

Occasionalism – Malbranche

1. Bodies and minds are not causes: Malbranche notes that we have only two sorts of ideas: ideas of material bodies, and ideas of immaterial minds.

- (a) Bodies are not causes: It is clear that bodies cannot move themselves. No one has ever seen a rock or a house get up and walk away.
- (b) Minds are not causes: Most people conclude from this that MINDS are what move bodies. But, Malbranche rejects this also. There is no necessary connection between the will of our mind and the motion of bodies, he says. All we ever observe is that, e.g., our mind wills our arm to move, and our arm moves. But, we never actually observe causation. (Can you detect the similarities between Malbranche's view of causation and Hume's?). He concludes that mind and body CANNOT cause anything in each other because they are so different and unrelated. He writes, "material things ... certainly cannot be united to our soul ... because, since they are extended and the soul is not so, there is no relation between them." (3.2.1)

2. God as cause: But, God is omnipotent. An omnipotent being can surely cause things to happen to matter and minds. It would be a contradiction to conceive of an omnipotent God willing that my arm should move, and yet my arm remains motionless. Therefore, God is capable of causing things.

In fact, God is the ONLY being capable of causing things: Not only is mind incapable of moving matter, and vice versa, but mind is not even capable of moving IDEAS. In chapter 3 of *Search After Truth*, Malbranche points out that man cannot create something from nothing. So, when we call up some idea from imagination, for instance, this idea is not created from nothing. But, neither is it created from something material, since it is impossible to create an immaterial thing from a material one. So, perhaps man calls up ideas from something immaterial. But, this won't work either. For, ideas are representations OF things; and, you can't form a representation of a thing unless you already know the thing. Yet, we cannot know a thing except through an idea of it. In short, in order to produce an idea of something in our own mind, we would ALREADY have to possess the idea in our mind.

3. Occasionalism: The conclusion is that, for every event, God is the cause. The specific version of this view that Malbranche advocates is called Occasionalism. This is the view that every event is an "occasion" for God to exercise His power to make things happen. He writes, "there is only one true cause because there

is only one true God; the nature or power of each thing is but the will of God; all natural causes are not the *true* causes but only *occasional* causes." For instance, every time a billiard ball strikes another, this is an occasion for God to stop the first ball and make the second ball start moving, in accordance with certain physical laws that God created (since bodies cannot move themselves). Or, every time you will to move your arm, this is an occasion for God to move your arm in accordance with your will (since minds cannot move matter). Or, every time you will to imagine a unicorn, this is an occasion for God to present your mind with the idea of a unicorn, in accordance with your will (since minds cannot produce their own ideas).

In this way, Malbranche is able to retain Dualism without having to explain how minds affect matter and vice versa; namely, by rejecting Interactionism. Occasionalism rejects the notion that minds EVER affect matter, and vice versa. The only being that affects anything directly is God.

[Question: Can you see how Berkeley's Idealism might be considered an extension of Malbranche's view?]

Parallelism - Leibniz

1. Against Descartes and Malbranche: Leibniz criticizes Cartesian Dualism and Occasionalism.

Descartes knew that the soul could not produce motion in bodies, since the universe, he believed, has a constant amount of motion (given to it by God) that cannot be created or destroyed. However, he believed that the soul could act on the body by RE-DIRECTING bodies. However, Leibniz notes that not only is the amount of motion conserved in nature, but the DIRECTION of motion is preserved in nature by physical laws. It would be absurd to think that the mind intervenes in or affects the physical world, because it could only do so by violating the physical laws.

Malbranche claimed that we do NOT intervene in the physical world; only God does. But, Leibniz rejects this view as well. On Malbranche's view (Occasionalism) God would be performing countless miracles every day. That is absurd.

2. Pre-Established Harmony: Leibniz offers an alternative. Like Malbranche's Occasionalist view, Leibniz's view also rejects Interactionism. The mind and the body do not interact at all. Each of these two types of substance operates on a completely different set of laws, and for one to interact with the other would be a violation of those laws.

So, the view that he offers is that the physical world and the mental world operate IN HARMONY with one another. For instance, when my mind (operating under mental laws) wills to move my arm, it just so happens that my arm (operating under physical laws) at that very moment MOVES. In other words, the physical world and the mental world are completely synchronized—they are PARALLEL—in such a way that their unison makes it SEEM as if they are affecting each other.

Where does this synchronization come from? God. God “wound up” the physical universe from the very beginning and gave it a set of laws that would make the physical world unfold “in harmony” with the mental world.