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Natures, Laws, and Miracles: The Roots of Leibniz's Critique of Occasionalism

Leibniz regarded his theory of preestablished harmony as offering the only plausible explanation of the remarkable agreement of the soul and the body: the agreement whereby physical stimuli give rise to appropriate sensory perceptions and volitions of the will terminate in appropriate bodily motions. According to his account, there is no real communication between the soul and the body, for neither is capable of exerting a real causal influence on the other. Instead, the soul and the body are to be conceived on the analogy of two perfectly synchronized clocks: each is responsible for the production of all its own states, yet the two nevertheless manage to agree or "harmonize" as a consequence of the consummate skill of the watchmaker who first set them in motion.

I thank Thomas M. Lennon and Steven Nadler for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this chapter.

Since its conception, the theory of preestablished harmony has confronted the charge that it is at bottom indistinguishable from the doctrine of occasionalism.¹ Like preestablished harmony, occasionalism denies any causal influence of one created substance on another. By its account the only real causal agent is God, who causes thoughts to arise in the soul on the occasion of the appropriate motions in the body, and movements of the body on the occasion of the appropriate volitions of the will.² Now, fairly clearly, this is not a position to which Leibniz himself subscribes. Critics of preestablished harmony, however, are little moved by this fact. They allow that occasionalism may make a more direct appeal to divine action than does preestablished harmony; nevertheless, they contend that the two theories share the crucial feature that a *prima facie* natural phenomenon is ascribed to a supernatural cause: either God's immediate production of all the states of the soul and the body, or his creation of two substances that are programmed to instantiate just those states that will ensure their perfect agreement. From the critic's point of view, the similarities between occasionalism and preestablished harmony far outweigh their differences. Whether God actually deals the cards or merely stacks the deck, the result is the same.

In certain moods, Leibniz is happy to acknowledge the common ground the theory of preestablished harmony shares with occasionalism. Despite his concessions on this point, however, he remains adamant that there are important problems with the doctrine of occasionalism that his theory avoids.³ Among the most prominent objections he raises to it are the following: (1) occasionalism is inconsistent with the supposition of finite substances; (2) occasionalism presupposes the occurrence of "perpetual miracles"; and (3) occasionalism requires that God "disturb" (*déranger, troubler*) the ordinary laws of nature. The first of these objections has received considerable attention in the literature. It has generally been acknowledged that Leibniz faults occasionalists for transferring all power to God on the grounds that such a move leads inevitably to the denial of finite

1. This criticism was first made by Arnauld; see his letter to Leibniz of 4 March 1687 (G II, 84/LA 105-6).

2. As Leibniz himself notes, the occasionalist theory is not limited to an account of soul-body relations, but extends also to causal interactions among bodies: "since the communication of motions also seemed inconceivable to them, they believed that God imparts motion to a body on the occasion of the motion of another body" (G IV, 483/AG 143). For recent reassertions of this point, see Thomas M. Lennon, "Philosophical Commentary," in LO, 810, and Steven Nadler, "Occasionalism and the Mind-Body Problem," *Oxford Studies in the History of Philosophy* 2 (forthcoming).

3. For examples of Leibniz both affirming and qualifying the relation of this theory to the doctrine of occasionalism, see his letters to L'Hospital (30 September 1695; GM II, 299) and Remond (26 August 1714; G III, 625).

created substances, that is, to Spinozism. At issue here is the proper understanding of divine omnipotence, and of the relationship between the power of God and that of created things. In this essay, I will not be directly concerned with this topic, although in the next section I will sketch the main lines of Leibniz's argument. My focus instead will be on objections (2) and (3). I will argue that both of these objections derive from a particular conception of the intelligibility of nature, a conception to which Leibniz is firmly committed and that occasionalists like Malebranche no less firmly reject. I will further suggest that this division is rooted in a deeper disagreement about the correct interpretation of divine wisdom as it figures in the respective theodicies of Leibniz and Malebranche.

I

Leibniz's theory of substance is constructed around two main claims: first, any substance is endowed with an intrinsic force or power sufficient to determine all its own states or modifications; second, the determinations of this active power are in agreement or harmony with those of the active powers of all other substances. It is the first of these claims that bears directly on his critique of occasionalism, for it is the occasionalist view that created beings lack all activity and that God alone has the power to bring about things in the world. Nevertheless, it is at least worth noting here the significance of the idea of universal harmony that animates Leibniz's thought from his earliest days.⁴ It is a fundamental thesis of his philosophy that harmony, or the unity and agreement of a multiplicity of diverse beings, is a defining characteristic of metaphysical perfection. Consequently, insofar as it is accepted that God has been motivated to select this world for existence on account of its superior perfection, such a harmony must be a key component in our understanding of the world. The doctrine of the preestablished harmony of substances is but a refinement of this basic theme.⁵

4. Leibniz's attachment to this idea can be traced to his early (c. 1663–66) acquaintance with the writings of Johann Heinrich Bisterfeld (see A vi.1; 151–61).

5. It is important to distinguish Leibniz's arguments *against* occasionalism from his arguments *for* preestablished harmony. In this essay, I am concerned solely with the former, which do not directly involve the doctrine of harmony. Arguments against occasionalism form an essential component of one of Leibniz's main defenses of preestablished harmony. Briefly, he contends that there are only three ways of accounting for the agreement of the soul and the body: interactionism, occasionalism, and preestablished harmony. Neither interactionism nor occasionalism is tenable; preestablished harmony is possible; therefore, preestablished

That any substance is endowed with an intrinsic force or power appears in many places as a necessary truth for Leibniz. Commenting on Locke's debate with the Bishop of Worcester in the Preface to the *New Essays*, he says unequivocally that "activity is the essence of substance in general" (NE 65). Similarly, in a letter to De Volder, he writes that it is "metaphysically necessary" that any substance possess an intrinsic activity (G II, 169; cf. G VI, 598/AG 207). Again, he writes to Bayle in 1702 that "[w]ithout an internal force of action a thing could not be a substance, for the nature of substance consists in this regulated tendency, from which phenomena are born in order" (G III, 58). As I read these remarks, they involve more than a mere stipulation on Leibniz's part. Rather than simply fixing what is to be called "substance," he is working from a complex, historically rooted conception of what it is to *be* a substantial being, and is subsequently arguing that these conditions can only be satisfied if substance is conceived as being by nature a principle of activity. We may see him as claiming that substance could not fulfill its prescribed metaphysical roles—as an ultimate explanatory principle, as a being that is dependent for its existence on no other created being, as a being that persists through change, and as a true unity—unless it is also conceived as a principle of activity: a source productive of changes in its states or modifications, which nevertheless persists as itself through those changes.

