

Malebranche's Neoplatonic Semantic Theory¹

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Abstract

This paper argues that Malebranche's semantics sheds light on his metaphysics and epistemology, and is of interest in its own right. By recasting issues linguistically, it shows that Malebranche assumes a Neoplatonic semantic structure within Descartes' dualism and Augustine's theory of illumination, and employs linguistic devices from the Neoplatonic tradition. Viewed semantically, mental states of illumination stand to God and his ideas as predicates stand in Neoplatonic semantics to ideas ordered by a privative relation on "being." The framework sheds light on interpretive puzzles in Malebranche studies such as the way ideas reside in God's mind, the notion of resemblance by which bodies imitate their exemplar causes, and the issue of direct vs. indirect perception through a mechanism by which agents can see bodies by "seeing" ideas. Malebranche's semantics is of interest in its own right because it gives a full (if implausible) account of the mediating relations that determine indirect reference; lays out a correspondence theory of truth for necessary judgments; defines contingent truth as based on an indirect reference relation that is both descriptive and causal but that does not appeal to body-mind causation; and within his theory of perception, works out an account of singular reference in which singular terms carry existential import, refer indirectly via causal relations, but describe their referents only in a general way.

Keywords

Malebranche – semantics – Neoplatonism – occasionalism – sensation – necessity – gradable adjectives

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Introduction: A Linguistic Turn

Malebranche's dispute with Arnauld over ideas is usually understood to be about metaphysics and epistemology.² Though both accept Descartes' view that knowledge is of clear and distinct ideas, they disagree about what ideas are. Like Descartes, Arnauld holds that they are modes of the soul, and that when they affect us, we have direct knowledge of the external world. Malebranche, on the other hand, holds that ideas are in God's mind, that it is ideas that we directly understand, and that we only understand the material world through them.

Though there is much agreement on the interpretation of Malebranche's metaphysics and epistemology, there are still points of contention. What is the ontological status of ideas in God's mind, especially that of extension that affects material bodies? Is Malebranche committed to indirect perception of the external world, as Arnauld maintains? If humans know only ideas and material substances cannot affect the soul, how can there be knowledge of contingent truths? Is there knowledge of material individuals? In this paper I hope to shed light on some of these issues by approaching them not through metaphysics or epistemology, but through Malebranche's logic broadly understood.

Cartesians are not known for their contribution to logic, and Malebranche is no exception. He expresses no views on *consequentiae* or the syllogistic—the formal logic of his time. Indeed, he sometimes disparages logic.³ But a large part of medieval logic is what we would call today semantics, the theory of meaning and reference, and about this Arnauld and Malebranche have a good deal to say. In *Logic, or The Art of Thinking* (which he wrote with Nicole) and *On True and False Ideas*, Arnauld essentially reconstructs on Cartesian lines the medieval theory of mental language.

In *The Search After Truth* Malebranche too develops a theory of mental language, which incorporates elements from medieval semantics, Descartes, and St. Augustine. Indeed, the debate between Arnauld and Malebranche on the nature of ideas can be seen as one about mental language.

Malebranche distinguishes between a mental act and an idea. An idea, he holds, is in God's mind and is distinct from the perceiver's mental act—mode of the soul—which is caused by God and consists of our *understanding* the idea. Malebranche agrees that an idea has a referent—that it “represents” in his

2 For an overview of Malebranche's metaphysics and epistemology see Nadler 1992 and Pyle 2003.

3 *Search after Truth* (hereafter *Search*), R-L, G 1:458, LO 242; 1:452, LO 250; 2:259, LO 437.

terminology—and that it possesses objective being, but the mechanism of reference, he holds, is Platonic. An idea, which is an exemplar cause, represents all those material substances that resemble it. Accordingly, Malebranche defends a version of what Putnam calls indirect intensional semantics.⁴ But unlike theories like those of Frege that leave the nature of the intermediary entity and the mechanism of reference unexplained, Malebranche details their nature by appeal to Augustinian Platonism. Of special interest is Malebranche's theory of sensation. Like a genuine Platonist he denies that material substances causally affect the soul in sensation. His alternative holds that all we know of material things is what we see of their natures when we understand the ideas that are their exemplar causes. Because the only epistemic link between the soul and the world is via ideas, Malebranche is often interpreted, by Arnauld as well as modern readers, as defending a theory of indirect perception or "representational realism" in addition to his indirect semantics. We shall see, however, that although his semantics is indirect, there is a sense in which for him perception is not.

In the sections that follow I lay out Malebranche's theory of reference and truth. According to his theory of indirect reference a thought in the mind refers to material substances through the intermediary of an idea in God's mind. Thus, there are three types of semantic entity and two semantic relations. Thoughts are linked to ideas by illumination, and ideas to bodies by a kind of Neoplatonic causation. Reference is then the composition relation determined by illumination and causation. The discussion below is divided into two parts corresponding to two types of truth. Part I concerns necessary truth, which is a function solely of thoughts, ideas and illumination. Part II concerns contingent truth generally and truths of singular existence in particular, both of which depend in addition on exemplar causation.

1 Necessary Truth

1.1 *Background*

Although Malebranche grants that there is both necessary and contingent truth,⁵ genuine knowledge is only of necessary truth. Moreover, necessary truth is what makes contingent truth possible. His view is essentially a version

⁴ Putnam 1975.

⁵ *Search* I.3.2; *LO* 14-15; *OC* 1:63. *Search* VI.2.vi; *Elucidation* VI, *OC* 3:66-66, *LO* 575.

of Augustine's Neoplatonism finessed to accommodate a number of Descartes' views.

Although by and large medieval logicians were skeptical of Platonic ontologies, they often made use of such doctrines to explain necessary truth. Of special influence on Malebranche were the views of Augustine, whom he credits with holding "in five hundred places" three important views that Malebranche incorporates into his own philosophy:

- immutable and necessary ideas reside in God's mind,
- God created the world by reference to ideas,⁶ and
- we come to know certain and necessary truth by being enlightened so as to understand these ideas.⁷

On this view a universal affirmative is necessarily true because its terms correspond not to ordinary material substances but to a special sort of entity, ideas in God's mind. In the Middle Ages this sort of correspondence theory was elaborated in terms of "objective being." It is in this form that it was adapted by Descartes and Arnauld, and at least nominally by Malebranche as well. It was widely if not universally held by medieval logicians—for example, William of Sherwood, John Buridan, and Francisco Suárez⁸—that there is a special use of the universal affirmative in which it is necessary and eternally true because it describes a nature or essence, an entity that is eternal and unchanging.⁹

Some philosophers, moreover, employed this sort of correspondence in epistemology for cases in which it is implausible to identify what we know with ordinary things in the world. Scotus, for example, held that concepts in a necessarily true proposition signify what he calls *esse cognitum*.¹⁰ Later

6 Augustine 1975. Q. 46, 2. *Spade August 29, 1985*. Vol. II, text 3, p. 7.

7 *Réponse*, OC 9:933. Nadler 1992, p. 104.

8 William of Sherwood 1937. I.14. English text Sherwood 1966 p. 124-126. Klima cites Garland the Computist (11th century), in Henry 1984 pp. 85-86. See also *de Rijk 1962-1967* II-2 p.730, and the discussion in Klima, 'Introduction to *Summulae*', xlv-xlvii, in Buridan 2001. On Buridan see John Buridan, *Sophismata*, Chapter 1, Sophism 6, 5th Conclusion, Buridan 2001. p. 834. See the discussion in Ashworth 1977. On Suárez see DM XXXI.12.44 & 45.

9 The standard view held that a necessarily true proposition describes the actual world and is false if its terms fail to refer to actual existents. See Aristotle 92b5-8.

Defenders of the standard view are, for example, William of Ockham (*SL P II.14. Ockham* 1980 p. 123), Roger Bacon (see *Braakhuis 1977*), and Robert Kilwardby (see *Ebbesen 1986*).

10 *Duns Scoti 1966* vol. XVII, Lectura I, Dist. 36, Q., pp. 468-469. Cf. Normore 1986, p. 232, and the citation of Scotus by Suárez: DM XXXI.2.1, Suárez et al. 1856-1878 (here after Vivès) XXVI.229.

philosophers refer to *esse objectivum*. Peter Aureol held that it is objective being that we perceive in illusions, and Ockham, for a time, believed that objective being is what we understand when we understand an abstract term.¹¹ On the standard account, as summarized in the logic treatises of Descartes' time, the doctrine ascribes to a concept (a mode of the soul) two kinds of being: formal and objective. It has formal being inasmuch as it is a mode of the soul—in a sense part of the soul's "form"—and objective being inasmuch as it has intentional content. In this form the doctrine was used by Descartes to explain the necessity of eternal truths,¹² and by Arnauld that of nominal definitions.¹³

Malebranche, however, understands objective being ("la *réalité objective*, ou l'*idée*"¹⁴) in an Augustinian way. His account is not unlike that of Henry of Ghent (1217-1293), who rejected accounts of signification based on Aristotelian abstraction and argued instead that a concept refers to objective being in God's mind.¹⁵ A more direct influence on Malebranche was Suárez, who held that there is a sense of the universal affirmative that is necessarily and eternally true because its terms signify objective rather than actual being and that this objective being consists of God's eternal thought, which is a necessary part of his nature.¹⁶

1.2 Malebranche's Neoplatonism

1.2.1 Ideas in the Mind of God

Malebranche has no technical term for the mental state that medieval logicians called a concept or mental term and that they classified as a mode of the soul. He calls it variously a *thought*, *manner of thinking*, *modification of the soul*, *perception*, or *conception* (*pensée*, *manière de penser*, *modification de l'âme*; *perception*; *concevoir*).¹⁷ In semantic contexts using logical vocabulary, he also refers to a thought as a *term*.¹⁸ Often he refers simply to the understanding of an idea. Here we shall call this mode of the soul a *thought* or *perception*.

