that *reward* the mind when it goes along with the passions and *punish* it otherwise:

> when we follow the impulses of our passions . . . the soul through the laws of nature receives this sentiment of delight and inner satisfaction [*sentiment de douceur et de satisfaction intérieure*] because the body is in the state in which it belongs. On the other hand, when the soul following the rule of reason arrests the flow of spirits and resists the passions, it

[19] See Chamberlain (2025).

> suffers a penalty [*souffre de la peine*] in proportion to the harm that may thereby happen to the body. (*Search* V.3, OC.ii.156/LO 355)

When we 'follow' the impulses of our passions and consent in the ways they suggest, we experience a 'sentiment of delight and inner satisfaction.' In contrast, when the mind 'resists the passions, it suffers a penalty' (*ibid.*). He reiterates these points in the *Treatise on Morality*:

> The passions are always accompanied by a certain feeling of sweetness [*sentiment de douceur*] which corrupts their judge and keeps him happy if he favours them; but the passions treat him cruelly if he condemns them to death. What gift could be offered more agreeable or charming than pleasure, to creatures who invincibly will to be happy= . . . ? And what treatment is more rude than that which the passions give to the mind, when it wants to sacrifice them to the love of Order? (*Treatise on Morality* I.13.9, OCM XI 150/W 138)

As a result of these culminating feelings, the passions make it feel good or sweet to follow the senses' advice—to eat the fruit—and painfully bitter to reject it.[20] It feels *right* to act on the senses; it feels *wrong* to resist. Or so our passions would have us believe.

[20] Malebranche sometimes gives the impression that the passions *always* culminate with feelings of delight, so that even negative emotions like sadness or rage are pleasant (*Search* V.3, OC.ii.145/LO 349). But *every* type of passion can feel good or bad, pleasant or painful, depending on whether we go along with the passions or resist. The passions *usually* feel good because we usually allow ourselves to be swept away.

Malebranche's analysis implies that our passionate experience will often be bittersweet. The pleasant taste of a peach unleashes the passions of joy and desire. But these passions will inflict pain on me so long as I resist them, with the result that my overall experience will be a mixture of first-order pleasure and higher-order pain: pleasure in the fruit, frustration with myself for depriving myself of more pleasure. By contrast, the unpleasant taste of a rotten piece of fruit will unleash sadness and hatred in me, from which passions I can nevertheless extract some pleasure—the smug satisfaction of acting well—if I behave in the way they suggest by spitting out the mouthful of half-chewed fruit.

These passionate feelings of delight and distress are importantly *like* the reproaches of reason. Both kinds of feelings *assess* the will's responses to perceptions (its act of consent, rejection, and suspense) but according to different standards of assessment. The passionate feelings encourage the will to consent to sensory perceptions that serve the body's interests, whereas the reproaches of reason urge the mind towards truth and virtue. If I act as the senses suggest—by eating the fruit, for example—joy and desire will reward me with pleasure for a job well done, while the reproaches of reason punish me for failing to do my duty. These conflicting feelings do not cancel out; they divide us. Moreover, the passionate feelings are often *indistinguishable* from the reproaches of reason, for these two sets of feelings are 'of the same nature.' As Malebranche writes:

> But we must note that the sin which introduced concupiscence often makes it difficult to discern Order by means of sentiment or instinct: because the secret inspirations of the passions are of the same nature as this interior sentiment. Thus, when we act against opinion and custom, we often feel inner reproaches that are similar enough to those of Reason and Order. Before sin the sentiment of interior reproach was not an equivocal sign: because there was only this sentiment that spoke to us as our master [*en maître*]. But

> since the sin the secret inspirations of the passions are not subject to our wills. Thus it is easy to confuse them with the inspirations of interior Truth . . .. (*Treatise on Morality* I.5.20, OCM XI 68/W 81)

Both the 'secret inspirations of the passions' and the 'inspirations of interior Truth' speak to us 'as our master' through reward and punishment, praise and blame, and we struggle to discern their voices. The better angel of our nature has a passionate devil as its identical twin.