Now, the occasionalist response to this line of reasoning will be to reassert the essential dependence in Christian metaphysics of all created being on God. As Malebranche interprets this dependence, created beings are conserved in existence only because God continues to will their existence. Thus, while from the side of creatures there appears to be a difference between creation and conservation, "in reality, creation does not pass away, since in God conservation and creation are one and the same volition, which consequently is necessarily followed by the same effects" (OC XII–XIII,

harmony must be accepted (cf. the "New System of the Nature and Communication of Substances" [G IV, 477–87/AG 138–45] and the Postscript to his 1696 letter to Basnage de Beauval [G IV, 498–500/AG 147–49]). In addition to this "argument from elimination," Leibniz also advances an *a priori* argument for preestablished harmony based on his concept of substance (cf. G IV, 494/P 126). Here the doctrine of harmony, or at least the weaker doctrine of universal expression, plays a central role in his reasoning. Starting from the premise that "God originally created the soul (or any other real unity) in such a way that everything must arise for it from its own depths, through a perfect *spontaneity* relative to itself, and yet with a perfect *conformity* relative to external things," he concludes in the "New System" that "[i]t is this mutual relation, regulated in advance in each substance of the universe, which produces what we call their *communication*, and which alone brings about the *union of soul and body*" (G IV, 484–85/AG 144). For a full discussion of both these arguments, see R. C. Sleight, Jr., *Leibniz and Arnauld: A Commentary on Their Correspondence* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1990), pp. 161–80.

157/D 153). The dependence of creatures on God, moreover, extends not only to the conservation of their existence but to the conservation of their particular modalities.

[God] cannot will what cannot be conceived. Hence, He cannot will that this chair exist without willing at the same time that it exist in some place or other and without his will putting it there, since you are unable to conceive that this chair exists and that it does not exist in some place, there or elsewhere. (OC XII–XIII, 156/D 153)

The upshot of the occasionalist position is that creatures essentially dependent on God are *completely* dependent on him for the production of all their states and effects. They possess no power to bring such things about themselves.⁶ This is the conclusion that Leibniz rejects, emphasizing instead the connection between the claim of substance to an existence that, while dependent, is nonetheless distinct from that of God and its status as a persisting principle of activity.⁷ In the absence of such a connection, he argues, the occasionalist position comes dangerously close to Spinozism. If created beings are denied a persistent force capable of producing (with the concurrence of God) their own modifications, and if instead those modifications are ascribed exclusively to the action of God, it ceases to make sense to talk about the modifications as being *theirs* rather than God's. Without a force of some duration, Leibniz writes in the 1698 essay *De ipsa natura*,

no created substance, no soul would remain numerically the same, and thus, nothing would be conserved by God, and consequently all things would be only certain vanishing or unstable modifications or phantasms, so to speak, of the one permanent divine substance. Or, what comes to the same thing, God would be the very nature or substance of all things. (G IV, 508–9/AG 160)⁸

6. The above is not intended as a full account of Malebranche's arguments for this last claim. See Lennon, "Philosophical Commentary," in LO, pp. 809ff.; and Robert C. Sleight, Jr., "Leibniz on Malebranche on Causality," in *Central Themes in Early Modern Philosophy*, ed. J. A. Cover and Mark Kulstad (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett, 1990), pp. 161–93.

7. The precise nature of the dependence of created substances on God in Leibniz's philosophy—the content of his doctrine of divine concurrence—is a vexed issue. See Sleight, *Leibniz and Arnauld*, pp. 183–85, and "Leibniz on Malebranche on Causality."

8. See also his letter to Lelong of 5 February 1712:

[F]orce is one of the principal perfections, which being removed there will remain nearly nothing of [substance], or soon nothing at all. And I dare to say that without force, there will be no substance; and one will fall, despite oneself, into the opinion of Spinoza, according to whom creatures are only passing modifications. It is necessary, therefore, to say that God gives the force, and that he does not replace it, in order to preserve the substances outside of him. (ML 421)

Leibniz's first, and in many ways most compelling, response to occasionalism, then, is to claim that to deny causal activity to substances is to deny that they satisfy the conditions of persistence and independence constitutive of substantial being. Thus, rather than solving the problem of how two distinct substances like mind and body appear to communicate with one another, occasionalists eliminate the problem by, in effect, denying that there are two such substances.

In the essay *De ipsa natura* Leibniz offers a further argument for the intrinsic activity of substance. He is principally occupied in this text with criticizing the occasionalist view, defended by Johann Christopher Sturm, that the motion of bodies occurs solely "by virtue of the eternal law God once set up." As it stands, Leibniz argues, this claim may be interpreted in one of two ways. On the one hand, it may imply that the motions of bodies come about as the result of a single original "volition or command" on the part of God, or "a divine law that . . . bestowed a mere *extrinsic denomination* . . . on things." On the other hand, this volition or command may be understood to have "conferred some kind of enduring impression" on things: namely, "an inherent law [*legem insitam*], . . . from which both actions and passions follow" (G IV, 506–7/AG 158). Leibniz strongly attacks the first of these alternatives, which he associates with occasionalists like Sturm, on the grounds that it destroys any intelligible connection between God's original volition and the present effects of things:

For, since that past command does not now exist, it cannot now bring anything about unless it left behind some subsistent effect at the time, an effect which even now endures and is now at work. Whoever thinks otherwise, in my judgment, renounces all distinct explanation of things; anything could equally well be said to follow from anything else if something absent in place or time could be at work here and now, without an intermediary. And so, it is not sufficient to say that God, creating things in the beginning, willed that they follow a certain definite law in their change [*progressus*] if we imagine this will to have been so ineffective that things are not affected by it and no lasting effect was produced in them. (G, IV 507/AG 158)

The only coherent way to understand the connection between God's volition and the present effects of things, he argues, is to suppose that God's action has left some permanent impression on them: an "inherent law" that is sufficient to account for the pattern of their particular effects that itself involves an intrinsic force.