11 For a discussion of the other uses of objective being see *Pasnau 1997*. *Pyle 2003* p. 79 mistakenly attributes this use of objective being to Arnauld.

12 *Meditation* V.05, AT 7.64, 76-77; III^{3.14}, AT 7:41.26-29; III.6, AT 7.37,36. English translations of the *Meditations* are from *Descartes 2007-2010*.

13 *LAP* IV, 13, *KM* 398, *B* 263.

14 *Réponse*, I:vi, *Robinet 1964* 6:58, p 317. See also *Search* III.2.i; *Robinet 1962-1990*. (*R-L, G*) 1:414-5; *LO* 217-18; and *TL* I, *R* 6:217.

15 Henry does not have a fully developed theory of mental language. See *Pasnau 1997*, Chapter 7, pp. 220 ff.

16 See *DM XXXI.12.44* & 45; *Vivès XXVI.296-297*; *XXV*; *DM XXXI.2.1*; *Vivès XXVI.229*.

17 *Search*, *R-L, G* 2:415, *LO* 218; *TL* I, *R-L, G* 6:217; *OC* 2:389 & 391, *LO* 492-3.

18 See for example *Search*, *R-L, G* 2:384, *LO* 489 and *R-L, G* 2:389, *LO* 492.

What is important in Malebranche's philosophy of language is that a thought occupies the role of what medieval logicians called a term in mental language. Like the philosophers of his time Malebranche calls the act of asserting or denying a proposition a *judgment*.

Unlike Descartes and Arnauld, Malebranche holds that formal and objective being are ontologically distinct. He agrees that as a form of the soul, a thought possesses formal being, but he offers a series of arguments designed to show that a thought is distinct from its objective being. The two cannot be the same, he argues, because they possess different properties. For example, knowledge is general but a mental mode is particular:¹⁹ Mental modes are contingent, mutable and temporary, but knowledge, which is of ideas, is necessary, immutable, and eternal.²⁰ The soul and its modes are finite, but the idea of God is infinite.²¹

Having shown that they are not thoughts, Malebranche goes into a good deal of detail about what ideas are. First, they are "in God's mind." By this he means that they are part of God's nature, and as such necessary and eternal. Because God is a simple unity, however, ideas are not modes distinct from God's substance. They have the special ontological status of being in God but not distinct from him.

Ideas, moreover, form a hierarchy of the sort associated with Neoplatonism, a necessary and immutable order of perfection:²²

It is evident that the perfections in God that represent created or possible beings are not all equal insofar as they represent these beings, and that those, for example, that represent bodies are not as noble as those that represent minds, and furthermore, that even among those that represent only bodies or only minds, there are infinite degrees of perfection. . . . it is clear that there will be a necessary and immutable order among them [i.e. intelligible beings], and that just as there are necessary and eternal truths because there are relations of magnitude among intelligible beings, there must also be a necessary and immutable order because of the relations of perfection among these same beings.

19 *Elucidation X, Search, R-L, G 3:149, LO 625*. See also *Search I.4.i. R-L, G 1:66, LO 16; I.1.2, R-L, G 1:48, LO 5*.

20 *TL I, OC 6:199-200; LO 217-1*.

21 *Réponse, VI.vi, R-L, G 6:58, S p. 317*.

22 *Elucidation X, R-L, G3:136 LO 617*.

As we shall see in more detail in Part II, in creation God employs ideas as the “seminal causes” of material substances, which are said to “participate in” and “resemble” ideas.²³

1.2.2 Illumination

Medieval logic held that truth is a matter of correspondence between the terms of mental language, understood as modes of the soul, and their signifi-cata. Malebranche agrees. He departs, however, in his understanding of signification, which he calls *representation*. Representation, in his view, is nothing other than the converse of illumination.²⁴ Illumination is the epistemic relation by which God causes a mental mode to be instantiated in an individual's soul so that the soul understands that idea:²⁵

It is through illumination and through a clear idea, the mind sees numbers, extension, and the essence of things.

Illumination is also a semantic relation because a thought functions as a term in language. It signifies the idea that causes it, and represents or contains that idea's objective being:²⁶

The word *idea*, to signify uniquely the objective reality... the perception... that contains *the objective reality*... this *perception* of the objective reality of the infinite is a modality of the soul, & that perception is representative of the infinite, in this sense that they contain this *representative reality* quite different from its own modification.

I recognize that a purse contains a hundred pistols, that it is a purse of a hundred pistols; but it is not simply a purse. Similarly, our thoughts represent the infinite, but it is because they contain the idea or the objective reality of the infinite. And I claim that without the objective reality of the infinite, the soul cannot have a perception of it: likewise that a purse will never be a purse of a hundred pistols if it does not receive and contain them.

²³ *Dialogues*, Preface, *R-L,G* 12.12; *OC* 12.19.

²⁴ *Elucidation* X, *LO* 621.

²⁵ *Elucidation* X, *R-L,G* 3:136, *LO* 617.

²⁶ *TL* I, *R-L,G* 6:217.

See also *Search* III.2.i; *R-L,G* 1:414-5; *LO* 217-18.

Like Descartes and Arnauld, Malebranche says that a perception “contains” its objective being, and illustrates containment by “infinite extension,” the exemplar cause of material substances:²⁷

God contains in Himself an idea of intelligible infinite extension; for since He has created it, God knows extension, and He can know it only in Himself. Thus, since the mind can perceive a part of this intelligible extension that God contains, it surely can perceive in God all figures; for all finite intelligible extension is necessarily an intelligible figure, since figure is nothing but the boundary of extension.

The idea of intelligible extended substances is contained in God. Through it and various less abstract ideas of extension that derive from it, God understands the multitude of material substances that participate in them. Humans understand them, however, only to the degree that they are *illuminated* by these more particular ideas.

To highlight semantic roles, we shall sometimes refer below to *representation* as *signification*, and say that an idea *causes* the thought that is the mode that God instantiates in the soul causing it to understand that idea.²⁸

1.3 *Truth as Identity*

1.3.1 Truth as Double Naming

It was a truism of medieval logic that a universal affirmative is true if the subject and predicate “stand for the same.” Malebranche understands this maxim in terms of his semantics of ideas, in what may be called a “double naming” theory of truth. The affirmation *twice two is four* is true, he says, because the terms stand for the same idea in God’s mind. In more formal terms, the proposition *every S is P* is true if, and only if, *S* and *P* signify—are illuminated or caused by—the same idea.

Here Malebranche is committed to several theses in semantics: the terms of a universal affirmative stand for ideas; the judgment asserts that the subject and predicate ideas are identical; and its denial asserts that they are not identical. Malebranche calls identity *equality*:²⁹

²⁷ *Elucidation X, R-L, G* 3:151-153, *LO* 626-8.

²⁸ On efficacious ideas see Nadler 1992 p. 77 and Pyle 2003 pp. 49, 67-68; *Search, R-L, G* 1:413, *LO* 217; 1:442, *LO* 232.

²⁹ *Elucidation X, R-L, G* 3:136, *LO* 617. Suárez offers the same analysis for essential propositions: *DM XXXI.12.46*, *Vivès XXVI.298*; *DM XXXI.12.45*, *Vivès XXVI.297*.

Now, truths are but relations of equality or inequality between these intelligible beings (since it is true that twice two is four or that twice two is not five only because there is a relation of equality between twice two and four, and one of inequality between twice two and five). It has always been true that twice two is four and this cannot become false.

It is appropriate to call this a double naming theory because Malebranche emphasizes that the copula in these propositions does not assert a real relation.³⁰

We see God in seeing ideas of these truths—for the ideas are real, whereas the equality between the ideas, which is the truth, is nothing real. When we say, for example, that the cloth we are measuring is three ells long, the cloth and the ells are real. But the equality between them is not a real being—it is only a relation found between the three ells and the cloth.

Malebranche is expressing a common view, namely that a relation is a “being of reason.” According to this doctrine, the affirmed relation is “unreal” because all that exists are the relata and their properties.³¹ In the case of a true assertion of identity, then, all that exists is a single relatum. This relatum is not a mode because it is an idea. All ideas are beyond the substance-mode ontology of souls and bodies because they are part of God’s simple substance. In short, what makes this sort of judgment true is that its subject and predicate name the same idea.

1.3.2 Truth as Resemblance between Ideas

The double naming analysis is appropriate only for judgments that affirm of a subject a predicate that expresses its entire essence. For example, *every triangle is a three-sided plane figure* or $3=2+1$. In these cases the subject exhausts the predicate. At other times Malebranche offers a more general account that covers cases in which the subject is narrower than the predicate. In these texts he says that an affirmative is understood to assert that either an identity or resemblance holds between the subject and predicate:³²

To find the truth, it [i.e. the mind of man] considers whether objects have a relation of equality or resemblance between them, or precisely

30 *Search* III.2.vi, R-L, G 1:444, LO 234. Also, *Search* III.2.vi, R-L, G 1:444, LO 234.

31 See, for example, Doyle’s remarks on Suárez in *Suárez* 1995, pp. 19 and 22, and *DM* 54, 1,6.

32 *Search* III.2.x; R-L, G 1:474, LO 252.

what magnitude is equal to their inequality. For just as the good is the mind's good only because it is agreeable to it, so the truth is the truth only through the relation of equality or resemblance found between two or more things—be it between two or more objects, as between the ell and the cloth, or between two or more ideas, as between the two ideas of three and three and the idea of six, for three and three are six because of the equality between the two ideas of three and three and the idea of six, or finally, between the ideas and things, as when ideas represent what things are; for when I say that the sun exists, my proposition is true because the ideas I have of existence and the sun represent that the sun exists, and the sun truly exists.