An important aspect of the mind's postlapsarian *dependence* on the body is the way the body's representatives—the senses and passions—rule over and dominate the mind. The secret inspirations of the passions are the basis of their rule. The pleasurable and painful feelings that the passions use to *assess* the will's acts of consent transform the senses from respectful advisors into tyrants. These feelings make the senses *feel* like they have the same obligatory force as clear and distinct perceptions. When we feel drawn to eat a piece of fruit, our desire for the fruit makes eating feel obligatory, because desire *punishes* us if we don't and *rewards us* if we do. These passionate rewards and punishments make the senses *feel* like they have the authority to tell us what we must do.

Someone might object that *even if* the senses and passions interact in the ways I've suggested, this mode of interaction is not plausibly a punishment of the Fall. Malebranche argues that Adam *before* the Fall had passions just like ours, and, indeed, that the passions are a 'gift' (*Search* V.1, OCM II 130/LO 339). But if the passions predate the Fall, presumably the secret inspirations of the passions did too: so, they are not plausibly what allow the senses and passions to *tyrannize* the mind.

In a way, that's right. But the passionate feelings that enforce sensory perceptions would have had a very different significance before the Fall than they do for us because of the lost ability to switch our sensations off. Sanctions that can be so easily removed are not properly sanctions at all. The *uncontroversial* aspect of the mind's dependence on the body—the lost ability—does play a role. The senses' power to command the mind consists not merely in the body's passionate reproaches *but also in the inescapability of these reproaches.* Sanctions too easily sidestepped are not really sanctions all. They cannot play any role in binding the will. Before the Fall, Adam could release himself from the body's reproaches, effectively neutralizing its ability to command him. This is the kernel of truth in the proposal that the tyranny of the senses consists in their *inescapability*. But their tyranny does not simply consist in the fact that the senses' advice is insistent and inescapable (*eat the fruit, eat the fruit, eat the fruit, eat the fruit*….). Even more important is that we cannot escape the consequences: *eat the fruit, or else*. The rewards and punishments that *enforce* the senses' advice are inescapable too.

V

Malebranche's Divided Mind. We experience ourselves as having two masters: Reason and the body. These different masters institute competing systems of reward and punishment within our minds, oriented towards radically different ends. Each of them assesses the mind's activity—its acts of consent—but according to different and often incompatible standards. The reproaches of reason push us to follow the rules of Order and Truth, while the reproaches of the passions push us to follow the body's rules (and more broadly custom and opinion). We cannot keep both happy. Pleasing one leads to punishment by the other. This experience of being *torn* is punishment for Original Sin:

> Sometimes I take pleasure in God's law according to the interior man, but I sense in my body another law that fights against the law of my mind. I suffer in the exercise of virtue: I taste pleasure in the enjoyment of sensible goods, despite all my resistance. And I am so much a slave to my body that I cannot even apply myself without pain and disgust to abstract things and which have no relation to the body. (*Christian Conversations* IV, OCM IV 88)

Or consider, again, Malebranche's exhortation to 'reflect on the combat you feel in yourself, of you against you, of the law of the mind against the law of your body' (*Christian Conversations* V, OC.iv.111). The feeling of constant failure—of failing to satisfy both our masters—is our peculiar and inescapable fate.

The change from union to dependence is a change from simplicity—from the experience of having a *single* master or rule—to the ambivalent experience of having *two*. 'Before sin,' Malebranche writes, 'the sentiment of interior reproach was not an equivocal sign: because there was only this sentiment that spoke to us as our master' (*Treatise on Morality* I.5.20, OCM XI 68/W 81). Since the sin, interior sentiment has become equivocal. The reproaches of reason compete with the secret inspirations of the passions. Sometimes Malebranche identifies the 'reproaches of reason' with the 'remorse of our conscience' (*Search* I.2.5, OC.i.57/LO 11). In our Fallen condition, then, we might say that our conscience no longer speaks with a unitary voice. Or, rather, we have two consciences, one moral, the other animal, which give conflicting directions.

But how bad is this, really? Someone *might* argue that the conflict between these two sets of obligations is only apparent, since only one of these masters—Reason—is legitimate. The body's demands might *feel* like obligations, but they aren't *really*, because the body lacks the requisite authority or standing to tell the mind what to do so. So, we might *feel* like we are constantly

failing, but we aren't really. How much does this help? The *feeling* of being obligated by the body—and, hence, of being torn—does not go away. The feeling of failure is inescapable, even if it is illusory. We would be like astronomers who know how big the moon is but still see it as a small circle in the sky.