But if, indeed, the law God laid down left some trace of itself impressed on things, if by his command things were formed in such a way that they were rendered appropriate for fulfilling the will of the command, then already we must admit that a certain efficacy has been placed in things, a form or a force, something like what we usually call by the name 'nature,' something from which the series of phenomena follow in accordance with the prescript of the first command. (G IV, 507/AG 158–59).

This second argument provides a basis for rejecting at least one version of the occasionalist thesis and for recognizing in its stead the existence of beings endowed with an intrinsic force or activity. However, it is doubtful whether it proves telling against all versions of the doctrine. In criticizing Sturm, Leibniz begins from the assumption that God's will is exercised in the form of a single command prior to creation; from this he infers that such a command is either insufficient to account for the present effects of things, or that it issued in the creation of beings whose natures incorporate causal powers capable of producing the observed effects. An occasionalist might object, however, that Leibniz has omitted the possibility that God acts either by a continuous series of particular acts of will, intervening at each moment to secure a particular effect, or by an eternal or timeless will, which is sufficient to account for the effects of all things at all times, without the action of secondary causes. And, indeed, this latter view would seem to be the position of Malebranche, who writes in his *Dialogues on Metaphysics*: "From all eternity God has willed, and to all eternity He will continue to will—or, to speak more accurately, God wills unceasingly though without variation, without succession, without necessity—everything He will do in the course of time" (OC XII–XIII, 159/D 157).⁹ Here, then, would seem to be a version of occasionalism that is at least *prima facie* resistant to Leibniz's charge that the doctrine assumes an unbridgeable gap between God's original volition and the present effects of things.

II

I turn now to Leibniz's second main criticism of occasionalism—his objection from the intelligibility of nature. The crux of his criticism here is that,

9. In "Occasionalism and General Will in Malebranche," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* (forthcoming), Steven Nadler argues that the former more accurately represents Malebranche's position: "that God always acts in accordance with the laws he has established in the realm of nature . . . does not rule out an infinite number of temporalized and individual acts of will on God's part" (pp. 20–21).

regardless of the mode of God's willing (whether it be singular or successive, in time or eternal), occasionalism is to be rejected on the grounds that it assumes a natural order that is at odds with the *wisdom* God has exercised in selecting this world for existence. Thus, in addition to the objection that a world with no secondary causal powers would be a world in which there would be no persistent substances, and hence no distinction between God and creation, Leibniz claims that the occasionalist picture of God acting at each instant to secure the continued progression of the world, or acting timelessly to produce the totality of the world's effects, fails to support the idea that God has chosen to create this world, as the best of all possible worlds, because it best answers to the demands of his wisdom.

Essential to Leibniz's conception of this as the best of all possible worlds is that it is a world in which the principle of sufficient reason is observed, a world in which for anything that happens there is a reason that it happens thus and not otherwise. A further dimension of this requirement, however, which has not been widely recognized, is that within the "order of nature" it is not enough simply that there be some reason for anything to happen as it does; in addition, there must be what Leibniz calls a "natural reason": a reason that displays the effect in question as following in an intelligible manner from the nature or essence of some created being.¹⁰ As Leibniz writes in the Preface to the *New Essays*,

within the order of nature (miracles apart) it is not at God's arbitrary discretion to attach this or that quality haphazardly to substances. He will never give them any that are not natural to them, that is, that cannot arise from their nature as explicable modifications. (NE 66)

In attempting to account for the phenomena of nature, Leibniz argues, we may reject as insufficient any explanation that appeals either to supernatural causes or to unintelligible "occult qualities": forms or faculties that are postulated solely for the purpose of accounting for a particular phenomenon (e.g., gravity, magnetism), without an attempt being made to explain how such a quality follows from the nature of its subject. We must instead begin from the assumption that the properties of things can in general be conceived as modifications of attributes that partly define the natures of their subjects.¹¹ I will return later to the deeper motivations, associated with

10. Compare G III, 519. I discuss this requirement in detail in my essay "Leibniz's Principle of Intelligibility" (*History of Philosophy Quarterly*, forthcoming).

11. This is the objection that Leibniz raises against Locke's notion of "thinking matter":

As for thought, it is certain, as our author more than once acknowledges, that it cannot

his understanding of divine wisdom, that attract Leibniz to this "principle of intelligibility." For the moment, I want to examine how it is applied in his critique of occasionalism.

We may begin with Leibniz's claim that occasionalism employs God as a *deus ex machina*, and that it consequently resorts to miracles in its attempt to account for the agreement of the body and the soul.¹² The first of these charges rests squarely on the principle just described. Espousing a conception of nature's order in which an explanation of the effects of any thing is always to be sought in that thing's intrinsic nature, Leibniz is hostile to all attempts to account for features of the natural world through appeal to divine action. A similar line of reasoning supports the claim that occasionalism transforms a natural circumstance like the agreement of the body and the soul into a "perpetual miracle." Pierre Bayle, who had commented on Leibniz's "New System" in his *Dictionnaire Critique et Historique* of 1697, argues that Leibniz had simply misunderstood the occasionalist position in bringing this objection against it.¹³ According to Bayle, occasionalism does not require that the actions of God occur miraculously. For an occasionalist like Malebranche, God acts in the world, but he ordinarily acts only by "general volitions" or "according to general laws"; hence, the natural order of things does not amount to a continual miracle.¹⁴

In his 1698 reply to Bayle, Leibniz reiterates his charge against occasionalism, while taking care to distinguish his own understanding of the notion of a miracle from that assumed by Bayle:

be an intelligible modification of matter and be comprehensible and explicable in terms of it. That is, a sentient or thinking being is not a mechanical thing like a watch or a mill: one cannot conceive of sizes and shapes and motions combining mechanically to produce something which thinks, and senses too, in a mass where [formerly] there was nothing of the kind—something which would likewise be extinguished by the machine's going out of order. So sense and thought are not something which is natural to matter, and there are only two ways in which they could occur in it: through God's combining it with a substance to which thought is natural, or through his putting thought into it by a miracle. (NE 66–67).