The resemblance in question is between ideas. He explains this resemblance more fully by dividing relations into two kinds of relations, of magnitude and of quality.³³

There are several types of relations . . . But we can reduce them all to two, namely, to relations of magnitude and relations of quality.

Again,³⁴

It is obvious, first, that . . . to know perfectly all exact relations of quantity and quality between two or more things, it is necessary to have distinct ideas of them that represent them perfectly, and to compare these things in all possible ways. We can, for example, resolve all questions that lead to discovering exact relations between two and eight because, since two and eight are exactly known, we can compare them in all ways necessary for recognizing their exact relations of quantity and quality.

Malebranche is Christian Neoplatonist.³⁵ Resemblance in this sense is the special Platonic variety explicated in terms of the order that holds among ideas. In Platonism it is true to say of an idea of *F* that it is *F* (hence generating the third-man argument). It is true also of ideas in Malebranche's sense of resemblance that they can fail to resemble each other either in quality or, if they are qualitatively the same, in "the degree of magnitude" of a quality they share.

33 *Search, R-L, G* 2:383-384, *LO* 489.

34 *Search, R-L, G* 2:397, *LO* 497.

35 On Malebranche's Neoplatonism see *Nadler* 1992 pp. 37, 62, 101, 153; *Pyle* 2003 pp. 60, 61, 63, 66, 69; and *Vianu* 2003.

Malebranche holds that the order among ideas is one of perfection, or of “part to whole,” both Neoplatonic doctrines.³⁶ This order is also causal. Ideas are universal, and the more universal gives rise to the less universal and ultimately to the particular materials things that resemble it. Ideas therefore fall in a kind of “logical” order from the general to the specific. The order of perfection ranks not only ideas but also the material substances that participate in them, as explained in Part II. Resemblance and order, moreover, are related. These differences in quality and magnitude (described in judgments of identity, resemblance and difference) correspond to differences in this order. One idea gives rise to another less perfect but that nevertheless resembles it by possessing some quality to a lesser degree or by possessing a different quality that marks its diminished state.

Platonic order, moreover, has a semantic function. It is a special case of the structure presupposed by gradable adjectives as studied in linguistics and logic. To understand Malebranche's concept of order, and in turn Platonic causation, it will be useful to digress at this point into the more general theory of scalar semantics.

1.4 *Comparatives, Scalars, Mass Nouns, and Negations*³⁷

1.4.1 Comparatives, Scalar Adjectives, and Mass Nouns

Typically a comparative adjective is associated with a family of scalar adjectives. For example, *is hotter than* is associated with *boiling, hot, warm, neutral, cool, cold, freezing*, and *is happier than* with *ecstatic, happy, contented, so-so, discontented, unhappy, miserable*. Semantically, the comparative is interpreted by an ordering relation (normally a complete or total order), that ranks entities that possess “quantities” of some background “mass,” which is frequently lexicalized by a mass noun formed from one of the adjectives in the scale. For example, *heat* is associated with *is hotter than*, which is semantically equivalent to *possesses more heat than*.

The extensions of the scalar adjectives form an ordered partition determined by the background comparison.³⁸ For example, the extension of *boiling*

36 *Elucidation X, LO 626-7; Dialogue I, JS, p. 17.*

37 On the linguistic theory of comparatives, scalars, mass nouns, associated intensifiers, and negations see *Horn 1989, Lloyd 1955, Lloyd 1976, Lloyd 1990, Seuren 1973, Seuren 1978, Seuren 1984*. For early work on the comparative adjectives in Plotinus, which Lloyd calls *P-predicates* see *Lloyd 1955, Lloyd 1976, Lloyd 1990*. On the application of scalar linguistics to Neoplatonism and the Neoplatonic logic of Plotinus and Proclus see *Martin 1995, Martin 2001, Martin 2004*.

38 $A \leq B$ iff, $\forall x \in A \forall y \in B, x \leq y$.

ranks higher than that of *warm* because the former possesses more heat than the latter. Accordingly, an interpretation over such a structure validates entailments. For example, $\{a \text{ is warm, } b \text{ is hot}\}$ entails $a \text{ is hotter than } b$. Some natural languages in fact do without comparative adjectives entirely by making use only of scalars.³⁹

1.4.2 Privative and Hypernegation

Of special relevance to Neoplatonism is the fact that scalar families are associated with a pair of affixes that function as intensifiers or “negations.” These are operators that convert an adjective that stands for individuals at one mass rank into a marked variant that stands for individuals at a different mass rank. One such is *privative negation* or the *a-privatum* of classical philology. Examples include *sub* in Latin and English, and *hypo* in Greek. Its role is to convert an adjective referring to one rank to a marked variant referring to the next lower rank. For example, *subnormal* stands for a lesser degree of the “mass” normality than does *normal*. The second operator is the *α-intensivum* of classical philology, e.g. *super* in Latin and English, and *hyper* in Greek and English. Its role is to convert an adjective referring to one rank to a marked variant referring to the next higher rank. *Hyperactive*, for example, stands for a degree of activity greater than that of *active*. $\{a \text{ is not just active, } a \text{ is hyperactive}\}$ semantical entails for some b , $b \text{ is active}$ and $a \text{ is more active than } b$.

1.4.3 Evaluative Order

Typically, the ordering underlying the comparative and the scalar ranks has an evaluative direction, one pole being marked as having positive value and its opposite negative value. Various linguistic markers indicate the evaluative direction.⁴⁰ One variety consists of affixes like *un*, *less* and *dis* (so called *mirror negations*), which are ungrammatical when affixed to adjectives in the “negative” pole of the series. For example, *happy* is “positive” and *sad* “negative” because though *unhappy* is grammatical, *unsad*, the negation of the lexicalized synonym of *unhappy*, is not.⁴¹

39 Seuren 1973.

40 For a fuller discussion of the linguistic markers of scalar order in the context of Neoplatonic semantics see Martin 2008.

41 A suitable scalar semantic framework is a simplified syllogistic. A *syntax* is a structure $\langle A, T, J, \downarrow, \uparrow \rangle$ such that A is a set (atomic terms), T (terms) is $A \cup \{x | y \in A \ \& \ x = \downarrow y \text{ or } x = \uparrow y\}$, and J (categorical judgments) is $\{x | a, b \in T \ \& \ x = Aab \text{ or } x = Eab \text{ or } x = Iab \text{ or } x = Oab\}$. A *scalar structure* is any partially ordered structure $\langle U, \leq, \wedge, o, 1 \rangle$ with greatest element 1 and least element o , and meet operation $\wedge$. A *branch* B in U is any totally ordered subset of U that

1.5 *Metaphysics and Epistemology*

Some Neoplatonists make use of the full range of scalar vocabulary. Proclus, for example, appeals to the “chain of being,” assigning names to the ranks, ordering them by multiple comparative adjectives, and by hyper and privative negations.⁴² Malebranche's use of Neoplatonic language is less systematic but nevertheless extensive. Its importance may be illustrated by several of his more obscure doctrines, which become clearer when formulated as part of a “Neoplatonic” scalar semantics.

Perhaps the best example is his doctrine of resemblance. Malebranche holds that material substances resemble ideas in the sense that they imitate and participate in their exemplar causes. Despite the fact that virtually all interpreters read Malebranche as committed to this view—it is the most straightforward reading of the texts—Steven Nadler has found the doctrine so obscure that he has questioned whether Malebranche could really believe it.⁴³ The doctrine is perfectly coherent, however, if understood in terms of comparative structures. Resemblance here is not the Aristotelian variety in which two substances resemble each other because they instantiate the same or similar modes. Rather it is Neoplatonic. One “mass” resembles a second because, to use Malebranche's vocabulary, the one “participates in” or “is part of” the other. In the vocabulary of scalar semantics, one node falls lower in the comparative order or “has less mass” than the other. In Platonic vocabulary one is a privative part of the other and possesses less being. They share the same “mass” but

contains all the $\leq$ -descendants and ancestors of any member of B , and a *sub-branch* is any subset of a branch. Intuitively, $x \leq y$ iff y is more perfect than or has more being than x , 1 is God, and 0 is pure non-being. An *acceptable interpretation* is any function $\mathfrak{I}$ on expressions such that:

- $\forall t \in T, \mathfrak{I}(t) \in U - \{0\};$
- $\mathfrak{I}(\downarrow t) \leq \mathfrak{I}(t) \leq \mathfrak{I}(\uparrow t);$
- $\mathfrak{I}(Aab) = T$ iff $\mathfrak{I}(a) \leq \mathfrak{I}(b);$
- $\mathfrak{I}(Eab) = T$ iff $\mathfrak{I}(a) \wedge \mathfrak{I}(b) = 0;$
- $\mathfrak{I}(Iab) = T$ iff $\mathfrak{I}(a) \wedge \mathfrak{I}(b) \neq 0;$
- $\mathfrak{I}(Oab) = T$ iff not($\mathfrak{I}(a) \leq \mathfrak{I}(b)$).