The body's obligations might seem to be *merely* apparent because the body (presumably) lacks the *authority* to command the mind. Recall Malebranche's *hybrid view* of obligation: a directive has obligatory force iff it is (a) issued by an appropriate or genuine authority, and (b) enforced by sanctions. The body's directives—namely, sensory perceptions—satisfy the enforcement condition, but (presumably) not the authority condition.

Order—the eternal and immutable hierarchy of beings—fixes the relations of authority between things. The more perfect a thing is, the more authority it has over the things beneath it. The less perfect a thing is, the more it should serve its betters. The body, then, would seem to *lack* any authority over the mind because of its inferior position in the great chain of being. As Malebranche writes, 'it is an immutable law that inferior things serve superior ones' (*Search* VI-II.3, OC.ii.310/LO 446-7); and, 'bodies are inferior to the mind [*les corps sont beaucoup au dessous de l'esprit*]' (*Search* V.5, OC.ii.167/LO 363). So, we seem to get the conclusion that it is an immutable law that bodies should serve the mind and not vice versa. The body lacks the *rank* to tell the mind what it must do, even with the help of the senses and passions. If that is correct, then the body only pretends to be our master. The body *feigns* authority.

Not so fast. Original Sin changes the mind's degree of perfection and, hence, its rank in the hierarchy of beings. A mind without sin is more perfect than bodies. But a mind having sinned is worse than nothingness and, hence, less perfect than bodies. Thus, if 'it is an immutable law that inferior things serve superior ones,' and the mind is now inferior to the body, then it follows that

the mind should *now* serve the body. Hence, the body satisfies both conditions—enforcement and authority—required to obligate the human mind. The mind's situation is like Eve's. Eve's punishment includes *subjugation* to Adam's authority: being placed under a new and onerous obligation to obey. Built into the original story is the idea that subjugation to another's authority, perhaps arbitrarily, is a form of punishment. The less worthy the master, the more degrading the punishment.

This argument's lynchpin is the premise that a sinful mind is less perfect than the body. Malebranche commits himself to this claim in *Elucidation X*:

> in the wisdom of God, minds are more perfect than bodies; and as a result of the necessary love that God has for Himself, He prefers the more perfect to the less perfect. Thus, minds could not have been subordinated to bodies *as nature was first instituted*. . . . It is true that the created mind is *now* subordinated to the body, but this is because order considered as a necessary law would have it so. This is because God, whose self-love is a necessary love and is always His inviolable law, cannot love minds that are opposed to Him; consequently, He cannot prefer them to bodies in which there is nothing that is evil or that He hates. (*Elucidation* X, OC.iii.141/LO 620, emphasis added)[21]

God prefers the more perfect to the less perfect. He prefers bodies more to sinful minds that 'are opposed to him.' Therefore, bodies are more perfect than minds with sin. Therefore, the obligations the body imposes on the Fall mind are real and not merely apparent.[22]

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[21] See also *Elucidation* VIII, OC.iii.99/LO 595 and *Christian Conversations* II, OCM IV 52.

[22] *Objection*: even if the body has the authority/legitimacy to command the mind, why would this empower the senses and passions to tell the mind what to do? After all, these are *mental* faculties.

Our punishment for Original Sin is not just *feeling* torn. It's not just *feeling* like we cannot please both our masters. Our punishment is *being* torn. It's *being* subject to two masters—Reason and the body—that we cannot satisfy simultaneously. Failure is our punishment: failure to live up to all our obligations, failure to do everything we are supposed to do. Malebranche holds that Original Sin 'needs no proof' because each of us is aware of the body's law within ourselves. To decide this question, each of us must turn inwards, to decide whether we feel the body's law, and whether it is real. [23]

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Reply: the senses and passions are the body's *representatives*: They speak for and on behalf of the body. They *speak with* the body's authority, much as an ambassador can speak on a king's behalf and with his authority. Thanks to Selim Berker and Ariel Melamedoff for pressing this objection.

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