Compare his letter to Lady Masham of 30 June 1704 (G III, 355/AG 290).

12. Compare the "New System":

It is quite true that, speaking with metaphysical rigor, there is no real influence of one created substance on another, and that all things, with all their reality, are continually produced by the power [*vertu*] of God. But in solving problems it is not sufficient to make use of the general cause and to invoke what is called a *Deus ex machina*. For when one does that without giving any other explanation derived from the order of secondary causes, it is, properly speaking, having recourse to miracle. (G IV, 483/AG 143).

13. See "Remark H" to the article "Rorarius" in Pierre Bayle, *Historical and Critical Dictionary: Selections*, trans. Richard H. Popkin (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett, 1991), p. 238.

14. Compare *Traité de la Nature et de la Grace* I, lix (OC V, 63); and *Dialogues on Metaphysics* VIII, iii (OC XII–XIII, 177–78/D 175).

[L]et us see whether the system of occasional causes does not in fact assume a perpetual miracle. Here it is said that it does not, because according to this system God would only act through general laws. I agree, but in my opinion this does not suffice to remove the miracles; even if God should do this continuously, they would not cease being miracles, taking this word, not in the popular sense of a rare and marvelous thing, but in the philosophical sense of what exceeds the powers of created things. It is not enough to say that God has made a general law; for besides this decree there must be a natural means of executing it; that is, it is necessary that what happens can be explained through the nature that God gives to things. (G IV, 520/L 494)¹⁵

In this passage, as in many others like it, Leibniz links his understanding of the miraculousness of events to his conception of the intelligibility of nature. What qualifies an effect as “extraordinary” or miraculous, he argues, is that it cannot be explained by the natures of created things. Occasionalism, in interpreting all change as the direct effect of God’s action, denies that such explanations can be given for natural effects. Hence, it renders them miraculous. From Leibniz’s perspective, it matters not whether occasionalists interpret God as intervening only in a regular manner or according to “general volitions.” The point is that on their view God *does* intervene in the world, rather than granting created things natures sufficient to account for their effects.

In claiming that the system of occasional causes assumes a “perpetual miracle,” then, Leibniz does not fault occasionalists for advancing a theory in which no provision is made for natural regularities. His objection is instead directed at how occasionalists account for such regularities. According to Malebranche, a law of nature exists just in case God wills that a certain sort of event should regularly follow another sort of event. On his account, God’s nature places important constraints on the form that natural laws can take. Most significantly, such laws will always be simple and will guarantee the maximum uniformity of nature, since these qualities reflect the perfection of God’s “ways.”¹⁶ Beyond this, Leibniz argues, occasional-

15. Similar statements appear in the *Theodicy*, §207 (G VI, 240–41/H 257) and § 355 (G VI, 326/H 338–39), in his comments on Lamy (G IV, 587–88, 594–95), and in his letters to Basnage de Beauval, c. 1696 (G III, 122), and Conti, 9 April 1716 (GB 277). Leibniz does not deny the possibility of God’s extraordinary intervention in the world, but only claims that it is necessary to draw a clear distinction between the ordinary course of nature, which can be understood through the natures of created things, and genuine miracles. Thus, he writes to Lady Masham in 1704 that “the ways of God are of two sorts, the one natural, the other miraculous” (G III, 353).

16. See section III below.

ists regard natural laws as products of divine convention. All things being equal, there is no reason that bodies should tend to move along a tangential path, rather than a circular one, except that God has decreed it to be so. Likewise, there is no reason that minds and bodies should not interact (in the occasionalist's sense), so long as God chooses that such a regularity should be observed in nature. It is precisely this suggestion of the potential arbitrariness of God's choice concerning the laws of nature that Leibniz finds objectionable.¹⁷ For properties or events to be characterized as natural, it is not enough that they conform to lawlike generalizations. In addition, it must be possible to understand how such properties or events follow from the nature of their subject. The debate between Leibniz and the occasionalists thus comes down to the question of what it is to be a genuine law of nature (and, conversely, what it is to be a miracle or an exception to such a law). According to occasionalists, a law of nature exists just in case God wills, in a manner consistent with his nature, that a certain regularity should occur. According to Leibniz, for a generalization to qualify as a law of nature it must, in addition, be possible to conceive of the effects it describes as "explicable modifications" of the nature of their subject. To put the point succinctly, for Leibniz, laws of nature are laws of *natures*: exceptionless sequences of events that are explainable by the intrinsic natures of *types* of being.¹⁸

17. Responding to François Lamy's critique of the doctrine of preestablished harmony in his *Connaissance de soi-même* (1699), Leibniz writes that according to occasionalists "a miracle is only an exception to general rules or laws that God has established arbitrarily. Thus once God has made it a general law or rule that the body should always agree with the soul, and vice versa, there would be no miracle about it; and in this sense, a miracle would only differ from another action of God by an external denomination, that is, by its rarity" (G IV, 594). There is no question that in Leibniz's mind occasionalists are committed to the arbitrariness of the laws of nature, insofar as they do not see God as constrained to will contingent events "in conformity with" the eternal natures of things (cf. G III, 529; G IV, 594–95). Malebranche would obviously contest this charge. Not only, he believes, is God "obliged to act always in a manner worthy of Him, by ways which are simple, general, constant and uniform" (OC V, 49), but all of his actions are subordinated to the highest aim of creation—the Incarnation of the Word in the person of Jesus Christ; cf. *Traité* I, i, and Additions (OC V, 12–13), and Lennon, "Philosophical Commentary," in LO, 824. For more on this issue, see section III.