A *scalar family* relative to a structure and interpretation $\mathfrak{I}$ is any subset $\{P_n, \dots, P_0, \dots, P_{n-1}\}$ of A such $\{\mathfrak{I}(P_i)\}_{i=n, \dots, 0, \dots, n-1}$ is a sub-branch of U , and for all i , $\mathfrak{I}(P_i) \leq \mathfrak{I}(P_{i-1})$ and $\mathfrak{I}(\downarrow P_{i+1}) \leq \mathfrak{I}(P_i) \leq \mathfrak{I}(\uparrow P_{i-1})$. *Mirror negation* is introduced by definition: relative to a scalar family, if $0 < i$, then $\neg P_i =_{\text{def}} P_{-i}$. If S is a scalar structure, then $X \models_s A$ iff, for all acceptable interpretations $\mathfrak{I}$ of S , if for $B \in X$, $\mathfrak{I}(B) = T$, then $\mathfrak{I}(A) = T$. $\models_s$ is sound and complete for the classical syllogistic as well as for obvious inferences for the non-classical negations, including: $A \downarrow P_i P_i \dashv \vdash \mathfrak{I}_s A P_i \uparrow P_i$. See *Martin 2001*.

42 See, for example, Proposition 60 (and scholium), 70 and 71, in *Proclus 1963*.

43 *Nadler 1992* pp. 71–73.

in different degrees. Semantically, the judgment *every S is P* is true if the idea signified by *S*, a quantity of God's "being", is a part of that mass signified by *P*. Resemblance simply means that two things are composed of the same "stuff".⁴⁴

Understanding the language of comparatives also helps explain what Malebranche says about the idea of extension. Of the various ideas of extension, which include those of geometrical figures and bodies, the most abstract he calls *intelligible infinite extension*. It is, he says, more perfect than the ideas of extension that are its restrictions or diminutions. In Neoplatonic vocabulary these ideas are parts or privations of absolute extensions. Among these are the various ideas of finite extension, which are the exemplar causes by privation of particular material bodies:⁴⁵

God contains in Himself an idea of intelligible infinite extension; for since He has created it, God knows extension, and He can know it only in Himself. Thus, since the mind can perceive a part of this intelligible extension that God contains, it surely can perceive in God all figures; for all finite intelligible extension is necessarily an intelligible figure, since figure is nothing but the boundary of extension.

At one point Malebranche describes the privation process through the metaphor of sculpture:⁴⁶

just as one can sculpt all kinds of figures from a block of marble by using a chisel, so God can represent all material beings to us through various applications of intelligible extension to our mind.

Conceiving material substances as quantities of extension is, of course, also entirely Cartesian. Malebranche adds to Descartes' physics what he understands to be the ontological prerequisites at the supernatural level. These he draws from Augustine's Neoplatonism, namely, the view that the various ideas of material substance in God's mind also possess extension. This is a more complete and non-material extension because, unlike material extension, it is eternal and unchanging. In the hierarchy of diminishing "mass," extension descends from intelligible infinite extension through the exemplar causes of particular extended substances to the material substances themselves.

44 As Part II explains, this resemblance extends as well to the material world.

45 *Elucidation X, R-L, G* 3:151-153, *LO* 626-8.

46 *Dialogue I, Malebranche* 1997, p. 17.

Within this framework he even accepts a version of the Neoplatonic doctrine that evil is non-being. Though what God causes is as perfect—literally, as complete—as possible, matter is such that some bodies are so imperfect as to be monsters, not due to what is positive in them, but to “what they are not.”⁴⁷ All imperfect extended bodies, including monsters, are unreal in the sense that they consist of a privation of being.

We can now summarize Malebranche's semantics of essential truth as resemblance:

The judgment *every S is P* is necessarily and eternally true if, and only if, either

- (1) the idea that causes the perception *S* is identical to the idea that causes the perception *P*, or
- (2) the idea that causes the perception *P* resembles the idea that causes the perception *S* in the sense that the being of *S* is a privative part of the being of *P*.

In defense of Malebranche it may be said that although his semantics presupposes being as a mass concept, mass concepts as such are neither mysterious nor incoherent. On the contrary, they are a standard feature of comparative semantics in natural language generally, and their formal properties are well-defined.⁴⁸ Malebranche may be wrong to think that the structure of reality is in fact a scalar structure, but the contention that it is so is perfectly coherent.

A second issue that scalar semantics elucidates is the ontological status of ideas. What does it mean for an idea to be, as Malebranche says, not a mode instantiated in God's substance, but a “part of God's substance?” Nadler, for example, says that Malebranche provides neither an adequate explanation of this view, nor of the related view that ideas possess degrees of being.⁴⁹ Others have been puzzled about the relation of God's substance to the idea of extension.⁵⁰

Again the explanation turns on being as a mass concept. Just as it is possible for natural language to construct a large variety of scalar families, it is possible to stipulate, even if it ultimately fails of reference, a scalar family for the

47 *Search, R-L, G* 3:88-89, *LO* 589.

48 As in footnote 41 and the reference there cited.

49 *Nadler* 1992, pp. 96 and 150.

50 *Vianu* 2003 argues that the idea cannot be identified with God's substance, and *Reid* 2003 that it is the same as God's immensity. The scalar reading of being is compatible with these views.

comparative *has more being than*, that ranks its relata according to “how much” they possess of the “mass” referred to by the mass noun *being*. Moreover, it would be consistent with the requirements of a scalar structure to add the condition, as Malebranche would, that this ordering have a maximal element. It might be odd to think of Malebranche’s version of “the God of the philosophers” as a mass concept and of *God* as a mass noun, but doing so has the virtue of making sense of the Neoplatonic claim that ideas are privations of God’s simple substance understood as maximal being.

Scalar semantics also contributes to the epistemological debate over whether Malebranche is a direct realist, as Nadler argues, or a perceptual representationalist, as most commentators hold, including Pyle.⁵¹ On the former reading we see bodies directly, whereas on the latter we “see” ideas directly but not bodies, which we only know by inference. Within scalar semantics, however, there is a sense in which both interpretations are compatible. One node of a privative hierarchy literally consists of the same “stuff” as any node from which it descends. It follows that by seeing the higher node, one sees all the reality that constitutes the lower node. It is for this reason that God understands, aka “sees,” all extended bodies by understanding extension in general. Similarly, a human in seeing the idea of triangle, “sees” all the reality that exists in any extended triangular body. Thus, in a sense the direct-indirect perception debate vanishes when perception is understood to presuppose a comparative mass structure.

1.6 *Issues in Semantics*

A main purpose of this paper is to acquaint readers with Malebranche’s semantics. Several features in the account of necessary truth are notable.

Oddly to a modern logician, there is a sense in which terms rather than propositions are the bearers of truth. Perhaps this result is not surprising given a Platonic framework in which knowledge is direct acquaintance, in this case acquaintance with ideas in God’s mind. A true identity judgment, Malebranche holds, consists of a double conceptualization in which two mental modes, the “terms” of the judgment, are instantiated in the soul in order. First we conceive the subject idea, then the predicate idea, seeing that they are the same or different. Indeed if their “referents” are identical, they are numerically one and the same idea. Thus, having conceived the one, conceiving the other adds nothing to knowledge. As terms they could not be more “synonymous.” The double conceptualization that constitutes a subject-predicate judgment is literally epistemologically redundant. A true resemblance judgment is similar.

51 Nadler 1992 pp. 55 & 156 ff. Pyle 2003 50 & 71-73 sets out the traditional interpretation.

It consists first of conceptualizing a subject mode that signifies one idea and then conceptualizing a predicate mode that signifies a second idea, but one that contains all the being of the first as an "emanative" (i.e. mass) part. Indeed if the predicate were fully understood, as it is by God, knowledge of the predicate would contain all there is to know about the subject. In this sense conceiving the subject literally adds nothing of substance to conceiving the predicate alone.

As an account of natural language grammar, the view that all judgments are essentially single conceptualizations may seem naïvely restricted. Even medieval logic recognized a wide variety of sentence forms including complex noun phrases and complex propositional forms including particular, negative, modal and truth-functional forms. But Malebranche's account accommodates more grammar than may be apparent. He recognizes what are in effect negative universals because they are simply denials of positive judgments. In his view, moreover, there is no need to employ particular or modal judgments because all true judgments are universal and necessary.⁵² A conjunction is simply a series of judgments. As Part II explains, Malebranche also has a special account of singular contingent truths.

A more serious problem for Malebranche's semantics is that it seems unable to deal with what is known in the philosophy of language as "Frege's problem." This is the celebrated difficulty of explaining the information content of an identity statement if meaning is the same as reference. The problem arises for Malebranche because he seems to conflate the meaning and reference of a term, identifying them with a single idea. Formulated in a syntax appropriate to his views, the problem is one of accounting for the information conveyed in *every a is b* that is not conveyed in *every a is a* when *a* and *b* name the same idea. For example, *every morning star is an evening star* seems to convey information that *every morning star is a morning star* does not, even when *morning star* and *evening star* have the same referent.

In a strict sense the account of truth we have just sketched is complete because, as explained in Part II, Malebranche thinks necessary truth is the only kind of truth there is. On his view, the mental acts that take the role of contingent truths are not strictly speaking true at all because they do not signify ideas. We shall now see, however, that he nevertheless believes that what he calls inner sensation corresponds to contingencies and functions like contingent truth.

52 Cf. Proclus in *Martin 2001*.

2 Contingent Truth

2.1 *Cartesian Background*

Descartes and Arnauld hold that there are both contingent and necessary truths.⁵³ Malebranche too accepts the distinction:⁵⁴

For there are two kinds of truth, those that are *necessary* and those that are *contingent*. I call those truths necessary that by their nature are immutable, or that have been fixed by the will of God, which is in no way subject to change. All others are *contingent* truths. Mathematics, metaphysics, and even a large part of physics and morals contain necessary truths. History, grammar, local custom, and several other things that depend on the changing will of men, contain only *contingent* truths.

Unlike Descartes and Arnauld, however, who have more traditional metaphysics, Malebranche must reconcile the distinction with his version of Neoplatonism.