18. Sleigh remarks that, for Leibniz, "Laws of nature are . . . characterized as generalizations that are true of created substances in virtue of their natures" (*Leibniz and Arnauld*, p. 162). I believe that this account needs to be emended slightly. As I read Leibniz, laws of nature are in the first place expressive not of the individual natures of substances, but of the natures of *types* or *species* of being (e.g., body or soul), only some of which are, strictly speaking, substances. What needs to be emphasized, I think, is the conceptual relation for Leibniz between the idea of a "law of nature" (including the laws that govern corporeal phenomena) and the notion of intelligibility (or explainability in terms of natures) described above. I take it to be consistent with my position that the causal powers of any given species of being (e.g., material being)

The establishment of this point helps us to understand Leibniz's further charge that on the system of occasional causes God would be guilty of "disturbing" the respective laws of the soul and the body:

[R]ather than saying with [occasionalists] that God has made it a law always to produce in a substance changes conforming to those of another substance, which disturbs [*troublent*] at every moment their natural laws, I would say that God has given to each of them from the start a nature whose own laws bring about its changes, in such a way that in my view the actions of souls neither increase nor decrease the quantity of moving force which is in matter, nor even change its direction, as M. Descartes believed. (G III, 122)

The basis of Leibniz's criticism in this case is not that occasionalists like Malebranche commit themselves to mistaken views about the laws of nature (e.g., they ignore the principle of the conservation of force). Nor does he take issue with their failure to acknowledge the existence in nature of certain types of causal sequences.¹⁹ He is instead concerned with the tendency of occasionalists to conceive of God as arbitrarily imposing natural laws on created things otherwise undetermined in their effects, rather than giving each thing "from the start a nature whose own laws bring about its changes." The objection that God "disturbs" or "interferes with" the natural laws of things is just that on the occasionalist account natural laws are not conceived as the lawful expression of the natures of created things.²⁰

supervene on the causal powers of individual substances—the only true sources of activity for Leibniz.

19. This is how Sleight understands the criticism. He sees Leibniz as objecting to "Malebranche's belief that some physical events have as their sole immediate quasi-cause a mental event" ("Leibniz on Malebranche on Causality," pp. 167–68; cf. *Leibniz and Arnauld*, pp. 164–68) on the grounds that it is inconsistent with his "great principle of physics"—that "a body never receives a change in motion except by another body in motion that pushes it" (G VI, 541/L 587). On Sleight's account, Malebranche is guilty of no more than a mistaken belief about the sequences of events that in fact obtain in the world: namely, that there are some physical events for which there are no identifiable physical causes. And this is a belief that Malebranche could easily have given up while preserving his system of occasional causes. I see Leibniz's criticism as going beyond this.

20. I take this point to be implicit in the following version of Leibniz's "elimination argument" (see above, n. 5):

[H]aving assumed that ordinary things must occur naturally and not by miracle, it seems that one can say that according to this my hypothesis is demonstrated. For the two other hypotheses necessarily make recourse to miracle. . . . And in all one can find no other hypothesis than these three. For either the laws of bodies and of souls are interfered with [*troublées*], or else they are conserved. If these laws are interfered with (what must come about from something outside), it is necessary either that one of these

Now, obviously, one of the principal points at issue here concerns the economy of power: whether God is to be accorded all power, or whether power is to be shared in some manner with finite created beings. On this question, there is a clear division between Leibniz and the occasionalists: he believes that there exist secondary causal powers, while occasionalists like Malebranche deny it.²¹ The issue I want to emphasize, however, which in my view occupies at least as prominent a place in Leibniz's reasoning, concerns the provision made for the intrinsic intelligibility of the created world. On my reading, Leibniz faults Malebranche not simply for denying created things the power to produce their own effects but also for his failure to insist that created things be endowed with natures through which their properties and effects can be rendered intelligible. Extensionally, these objections might seem to amount to much the same thing, for it is plausible to think that the effects and properties of things will be explicable by their natures just in case their natures include powers sufficient to produce them. For two reasons, however, I want to resist the move to run these two lines of argument too closely together. First, they bear on what are manifestly different aspects of the created world: on the one hand, its intrinsic intelligibility; on the other, its degree of causal self-sufficiency.²² Second, the intelligibility objection plays an important dialectical role in Leibniz's thought that is independent of the attribution of real causal powers. He deploys this objection in many contexts where it enjoys no obvious basis in a view about what sorts of created things are in fact endowed with force or activity. Instead, his point in these contexts is limited to the claim that, with regard to certain species or types of being, only certain effects can be conceived as following in an intelligible manner from their natures: namely, only those that can be conceived as "explicable modifications" of them.

This type of reasoning figures centrally in Leibniz's discussion of the soul-body relationship. He relies on it in attacking the Cartesian hypothesis of interaction on the grounds that it is impossible to conceive how a material thing could bring about changes in a mental thing, or vice versa.²³

two things interferes with the other, which is the hypothesis of influence common in the Schools, or that it is a third thing which interferes with them, that is, God, in the hypothesis of occasional causes. But finally, if the laws of souls and of bodies are conserved without being interfered with, that is the hypothesis of preestablished harmony, which is consequently the only natural one. (letter to Lady Masham, 30 June 1704 [G III, 355])

21. Malebranche's fullest defense of this position is in *The Search after Truth*, Bk. 6, Pt. 2, Ch. 3, and in the "Fifteenth Elucidation."

22. Likewise, they raise the question of the proper understanding of two different divine attributes: God's power and God's wisdom.

23. He writes to Jaquelot: "I have said to you that it is as far from reasonable to attribute to the soul an immediate physical influence on the body as to attribute to matter the faculty of

As we have seen, he employs it in criticizing occasionalists: their account makes no attempt to explain divine action in a way that is consistent with the natures of created beings. Finally, he cites it as an advantage of his own theory of preestablished harmony that it ascribes to the body and the soul only those effects that can be understood as following from the nature of each being: material effects from material things, mental effects from mental things. In each of these cases, we find Leibniz arguing purely on the basis of considerations of intelligibility: within the "order of nature" it must be possible to conceive how any effect follows in an intelligible manner from the nature of its subject.

At another level, however, considerations of intelligibility do become closely linked in Leibniz's mind with the idea that any substance is by nature a principle of force or activity. Applying the principle of intelligibility to the *individual* nature of a substance, he infers that a substance must not only be a principle of activity, but a principle that is sufficient to account for the production of all its particular natural effects. Together, then, the claims of activity and intelligibility lead to the conclusion that it is of the very nature of the soul (and, in an extended sense, of the body)²⁴ to be causally responsible for the production of all its own states in the order in which they occur. Rather than one substance influencing the other, or God influencing both, each has been created from the start such that through the exercise of its own natural powers there follows the entire sequence of its effects.²⁵ We may conclude, then, that in his discussion of

thinking. My reason is that the one is as inexplicable as the other by the modifications of the thing to which it is attributed" (G VI, 569; cf. 570).

24. The case of bodies raises special problems. Although I cannot argue the point here, on Leibniz's understanding of the body-soul relation any fundamental commitment to the substantiality of bodies is given up; instead, every body is, in the final analysis, an "aggregate" of soul-like monads. (On this, see my essay "Leibniz's 'Analysis of Multitude and Phenomena into Unities and Reality,'" *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 28 [1990]: 525-52.) Thus, while in many of his published writings Leibniz represents the theory of preestablished harmony as a response to the views of Descartes and Malebranche on the issue of mind-body interaction, this posture is to a degree deceptive. At a deeper level, the preestablished harmony of body and soul is revealed to be a preestablished harmony among the perceptions of a universe of unextended, soul-like substances.

25. Roger Woolhouse has argued that Leibniz's objection that occasionalism introduces a perpetual miracle "turns on his view of substances as active and as containing in their own natures the principle of their changes" ("Leibniz and Occasionalism," in *Metaphysics and Philosophy of Science in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. R. Woolhouse [Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1988], pp. 166-67). I see his position as largely consistent with my own, although it collapses the distinction between what I regard as two separate argumentative strategies in Leibniz—the one bearing on the nature of substances as persisting principles of activity, the other on the intrinsic intelligibility of nature as a whole. Again, I would stress the point made with respect to Sleight: Leibniz's arguments concerning miracles and intelligibility are in the

the problem of soul-body agreement Leibniz draws on the principle of intelligibility in two quite different ways: on the one hand, to insist that from any given being there follow just those effects proper to the type of being it is; on the other hand, to insist that the effects of any particular body or soul are determined by, and hence are explainable in terms of, its individual nature or causal power. Both of these considerations can be seen as contributing to the case he makes for the superiority of the theory of preestablished harmony over the Cartesian and the occasionalist positions:

[S]ouls or vital principles, according to my system, change nothing in the ordinary course of bodies and do not even give God the occasion for doing so. Souls follow their laws, which consist in a definite development of perceptions according to goods and evils, and bodies follow theirs, which consist in the laws of motion; nevertheless, these two beings of entirely different kind meet together and correspond to each other like two clocks perfectly regulated to the same time. It is this that I call the theory of *pre-established harmony*, which excludes every concept of miracle from purely natural actions and makes things run their course regulated in an intelligible manner. Instead of this, the common system has recourse to absolutely unexplainable influences, while in the system of occasional causes God is compelled at every moment, by a kind of general law and as if by compact, to change the natural course of the thoughts of the soul in order to adapt them to the impressions of the body and to interfere with the natural course of bodily movements in accordance with the volitions of the soul. This can only be explained by a perpetual miracle, whereas I explain the whole intelligibility by the natures which God has established in things. (G VI, 540–41/L 587)

The interpretation of Leibniz's position I have so far developed leaves one point untouched. This is the question of what, if anything, the theory of preestablished harmony has to tell us about the apparent *communication* of the body and the soul. What we had expected to account for in the ordinary course of things, after all, was not simply the fact that material things give rise to material effects and mental things to mental effects; we were initially puzzled by the problem of how material things appeared to give rise to mental effects, and vice versa. What we seem to be missing to this point is any explanation of why the soul and the body appear to be joined in a

first place concerned with the sorts of effects that can be conceived as following from the natures of different *types* of being.

functional union whereby it is reasonable to think of the two as communicating with each other.

In Leibniz's view, this impression that the soul is in immediate communication with the body—that it is capable both of influencing and being influenced by the body—is a phenomenon that can be explained in a way that is consistent with the assumption of nature's intelligibility. As he sees it, it is part of the soul's intrinsic nature to "represent" each and every state of its associated organic body.²⁶ To say that a soul is naturally representative of its body means, among other things, that it perceives itself as being located within a body that it identifies as its own, and that it perceives itself as interacting with other bodies via the instrumentality of this body.²⁷ Again, Leibniz takes this to be an essential property of any soul-like substance. To posit a soul acting without representing the state of its body, he suggests, would be to contravene the "order of nature." It would be to accept

a metaphysical fiction, as when one assumes that God destroys a body in order to create a vacuum; the one is as contrary to the order of nature as the other. For since the nature of the soul has been made in such a way from the beginning as to represent successively the changes of matter, the situation which we assume could not arise in the natural order. (G IV, 519/L 493)

Presented with this position, a critic might well raise the objection that Leibniz has advanced what is fairly described as an ad hoc solution to the problem of the communication of the body and the soul. While rejecting as unintelligible the hypothesis that the two causally interact, as well as all appeals to a supernatural influence, he has failed to explain how it happens

26. In his first reply to Bayle, Leibniz claims that "it is the soul's own God-given nature to represent everything that takes place in its organs by virtue of its own laws" (G IV, 519/L 493). Compare *Theodicy*, §355: "The true means whereby God causes the soul to have sensations of what happens in the body have their origin in the nature of the soul, which represents bodies, and is so made beforehand that the representations which arise one from another within it, by a natural sequence of thoughts, correspond to the changes of bodies" (G VI, 326).

27. In the "New System," Leibniz writes that the "internal perceptions in the soul itself must arise because of its own original constitution, that is, they must arise through the representative nature (capable of expressing external things as they relate to its organs) given to the soul from its creation, which constitutes its individual character" (G IV, 484/AG 143). He further remarks that the "organized mass" of the body contains the "point of view" of the soul, and that "the soul has its seat in the body by an immediate presence" (G IV, 484–85/AG 144). For reasons of space, I omit here any discussion of the special sense Leibniz gives to the terms 'expression' and 'representation'. Such a discussion would obviously be necessary for a complete account of his position.

that two things as different as the body and the soul nevertheless appear to operate in complete agreement in the confines of a single human being. Leibniz's response seems to take us no further than: It happens because that's the sort of beings they are; God has created each from the start such that it appears to communicate with the other. Yet this seems uncomfortably like the notorious pseudoexplanation that opium sedates by virtue of its intrinsic dormitive power.