Classical Neoplatonism regards the emanations from the One as necessary. It follows that the material world too is necessary. The framework, however, does allow for contingency in a sense. To see how, let us distinguish between two senses of necessity, which we may call *determinism* and *immutability*.⁵⁵ In a Neoplatonic context a proposition is necessary in the first sense if it is caused to be true, and in the second if it is always or eternally true.

Truths about ideas are necessary in both senses. Proclus, however, distinguishes between those levels of being that are immutable from those that exist within time and are changing. Like Malebranche he calls the latter *nature*.⁵⁶ In classical Neoplatonism nature is determined but not immutable. Its parts come to be, change, and pass out of existence. Spinoza has a similar view about the necessary origin of what he calls the finite modes, which are changeable.

53 LAP IV, 13, KM 398, B 263; *Meditations* III.19-20; AT 7.43, 45-47; LAP I,2, KM V,136, B 32; LAP I,9, KM V,163, B 54. See Martin 2011 and Martin 2012.

54 Search I.3.2; LO 14-15; R-L, G 1:63; VI.2.vi:

... essences, what are immutable, possibilities, not of "what is."

LO VI, R-L, G 3:66-66, LO 575:

Sensation is of what is.

55 On necessity as determinate see Lukasiewicz in Martin 2002. On necessity as eternally true see Hintikka 1973.

56 Lxii,V; Search, R-L, G pp 141-142; LO 59-60; II.1, ch 5; LO 102.

These distinctions in necessity could be represented in language if appropriate linguistic resources existed, for example, modal and tense operators. Historically, however, the linguistic resources available within a particular Neoplatonic theory for distinctions of contingency, especially those appropriate for truths about the natural world, are frequently unclear. Although Proclus declares that he intends to explain the natural world in the later volumes of the *Platonic Theology*, these were never written or have been lost.⁵⁷ Malebranche, however, works out a detailed account of the relation of the natural to the supernatural and the extent to which it is possible for language to describe facts of nature.

2.2 *God, Nature, and Natural Law*

Perhaps the most significant way in which Christian Neoplatonism differs from its classical roots lies in its rejection of what I have called determinism. On the one hand, the ideas in God's mind, including the various ideas of extended things, are immobile:⁵⁸

the intelligible parts of the idea of extension always maintain the same relation of intelligible distance between them and that this idea therefore cannot be moved even intelligibly.

Ideas are part of God's substance, and truths describing them are determinately and eternally true, necessary in both senses. Natural objects, on the other hand, come to be from a free exercise of God's will.⁵⁹

I reply that God can do nothing and can rule nothing without knowledge, and that therefore His volitions suppose something; but what they suppose is not something created. Order, truth, eternal wisdom is the exemplar of all God's works, and 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 . . .

For God does not see the actual motion of body in His substance, or in the idea He has of them in Himself, but only in the knowledge He has of His volitions with regard to them. Even their existence He sees only in this way, because only His will gives being to all things. God's volitions

⁵⁷ See the discussion in *Martin 2001* and *Siorvanes 1996*.

⁵⁸ *Elucidation X, R-L, G 3:151, LO 626*.

⁵⁹ *LO VIII, 20, Search, R-L, G 3:85-86, LO 586-587*.

change nothing in His substance, they do not move it. In this sense, intelligible extension cannot be moved even intelligibly.

Here God's substance is said to be unaffected by his understanding or his volitions, and his understanding, both of himself and of creation, consists only of his knowledge of the ideas in his mind and his volitions.⁶⁰

A caveat, however, is in order. In *Elucidation X* Malebranche retreats from saying, as he suggests above, that God possesses general ideas of material substance that are less abstract than the most general concept of intelligible extension. His later view is that God possesses knowledge of all material substances emanatively because he knows the idea of intelligible extension itself. Malebranche's views on order must be qualified as well. The hierarchy of ideas is not an order among the ideas that God actually possesses or an order of entities distinct from God's being. Rather, it is an order among the ideas immanent in God's substance. Algebraically, the nodes of the order represent masses implicit in a single mass, much as a block of marble contains implicitly various "non-actual parts."⁶¹

2.3 *Natural Law*

Due to the role of ideas as exemplar causes, there is a correspondence between the structure of ideas and what Malebranche calls "nature or the will of the Creator."⁶² This correspondence gives rise to natural law.⁶³

All the intelligible parts of intelligible extension are of the same nature insofar as they are ideas, just as all the parts of local or material extension have the same nature as a substance.

What he intends by "law" can be made clear by the structure implicit in the scalar semantics of the mass noun *being*. A truth *every S is P*, which is about ideas in God's mind, is simultaneously a "law" governing the material substances that participate in these ideas because each body imitates its exemplar cause. An individual material instance of an idea imitates its exemplar cause because it participates in its being. Hence if *every S is P* is a determinate and

60 LO VIII, 20, *Search, R-L, G* 3:85-86, LO 586-587. Pessin 2004 argues that ideas in God's mind are God's volitions in an odd sense: caused by God's substance and necessary truths.

61 Similarly medieval philosophers explain the existence of infinite potential but non-actual "parts" of an extended mass. See *Ockham* 1989.

62 Lxii,V; *Search, R-L, G* pp 141-142; LO 59-60; II.1, ch 5; LO 102.

63 Dialogue I, *Malebranche* 1997, p.17.

eternal truth about ideas, it is eternally, but not determinately true that any body caused by the referent of *S* shares in the being of the referent of *P*.

The causal process of “descent” from ideas to bodies can be explained by reference to the scalar structure of being. A body is simply the privation of some idea or ideas. It is a lesser mass of being. Structurally, it is a “meet” on the lattice in which ideas occupy higher nodes. Hence, a body is not an Aristotelian form-matter composite. It is rather a realized “mass.” In Malebranche’s terms it is an incomplete quantity of being that manifests its incompleteness in its changing existence. Thus, to say that a body “has a property” is equivalent to saying that a scalar predicate is true of it.

Malebranche says more about how the order of being among ideas is replicated in the order of material substances:⁶⁴

Intelligible extension contains all the perfections, or rather, all the differences of bodies due to the different sensations that the soul projects on the ideas affecting it upon the occasion of these same bodies.

Here Malebranche is espousing his own version of the Neoplatonic doctrine that there is coordination between ideas and nature: the order of perfection among ideas is copied in an order of perfection among material substances. A similar order is posited by Proclus in his dictum, which he puts in terms of hypernegation, “negations generate affirmations.” Unlike the modern view that the order of intensions is inverse to that of extensions—a view shared by Arnauld, Leibniz, and Frege—Malebranche holds to the Platonic doctrine that the order of ideas and things is the same. In algebraic terms, he holds that there is an order-isomorphism from ideas ranked in their causal order by degrees of perfection to the order of perfection among material substances.⁶⁵

For Malebranche, then, the essential truths of ideas are doubly necessary, but the laws of nature are eternal but not determinate. As quoted earlier, Malebranche also classifies the truths of history, grammar and custom as contingent, presumably because they are neither determined nor eternal. In this class also fall the truths of sensation. In explaining sensation, moreover, he lays out a particularly interesting account of the truth of singular propositions about material substances.

64 *Elucidation X, R-L, G III, 152-3, LO 626-7.*

65 In the formalism of note 41, $A \downarrow P_i \downarrow P_j \models \models_s A P_i P_j \models \models_s A \uparrow P_i \uparrow P_j$. See *In Parmenidem* 1099:32-35, 1086:27-29, 1099:32-35, 1208:22-24.

2.4 Sensation

In the strict sense a mental term is a “perception,” a mode of the soul by which God causes the soul to see an idea in his mind. Signification, moreover, in its strict sense is the relation between such perceptions and their corresponding ideas. Truth in turn is a property of judgments formed from these terms and consists of correspondence with ideas. It then follows that there is no knowledge except of ideas. In a strict sense there is neither language that describes the material world nor knowledge of it.

Malebranche allows, however, that there is a second variety of mental mode that correlates with the material world. Although these modes do not constitute language or form truths, they do permit a kind of second-rate knowledge. When instantiated in the soul, these modes are correlated with the existence of a material substance outside the mind. Malebranche describes the two kinds of knowledge this way:⁶⁶

It seems to me worthwhile to point out that the mind knows objects in only two ways: through illumination [*par lumiere*] and through sensation. It sees things through *illumination* when it has a *clear idea* of them, and when by consulting this idea it can discover all the properties of which these things are capable. It sees things through *sensation* when it finds no clear idea of these things in itself to be consulted, when it is thus unable to discover their properties clearly, and when it knows only through a confused sensation, without illumination and without evidence. Through illumination and through a clear idea, the mind sees numbers, extension, and the essence of things. Through a confused idea or through sensation, it judges about the existence of creatures and knows its own existence.

The mode instantiated in the soul on the occasion that a material substance is affecting the body’s sense organs can simultaneously be a perception of an idea in God’s mind. But it is important to distinguish this psychological event—a kind of illumination simultaneous with sensation—from pure illumination apart from sensation. An idea that God causes us to see in pure illumination Malebranche calls a *clear idea*. These impart genuine knowledge. The idea associated with sensation, on the other hand, he calls a *confused idea*. Exactly what he thinks a confused idea is and the sense in which it allows for knowledge of an inferior sort turn on the details of his account of sensation.