In answering the criticism that the system of preestablished harmony is in some way an ad hoc theory of the soul-body relation, what needs primarily to be stressed, I think, is the common methodology that informs the development of Leibniz's own system and his objections to occasionalism. In both cases, he is principally motivated by the requirement that it must always be possible to account for natural effects as intelligible consequences of the nature of some created being. As we have seen, in his discussion of the problem of soul-body agreement, he employs this principle in two quite different ways: sometimes critically, in order to undermine a given philosophical theory; at other times constructively, in formulating positive hypotheses about the natures of things. On the critical side, he draws on the idea of intelligibility in attacking a wide range of rival philosophical positions: the doctrines of interactionism and occasionalism, the supposition of atoms in a vacuum, the notion of a primitive force of attraction, and, in general, any hypothesis that invokes so-called occult qualities.²⁸ On the positive side, the assumption of intelligibility plays a complementary role in inspiring that part of Leibniz's philosophy that takes as its primary task the construction of a general theory of the natures or essences of created things. It is in this context, I think, that we can best understand the assertion that it is part of the nature of the soul both to be causally responsible for the production of its own internal states and to represent the states of its own body. We may see this claim as being in the first place a hypothesis about the intrinsic nature of any substantial being, which, consistent with the assumption of intelligibility, suffices to account for the apparent communication of the soul and the body.

Hypotheses about the natures of things are often defended by Leibniz on the grounds of their capacity to save the phenomena. Ultimately, however, such hypotheses end up being more than mere conjectures in his system, insofar as they are supported by the *a priori* consideration that the character of God's wisdom would in fact have inspired him to create a world that manifested just this sort of rational order. This brings us at last to the deepest level of Leibniz's disagreement with the occasionalist philosophy:

28. For more on this topic, see my essay "Leibniz's Principle of Intelligibility."

what he sees as occasionalism's negative consequences for the project of theodicy.

III

We have seen how Leibniz's charge that occasionalism implies a "perpetual miracle" draws on the assumption of nature's intelligibility. In rejecting the demand for intelligibility, he argues, occasionalism promotes the elimination of any coherent distinction between the natural and the miraculous, and with it any notion of what Stuart Brown has called the "autonomy of nature."²⁹ For Leibniz, this is a result with profound consequences for the project of theodicy. As he sees it, the principle that the ordinary effects of things must always be explicable by the natures of those things stands in a critical relationship to God's wisdom.³⁰ As he writes in his 1709 response to Lamy: "the wisdom of God appears more clearly in the system of harmony, in which all is connected through reasons drawn from the natures of things, than in that of the occasionalists, in which everything is compelled by an arbitrary power" (G IV, 594).³¹

We can conceive of the relationship between God's wisdom and the

29. "Leibniz's 'Crossing from Occasional Causes to the Preestablished Harmony,'" in *Leibniz: Tradition und Aktualität. Vorträge, V. Internationaler Leibniz-Kongress*, ed. I. Marchlewitz (Hannover: Schlütersche Verlagsanstalt, 1988), pp. 116–23.

30. A forceful statement of Leibniz's concern on this issue appears in the Preface to the *New Essays*:

I acknowledge that we must not deny what we do not understand, but I add that we are entitled to deny (within the natural order at least) whatever is absolutely unintelligible and inexplicable. . . . The distinction between what is natural and explicable and what is miraculous and inexplicable removes all the difficulties. To reject it would be to uphold something worse than occult qualities, and thereby to renounce philosophy and reason, giving refuge to ignorance and laziness by means of an irrational system which maintains not only that there are qualities which we do not understand—of which there are only too many—but further that there are some which could not be comprehended by the greatest intellect if God gave it every possible opportunity, i.e. [qualities] which are either miraculous or without rhyme or reason. And indeed it would be without rhyme or reason for God to perform miracles in the ordinary course of events. So this idle hypothesis would destroy not only our philosophy which seeks reasons but also the divine wisdom which provides them. (NE 65–66)

31. Compare his letter to Lady Masham of 30 June 1704: "[T]he very reason and order of divine wisdom determines that one not have recourse to miracles unless necessary. . . . Thus it seems that my hypothesis is something more than a hypothesis, being not only entirely possible, but also the one which is most in conformity with the wisdom of God and the order of things" (G III, 353–54).

intelligibility of nature as being established in the following way. We know that within Leibniz's theodicy there is an important connection between the character of this world as the best of all possible worlds and God's wisdom as the attribute determining his selection of this world for existence. If we now assume that the idea of nature's intelligibility plays an essential role in Leibniz's attempt to conceptualize the rational order that marks this as the best of all possible worlds, we may infer that any hypothesis that challenges the assumption of intelligibility also contains a concealed attack on the notion of God's wisdom. Given the capacity of occasionalism to pose just such a challenge, we may conclude that Leibniz's opposition to this doctrine is again ultimately motivated by theological concerns. In addition to placing in jeopardy the vital distinction between God and his creation, Malebranche's theory denies the condition of intelligibility by which the natural world is rendered compatible with God's wisdom, and thus worthy of his choice for creation.

At first sight this conclusion might seem a surprising one, for we know that Malebranche and Leibniz agree on the basic point that God has chosen this world for existence because its production represents, overall, the creative act of greatest possible perfection. There remains, however, a significant disagreement between them on the issue of how God's perfection is communicated in creation. Malebranche repeatedly asserts that it is not enough simply to look at the end of creation, the intrinsic perfection of the created world, but that it is also necessary to consider the means of God's volition. Accordingly, on his view, a world of greater perfection might have been created, but this would have required that perfection be sacrificed in the mode of God's willing. For Malebranche, God acts in ways that are "the most simple, the most general, the most uniform" (OC V, 28); and the result is a world in which there are intrinsic imperfections and evils, but in which the elimination of any of these imperfections would have interfered with the "simplicity of God's ways," that is, the general laws by which he brings about all that happens in the world.³²

32. Compare *Traité* I, xiv:

God could undoubtedly make a world more perfect than the one we inhabit. He could, for example, make it in such a way that the rain, which serves to render the earth fertile, should fall more regularly on lands that are worked than in the ocean where it is not so necessary. But in order to make this world more perfect, it would have been necessary for him to have changed the simplicity of his ways, and to have multiplied the laws of the communication of motion by which our world subsists; and then there would no longer have been between the action of God and his work that proportion which is necessary in order to determine an infinitely wise being to act, or at least there would not have been the same proportion between the action of God and this world, however perfect, as there is between the laws of nature and the world we inhabit. For our world, as imperfect one may want to imagine it being, is founded on laws of