Explaining sensation is something of a challenge for Neoplatonists. On the one hand, it seems rather obvious that bodily events, like a boulder dropping

66 *Elucidation* X, R-L, G 141-142; LO 621.

on one's toe, cause a perceptual reaction, like pain. But in Platonic metaphysics bodies do not affect souls. St Augustine wrestles with this problem in *De musica*.⁶⁷

Master. I will say directly what I think. Either follow me, or even go ahead [of me] if you can, if you notice that I am delaying or hesitating. For I do not think this body is animated by a soul except by the intention of the maker. Neither do I suppose [the soul] undergoes anything from [the body], but rather acts on [the body] and in it, as if [the body were] subjected by divine order to [the soul's] domination. Yet sometimes [the soul] operates with ease, sometimes with difficulty, according as the bodily nature yields to it more or less, in proportion to its merits. Therefore, whatever corporeal things are imposed on the body or hurled against it from outside, they produce something in the body itself but not in the soul. [The body] either resists its task or else agrees with it. And so, when [the soul] struggles against the resisting body, and with difficulty forces the matter subjected to [the soul] into the ways of its own task, it becomes more attentive because of the difficulty of the action. This difficulty, when it does not pass unnoticed, is called "sensing" because of the attention. And this is called 'trouble' or 'labor'. But when what is introduced or applied [to the body] is agreeable, [the soul] easily turns all of [the body], or as much as is needed of it, to the paths of its own task. And this action of [the soul], by which it conjoins its body to an agreeable external body, does not pass unnoticed, because it is carried out more attentively on account of that extraneous factor. But, because of its agreeableness, it is sensed with pleasure. . . .

And, lest I go on too long, it seems to me that when the soul senses in the body, it does not undergo anything from [the body], but rather acts more attentively in the midst of [the body's] passive processes [*passionibus*], and that these actions, whether they are easy because of an agreeableness or hard because of a disagreeableness, do not pass unnoticed by [the soul]. And all this is what is called "sensing".

Here Augustine adopts the Platonic line that bodily changes do not affect the soul, and then tries to explain sensations of pain as the result of difficulties the soul encounters when affecting the body. Malebranche agrees with Augustine that the body cannot affect the soul, but like Suárez, Arnauld, and

67 *De musica*, VI, 5, 9-10, *Patrologia Latina* 32, cols. 1168-1169. Paul Spade trans. *Spade August* 29, 1985, Vol. II, text 3, p.8.

other occasionalists he also denies that the soul affects the body. His explanation of their apparent interaction, however, is Neoplatonic—it might even be called theurgic. The correlation between *A* and *B*, which appears causal, is rather the result of God causing both simultaneously.

Though he departs from medieval psychology in many ways, Malebranche presupposes as background part of the standard Aristotelian account and adopts some of its terminology. In the standard view sensation is understood as a step preliminary to the knowledge contained in ideas, or, as medieval philosophers would say, sensation is pre-conceptual cognition. Moreover, the properties of a material substance that affect the body's organs and of which we are aware in sensation were held not to be universals. Rather, they are individual properties in the sense that they are true of only a unique individual. These become conscious in the pre-conceptual experience associated with sensation. This pre-conceptual awareness of individual sensory properties went under various terms but we may call it here, following Ockham, *intuitive cognition*. This was a pre-abstractive awareness of individualizing sensory properties because the soul experiencing sensation has yet to abstract the general concepts under which the particular properties fall. But even though at this point the soul does not know under what concept the sensed individual falls, the intuitive cognition alone is sufficient for a minimal sort of knowledge of existence. Because the experience is correlated with an existing material substance outside the mind proximate to the perceiver, it was held to be sufficient for knowing that something with those individual sensory properties existed. Ockham describes the situation as follows:⁶⁸

Again concerning this question, I first set out some distinctions. One is that some cognition is intuitive, and some abstractive. Intuitive is that medium by which it is understood that a thing is when it is, and it is not when it is not. Because, when I apprehend completely some extreme [i.e. term of a mental proposition] in an intuitive manner, I am immediately able to form a complex [i.e. proposition] stating that these extremes are unified [i.e. the proposition *S is P* unifies the terms *S* and *P*] or not unified [as in *S is not P*]; and am able to assent to or deny it. For example, if I should intuitively see a body and a whiteness, immediately the intellect is able to form this complex *a body is, a white thing is, or a body is white*, and when these complexes are formed, the intellect immediately assents.

68 Ockham 1981, Book II, Quaest. XIII, p. 256, 1.10. Compare Buridan, *De Anima*, 1989.

This group of individualized sensory properties could remain in cognition actively or dispositionally in a diminished form even when the material substance responsible for the perception no longer exists or is no longer in proximity to the sense organs. In that case the experience was called *memory*. The individual properties from this experience or others could be selected and mixed. In that case they no longer normally correspond to a proximate material substance, and the experience is called *imagination*. In medieval psychology the pre-conceptual cognitive experience of sensation, memory and imagination were always of non-universalized individual properties.

Malebranche accepts that the properties affecting the body and its sense organs, and those experienced in sensation, memory and imagination are individual and not universal. However, his dualism mandates that the properties of the body are material and different from those that the soul experiences in sensation, imagination and memory.⁶⁹ The former, like motion and impulse, are material modes, and the latter, like sensations of light and color, are spiritual.⁷⁰

... light is not and cannot be a property or modification of matter ... it is in fact within the soul itself, because it never thinks to avail itself of reason in order to discover the truth about what is in it; the soul avails itself only of the senses, which never discover the truth and which were given only for the preservation of the body.

...

Reason must make it clear that (a) motion and impulse are properties of bodies and that therefore they can be found in objects and in our sense organs, but that (b) the light and colors we see are modifications of the soul, which are quite different from the above properties and of which we also have quite different ideas.

He accepts the traditional view, however, that the awareness of sensory properties associated with sensation is sufficient for knowing that a material substance exists, but that the less vivid awareness associated with imagination is not:⁷¹

69 Malebranche makes clear that the modes in question are particular and not universal. *Elucidation X, R-L, G III*, 152-3, *LO* 626-7; *Dialogue I, JS*, p. 17; *Elucidation X, R-L, G* 3:149, *LO* 625.

70 *Search I.xii, V*; *R-L, G* 141-142; *LO* 59-60.

71 *Search I*, ch. 18,I; *R-L, G* 179; *LO* 79.

The reason for this is that the senses represent objects as present, and the imagination represents them only as absent.

More fully he says:⁷²

If the agitation originates through the impressions made by objects on the exterior surface of our nerve fibers and is communicated to the brain, then the soul senses, and it judges that what it senses is outside, i.e., it perceives an object as present. But if the internal fibers alone are lightly disturbed by the flow of animal spirits, or in some other way, then the soul imagines, and judges that what it imagines is not outside, but inside the brain, i.e., it perceives an object as absent.

Sensory experience therefore is a sign that material substances exist. However, because the individual spiritual modes of the soul that the soul experiences during sensation are modes of the soul, we cannot know from having experienced them alone what modes the correlated body possesses. The mechanisms Malebranche proposes for grounding a kind of qualitative knowledge of bodies is novel.

On the traditional view a sensed body outside the mind is linked by the causation relation to both the sense organs and the modes of intuitive experience. These modes in turn are linked by abstraction to concepts, which are the common nouns of mental language. Malebranche rejects both the relations of body-soul causation and abstraction.⁷³ He posits rather a divine coordination between three components: (1) the body's sensory modes inhering in the body's sense organs caused by the material substance being sensed, (2) the individual sensory modes of the soul experienced in sensation, and (3) the idea in God's mind under which the body being sensed falls.⁷⁴ On his view there is no causal link between (1) and (2), and the causal direction goes from (3) to (2) rather than conversely. That is, God links the three by two simultaneous acts of causation on his part. First, through the laws of nature, which are a consequence of his act as creator, he causes material substance outside the mind to excite particular bodily modes in the sense organs and brain of the

72 *Search* II.1, ch. 1; *R-L,G* 191-192; *LO* 87-88. See also *Elucidation* X, *R-L,G* 3:136, *LO* 617; *Elucidation* X *LO* 621.

73 *Elucidation* II.1, ch. 5, *R-L,G* 215-216, *LO* 102. *Search* I,13,III; *R-L,G* 145; *LO* 62. Quoted by Arnauld *VFI*, ch. 16.

74 *Nadler* 1992 p. 65 seems to conflate (2) and (3).

perceiver. Second he causes particular spiritual modes to be instantiated in the soul in the perceiver that coincide with the excited state of the sense organs and brain. The instantiation of these spiritual modes constitutes the soul's being illuminated by the idea, which is the exemplar cause of the material substance affecting the body's sense organs:⁷⁵

From this we can judge that it is in God or in an immutable nature that we see all that we know by means of illumination of clear ideas—not only because through illumination we see only numbers, extension, and the essences of things, which do not depend on a free act of God, as I have already pointed out, but also because we know these things in very perfect fashion, and because we would even know them in an infinitely perfect fashion if our capacity for thought were infinite, since nothing is lacking to the ideal representing them. We must also conclude that everything we know through sensation is seen in itself. However, this is not to say that we can produce in ourselves any new modification, or that our soul's sensations or modifications can represent objects upon whose occasion God excites them in us, but only that our sensations (which are in no way different from us, and which as a result can never represent anything different from ourselves) can, nonetheless, represent the existence of beings or, rather, make us judge that they exist. For as God, upon the presence of objects, excites our sensation in us through an insensible action that we do not perceive, we imagine that we receive from the object not only the idea that represents its essence but also the sensation that makes us judge that it exists—for there is always a *pure idea* and a *confused sensation* in the knowledge we have of the existence of beings, the knowledge of God and of our soul excepted.

The complex experience of the soul during sensation is what Malebranche here calls a "confused sensation." He employs this terminology frequently.⁷⁶ The term *confused* is jargon from medieval logic. Both in mediaeval logic and among Malebranche's contemporaries the term *confused* is synonymous with *common*, *general* and *universal*; it applies to a term of mental language that "signifies many." It is contrasted with *determinate* which applies to a term with

75 *Elucidation X*, R-L, G 142, LO 621.

76 See *Elucidation X* R-L, G 3:136, LO 617, R-L, G 3:141-143, LO 621; *Response VI*, R-L, G 6:55, VI, R-L, G 6:61; *Réponse*, VI:xii, R-L, G 6:60-61, S p. 319, XII.

a narrower or even unique signification.⁷⁷ For example, Suárez says that while a concept's objective content is unique, what it signifies is confused, universal and common—all synonyms.⁷⁸

That a sensory experience is confused is a view Malebranche takes from Descartes and Arnauld. As Descartes and Arnauld sometimes use the term, an idea is confused because it is non-unique in its content. It mixes modes that cannot all be true at the same time. Descartes gives the example of *cold body*, which inconsistently mixes *body* with *non-being*,⁷⁹ and Arnauld that of *virtuous rich man*, an impossible mixture of *virtue* and *wealth*.⁸⁰ A proposition with a confused idea as subject term is false. The cases that exercised the Cartesians most were those in which the uncritical person forms an idea containing modes that are both spiritual and material, and that therefore, for metaphysical reasons, cannot be instantiated in the same substance.

Malebranche's analysis of confused ideas is different, with different implications for truth. He agrees with Descartes and Arnauld that a confused sensation is one that mixes modes from different ontological categories. First it is an experience of an individual sensory mode, like the feelings of hot and cold, or the experience of colors and shapes. These are individual modes of the soul of which we are directly aware in a preconceptual way. Because God insures that they are correlated with a material substance outside the mind—Malebranche calls this a *mutuelle correspondance*⁸¹—this experience alone imparts a kind of knowledge that some body exists, but this knowledge is not conceptual. From the sensory experience alone we do not know what body it is. At the same time, however, the soul has a second experience, illumination by a pure idea, which causes the soul to see that idea. Illumination by a pure idea plays the role of what Ockham calls abstractive cognition in the passage quoted earlier.

At one point, Malebranche describes the same complexity of a confused idea by making a threefold distinction among the *sort of truth* that an idea may reveal about the natural world:

77 See for example the following texts from Aristotle, Abelard, Aquinas, and Buridan: Aristotle, *Physics* I.1 184^a22-24; Peter Abelard L1.01 /21/-/29/; Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, p I.1, q. 85, a. 3 *Responsio*; Buridan, line 95 ff. p. 291 ff. in *Buridan* 1989.

78 *DM*, 2, 1,1;25,65.

79 Fourth Reply, *AT* VII, 233:7.

80 For passages in which the formation of such ideas are described see: *LAP Discour* I, *KM* V, 110, *B* 9-10; I,ix, *KM* V, 157-78; *B* 49-50; I,xi, *KM* V, 168-170; *B* 58-60.

81 I,13,III *Search*, *R-L*, *G* 145; *LO* 62. Quoted by Arnauld *VFI*, ch. 16.

- (1) a pure idea that is in God's mind but is not the exemplar cause of a material substance currently affecting the body's sense organs informs us that an idea, which is a possible exemplar cause, has a certain nature;
- (2) a confused idea that affects the soul when it is the exemplar cause of an existing material substance affecting the sense organs informs us that that substance exists; and
- (3) an idea that illuminates us when the soul is instantiating certain purely spiritual modes like pain informs us that we the soul is in a certain state, for example, pain:⁸²

I have made this observation... that bodies cannot act on, or reveal themselves to, minds, and that the bodies we look at when we open our eyes are quite different from the ideas that represent them and that affect us; that our soul finds its light, its life and its sustenance only in God; that it can have an immediate and direct relation only with Him and that the relation it has with its body and those surrounding it necessarily depends on the relation it has with the efficacious and luminous substance of the Divinity—a substance that discloses creatures to us as possible or as existing or as belonging to us, depending on the different ways in which it affects us insofar as it represents them: (1) as possible when the perception of the idea affecting us is pure, (2) as existing when the perception is sensible, and (3) as belonging to us and forming a part of us when the perception is very absorbing and lively, as in pain.

He gives as an example of sensation the case of seeing a cubic body:⁸³

Two simultaneous sensations affect the brain, say of size and 2 dimensional shape and distance and on that occasion an idea is "seen" with a content of the (true) figure of a 3-dimensional *cube C* as 3-*d*, and an associated judgment *a cube is 3-d*.

Ideas mix not only with sensations, which correspond to actually existing things, but also with memory and imagination, which do not:⁸⁴

82 *Search*, R-L, G 3:65; LO 575.

83 I.7.iv *Search*, R-L, G 1:96; LO 34.

84 *Search*, Conclusion of Bks. I-III; R-L, G 488, LO 261.

I have called sense when it receives from God ideas mixed with sensations, i.e. sensible ideas, on the occasion of certain movements taking place in its sense organs in the presence of objects. I have called it imagination and memory when it receives from God ideas mixed with images, which are a kind of weak and languid sensation the mind receives only because of certain traces being produced or aroused in the brain by the flow of spirits. Finally, I call it pure mind, or pure understanding, when it receives from God entirely pure ideas of the truth, with no admixture of sensation or images, through its union not with the body but with the Word, or the Wisdom, of God; not because it is in the sensible, material world, but because it subsists in the immaterial, intelligible world, not in order to know mutable things suited to the preservation of the life of the body, but to enter into immutable truths, which preserve in us the life of the mind.

Confused ideas, whether of sensation, imagination, or memory, are inferior to pure ideas. According to Descartes and Arnauld what is defective in a confused idea is that by mixing spiritual with material modes, they describe an impossible being of reason. The defect seen by Malebranche is more complex. What Malebranche calls a sensory idea—an idea that God causes to accompany a sensory mode—is defective not only because the uncritical might think that the sensory mode belongs to a body outside the mind, but also in that being general the idea itself never uniquely characterizes the individual outside the mind. In short, it is confused—true of many—in the medieval sense. To appreciate Malebranche's point it is helpful to explore his views about what medieval logicians would call an individual concept.

2.5 *Individual Concepts*

Malebranche is clear that he believes that a sensation like that of color “particularizes intelligible extension.”⁸⁵ He gives an example of how color allows us to sense an individual, the sun:⁸⁶

When we have a vivid sensation of light attached or related to an intelligible circle, distant through a certain intelligible space, and made sensible by different colors, we see the sun.

85 *Réponse VI, R-L, G 6:61.*

86 *Réponse, VI, R-L, G 6:55.*

He provides an extended description of the process:⁸⁷

The reason for this is that, when I see a black body on a white paper, it determines me to regard this black body like a particular body, which without its distinctive color would appear to be the same. Thus the differences of ideas of visible bodies do not come from the differences of colors. All the same, the whiteness of paper makes it so that I distinguish it from the carpet, the color separates it for me from the table, and that of the table makes it that I do not confound it with the air that surrounds it, or with the floor which supports it. All bodies are the same without this modification of the soul. Yet another reason is that Arnauld agrees that color is a modality of the soul. It is therefore general and always the same: it can be seen by the entire spirit, because, neither the intelligible extension, nor numbers, are in fact created beings or particulars. But color renders particular this intelligible extension, because, as I have just said, no modification of a creature, or *of a particular being*, can be a general being.

Here Malebranche describes the first part of the three part correlation: a one-to-one correspondence, between, on the one hand, sensed bodies and, on the other, sets of particular sensible modes instantiated in the soul. The correlation is caused by God. When the soul experiences a set of particularized sensible modes, God makes it the case that there exists proximate to a perceiver a characteristic material substance, and conversely.

The second correlation is a species of illumination, the relation that holds between sets of sensible modes and ideas. In his beneficence God makes it the case that a sensory experience is accompanied by a characteristic idea. This is a second correspondence. By a *lineage* let us mean a series of ideas ordered by the *is-more-perfect-than* relation, the first member being the most perfect, causally potent and general, the least member being the least perfect and most specific.⁸⁸ Illumination properly understood is a relation between a mental mode and an idea in a lineage. In sensation, then, when we experience a set of sensible modes correlated with a body outside the mind, we are simultaneously illuminated by at least one idea that is an exemplar cause of that body.

It is by means of associated ideas, moreover, that we individuate—to the degree that we can individuate—the individuals we sense. Part of understanding ideas consists of understanding the differences among them, which is expressed in negative identity judgments. Due to the correlation between sets

87 *Réponse*, VI:xii. R-L, G 6:60-61, S p. 319.

88 In the terminology of note 41, a lineage is a sub-branch in the lattice structure of ideas.

of sensible modes and idea lineages, and the mapping between perceived bodies and sensible mode sets, it follows that if in sensation we are illuminated by two ideas from distinct (non-overlapping) lineages, the sets of sensible modes associated with them are distinct, and in turn so are the sensed bodies outside the mind. Thus though we cannot know a material substance directly, we can in a sense know what sort of thing it. We do so by the ideas with which we are illuminated when we sense it. Moreover, we distinguish between two material substances by the distinction between the ideas from different lineages that we experience at the moment of sensation.

It is not the case, however, that we know individual material things in their full specificity. Malebranche denies that God has what medieval logicians would call individual concepts, concepts that uniquely signify a single creature:⁸⁹

It should not be imagined that the intelligible world is related to the sensible material world in such a way that there is an intelligible sun, for example, or an intelligible horse or tree intended to represent to us the sun or a horse or a tree, or that everyone who sees the sun necessarily sees this hypothetical intelligible sun. Given that all intelligible extension can be conceived of as circular, or as having the intelligible figure of a horse or a tree, all of intelligible extension can serve to represent the sun, or a horse or a tree, and consequently can be the sun or a horse or a tree if the soul has some sensation upon the occasion of bodies to attach to these ideas, i.e., if these ideas affect the soul with sensible perceptions.

Thus, when I said that we see different bodies through the knowledge we have of God's perfections that represent them, I did not exactly mean that there are in God certain particular ideas that represent each body individually, and that we see such an idea when we see the body; for we certainly could not see this body as sometimes great, sometimes small, sometimes round, sometimes square, if we saw it through a particular idea that would always be the same. But I do say that we see all things in God through the efficacy of His substance, and particularly sensible things, through God's applying intelligible extension to our mind in a thousand different ways, and that thus intelligible extension contains all the perfections, or rather, all the differences of bodies due to the different sensations that the soul projects on the ideas upon the occasion of these same bodies.

89 *Elucidation X, R-L, G* 3:153-154. *LO* 626-27. *Pyle* 2003 pp. 64-65 argues Malebranche should accept individual concepts. This reading is unnecessary and theoretically undesirable.

God does not know each created body by an idea that has that body as its unique material instance because he knows all his material creatures emanatively by understanding the idea of extension in general. Likewise we need not know an idea of an individual to understand what it is that we sense because it is sufficient to know some idea, which may be quite general, under which that body falls. Nor need we be illuminated by individual ideas—those that have a unique material instance—to distinguish between two sensed bodies. It is sufficient that the ideas by which we are illuminated on sensing them are from distinct non-overlapping lineages.

Contra Malebranche, medieval logicians like John Buridan believed it was possible to form an individual concept. Buridan, for example, thought that by adding progressively more defining features to a general concept we could arrive at a concept that signified exactly one thing.⁹⁰ In a similar way Frege and Russell thought that the reference of a proper name is uniquely determined, in Frege's case by a uniquely determining sense and in Russell's by a uniquely determining description. In fact, however, these views are problematic. We are rarely able to uniquely describe the many individual things we name, must less those we know without names. One of the advantages of modern causal theories of reference is that they avoid this implication. It is also a virtue of Malebranche's theory although his causal account of reference is rather different.

From the perspective of Cartesian semantics it is also interesting that Malebranche has a unique Cartesian account of the truth-value of judgments with a non-referring subject term, or what the Cartesians would call a false idea. Strictly speaking, in Malebranche's view a judgment's truth is a matter of ideas and is independent of whether it corresponds to an actually existing material substance outside the mind. Thus Malebranche would side with Suárez that, on the assumption that a chimera is a possible object, the judgment *a chimera is a chimera* is true because it is a truth about ideas. On the other hand, since there are in fact no chimeras, there are no sensations correlated with the idea, and hence we have no evidence from experience that they exist.

2.6 *Contingent Truth*

Mental terms, which are modes of the soul, are associated with material substances outside the mind by two indirect relational routes. The term, a mental mode, directly signifies the idea in the mind that God causes its soul to understand when he instantiates the term in the soul. That idea in turn is the exemplar cause of various material substances. The set of these material instances

90 Buridan 1989, pp. 395-399, 413-418, 498-506, 633.

would make up what a modern logician would call its *extension*. The mental term (a mental mode) may also be also associated with a material substance because it is simultaneously a mode of sensation. If the term is one of those that God instantiates in the soul so as to be simultaneously a sensible mode, then the term is associated with the substance outside the mind that God causes to exist simultaneously with the sensible mode. If this happens, then the two routes to the external world meet. First, a perception of an idea is associated by illumination with any possible material substance of which that idea is the exemplar cause. Secondly, the very same perception is simultaneously a sensory mode, one that God causes to be instantiated in the soul on the occasion that a material substance is affecting the sense organs and brain. The two routes meet because the body affecting the sense organs and brain has that idea as exemplar cause.

An idea that illumines the soul on the occasion of the sensory experience of an existing body Malebranche calls a *sensory idea*. Let us call the sensible mode that is the perception caused on this occasion a *sensory term*. It follows that if a judgment *every S is P* is true and is composed of sensory terms, then it corresponds to multiple facts in nature outside the mind. First of all, every material substance that is caused by the idea signified by *S* is also caused by the idea signified by *P*. Equivalently, the modern extension of *S* is a subset of the modern extension of *P*. More particularly, it also follows that the material substance correlated with *S* is the same as or similar to that correlated with *P*. If, like Arnauld, Malebranche understood a singular affirmative as a special case of universal affirmative—a topic Malebranche does not discuss—the singular judgment *S is P* formed with singular sensory terms would be true if the material substances associated with both terms were identical or similar. Thus, even though the judgment *every S is P* is about ideas and true for that reason, there are special cases in which a true judgment about ideas holds only when certain facts hold about nature. As truths about ideas, however, they are necessary. Understood as indirectly about material objects, they are contingent.

Earlier in paper the distinction was drawn between two senses of necessity: a necessary truth is one that is eternally and immutably true, and a necessary fact is one that is causally determined in a necessary and unconditional way. In Malebranche's semantics, strictly speaking all true universal affirmatives are about ideas. Since their relations part of God's nature and are eternal, *every S is P* is necessarily true in both senses.

Creatures in nature, however, are causally contingent. They are created by a free act of God's will. There are therefore not causally determined in an unconditional way, and are mutable. If *every S is P* is true and composed of sensory ideas, then, it is a contingent fact that any material substance in the modern

extension of *S* is a member of the modern extension of *P*. Since this is true for all elements of the extension of *P*, it is universally true. In this sense the judgment is both contingent and universal. That is, a true universal judgment every *S* is *P* composed of sensory terms is, as a fact about ideas, necessary, but as a truth that corresponds to facts about nature, it is in a sense contingent.

There may seem to be a problem here. How can one and the same judgment be contingent and necessary? Are there not contingent truths that are not necessary? On Malebranche's view, however, the answer is no. A judgment that seems to count as contingent but not necessary is *the sun is setting*. Let us suppose that it is true. In that case, on Malebranche's analysis, the sun as a material substance participates in the idea "setting." On the one hand, because "setting" is an idea, it has a definition and essence, which God has known from eternity. This comprises some abstract spatial properties of extension relative to the ideas of the earth and mobility, and these determine how a possible material instance of a "setting" will manifest itself in the appropriate way. The judgment describing this essence is determinately and eternally true. To the extent that humans understand the sun, there is also an idea of the sun. It too is eternal, with an essence, and there is a necessary judgment describing the conditions of any possible material sun. This idea participates in the idea of setting. It was for this reason that medieval logicians understood the copula of essential judgments to lack existential import. As they would put it, *the sun is setting* is equivalent to the conditional *if it is the sun, then it would be setting*.⁹¹ This is a necessarily true attribution of essential properties that are dispositional. That is, the judgment *the sun is setting* as a fact about ideas is a necessary truth because it is really a dispositional assertion: *the sun is the sort of thing that would be setting if it existed*.

On the other hand, the setting sun is a fact in the material world. The imperfect quantity of being that constitutes the material sun is derived by privation from the being that constitutes the idea of setting. Because this is a fact of nature, it is contingent on God's will and is not unconditionally determined. The fact that the terms *the sun* and *setting* are sensory, is a mark that this fact obtains. The soul, moreover, is aware through direct awareness of the sensible modes associated with it. In short, the content of judgment *the sun is setting* might be expressed more fully as *necessarily, the sun is the sort of thing that sets, and lo, there is occurring right now something that is both a sun and a setting*.

The whole picture of how contingent truth works is now clear. The combination of, on the one hand, the dispositional truth about essences lacking in existential import and the sensory signal that the judgment corresponds to a

91 Martin 2011.

contingent fact, makes the judgment not only true necessarily in a dispositional sense but also in relevant cases a carrier of existential import.

3 Conclusion

There is perhaps much to fault in Malebranche's wider philosophy, its florid ontology and dubious account of causation above all. On the other hand, it should be clear from this discussion that Malebranche presumes a variety of Neoplatonic semantics that is of interest not only because it sheds some light on issues in his metaphysics and epistemology, but also because it is novel in its own right. The semantic structure he assumes, which is ordered by a privative relation on being, provides a framework that helps explain the way ideas reside in God's mind, the notion of resemblance in which bodies imitate their exemplar causes, and the mechanism by which agents can see bodies when they "see" ideas. Of more direct interest to the history of logic is his version of indirect reference, his correspondence theory of truth for necessary judgments, and his account of contingent truth, especially its indirect reference relation that is both descriptive and causal but does not appeal to body-mind causation. By appeal to his theory of perception, he works out an account of singular reference in which singular terms carry existential import, refer indirectly via causal relations, but describe their referents only in a general way. The combination of these semantic views is unique in the history of logic, and intriguing to the extent that they are embedded in an overall theory that presupposes definable linguistic structures—those of scalar adjectives. Malebranche may be mistaken about the ontic structure of the real world, but this discussion has shown that to the extent that his Christian-Neoplatonism depends on scalar language and structure, it is not only novel, but coherent and consistent.

References

Abbreviations used in the footnotes:

<i>B</i>	<i>Arnauld 1996</i>
<i>JS</i>	<i>Malebranche 1997</i>
<i>KM</i>	<i>Arnauld 1813</i>
<i>LAP</i>	<i>Logique ou l'Art de Penser</i>

<i>Search, R-L, G</i>	<i>Recherche de la Vérité, Robinet 1962-1990.1962</i>
<i>R</i>	<i>Robinet 1964</i>
<i>Dialogues</i>	<i>Malebranche 1997</i>
<i>OC</i>	<i>Œuvres complètes de Malebranche</i>
<i>Réponse</i>	<i>Réponse du Père Malebranche au Livre des fausses Idées</i>
<i>TL</i>	<i>Trois lettres de l'auteur De la Recherche de la Vérité</i>
<i>Vivès</i>	<i>Suárez et al. 1856-1878</i>

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