As Catherine Wilson has emphasized, Leibniz, particularly in his early writings, shows signs of being strongly influenced by Malebranche's approach to the theodicy problem.³³ Arguably, this is an influence that persists through the publication of the *Theodicy*, in the view that the metaphysical perfection of a world is to be regarded as a function of both the plenitude of its existence and the simplicity of its laws. Despite these points of contact between the views of the two philosophers, however, the fact remains that while Malebranche sees the perfection of God's creation as essentially dependent on the perfection of his "ways" or modes of willing (their simplicity, uniformity, etc.), Leibniz is concerned exclusively with the perfection that a world possesses by virtue of its own intrinsic nature. This is most immediately apparent in his image of God surveying the domain of all possible worlds, weighing their respective degrees of perfection, and only then choosing to create that world which is by its own nature the best of all possible worlds (cf. *Theodicy*, §225). Within this model there is no room for an independent weighing of the particular mode of God's willing. Instead, God brings into existence the possible world of greatest perfection by virtue of a "moral necessity, which constrains the wisest to do the best" (*Theodicy*, §367; G VI, 333/H 345).³⁴

motion so simple and so natural that it is completely worthy of the infinite wisdom of its author." (OC V, 29)

See also *Dialogues* IX, x (OC XII, 213–14/D 213).

33. "Leibnizian Optimism," *Journal of Philosophy* 80 (1983): 765–83, and *Leibniz's Metaphysics: A Historical and Comparative Study* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989), pp. 281–88.

34. A somewhat subtle distinction is involved here. My claim is not that the mode of God's willing (God's "ways") is irrelevant for Leibniz in determining the perfection of a world, but only that it is not a factor that is set against the perfection of the "work," as in Malebranche. According to Leibniz, God's assessment of a world's degree of perfection requires that he foresee the results of certain free decrees of his will. (In the Arnauld correspondence, Leibniz says that God considers these decrees *sub ratione possibilitatis*; cf. G II, 51–52/LA 56–58.) These free decrees are responsible for the specific causal order of any world, and thus contribute to determining its intrinsic perfection. The difference between the positions of Leibniz and Malebranche is that for Leibniz the mode of God's willing is relevant to the assessment of the perfection of God's creative act only insofar as it contributes to the intrinsic perfection of the *product* of creation. For Malebranche, by contrast, the mode of God's willing becomes a factor that is in competition with the perfection of the work. The apparent similarity between their two positions allows Leibniz to claim (when it suits him) that he is really just saying the same thing as Malebranche. Reading carefully, however, the distance between the two becomes clear. In the *Theodicy* (§208), for example, Leibniz defends the Malebranchian view that the "ways of God are those most simple and most uniform"; but he immediately goes on to stress that these are also the means that are the "most productive" and that they lead "to a single advantage, which is to produce as much perfection as is possible" (G VI, 241/H 257; cf. ML 392). This is a point that is reiterated in a number of texts suggesting that God's decision in creation is to be seen not as a balancing of two competing sources of perfection—richness of

The conflict between the positions of Malebranche and Leibniz is not limited to this point alone. At bottom it extends to a set of basic disagreements concerning God's goal in creation and the character of the wisdom that he therein expresses. In Malebranche's view, God acts only for the sake of his own glory, and this he finds only if his work is sanctified by a divine person, Jesus Christ, the Incarnation of the Word.³⁵ "Separate Jesus Christ from the rest of creation," Malebranche writes in his *Traité*,

and see if he who can only act for his glory, and whose wisdom has no limits, would not be able to carry out the plan of producing nothing externally. But if you join Jesus Christ to his Church, and the Church to the rest of the world, then you raise to the glory of God a temple so august and so holy that you will perhaps be surprised that its foundations have been set down so late. (OC V, 15)

We know, however, that for Malebranche the excellence of God's creation cannot be understood through its end alone; God must be honored both by his work and by his ways. It follows that while the Incarnation of the Word is the only end that justifies creation, insofar as it is the only end capable of ensuring God's glory, it is necessary that God also be glorified by the means he chooses to realize this end.³⁶ As Malebranche conceives them, the means God selects are chiefly distinguished by their being expressions of his unlimited wisdom.³⁷ To appreciate precisely how this wisdom is expressed in the created world, we must see Malebranche's theodicy from within the framework of his occasionalism. Within this framework, we have observed, there is no significant distinction between creation and conserva-

existence (perfection of the "work") versus simplicity of laws (perfection of the "ways")—but that a simplicity of laws is merely the means by which the greatest quantity of intrinsic perfection can be realized (cf. G I, 331/L 211; G VII, 303/L 487). Compare Martial Gueroult, *Malebranche*, 3 vols. (Paris: Aubier, 1959), vol. 2, pp. 194–207, and Geneviève Rodis-Lewis, *Nicolas Malebranche* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1963), pp. 310–12.

35. "[T]he Incarnation of the Word is the first and principal of the plans of God" (OC XII–XIII, 207/D 205). Compare *Traité* I, i–ii, and *Dialogues* IX, iii–vi. I am grateful to Thomas Lennon for making this point clearer to me; see his "Philosophical Commentary," in LO, p. 284; see also Gueroult, *Malebranche*, vol. 2, ch. 5.

36. "God wants His conduct, as well as His work, to bear the character of His attributes. Not satisfied that the Universe honor Him by its excellence and its beauty, He wants His ways to glorify Him by their simplicity, their fecundity, their universality, their uniformity, by all the characteristics expressing qualities which He glories in possessing" (OC XII–XIII, 214/D 213).

37. "God [is] obliged to act always in a manner worthy of him, by ways simple, general, constant and uniform, in a word, by ways conforming to the idea we have of a general cause whose wisdom has no limits" (OC V, 49).

tion: God's volition is a necessary condition for the existence of the world at each and every moment. God's wisdom is expressed through his willing the continued existence of the world according to those laws, or ways, that are "the most simple, the most general, the most uniform" (OC V, 28).

On the basis of this brief account, we may see Malebranche's theodicy as defined by two basic commitments. The first is his concern to uphold the tenets of orthodox Christianity—in particular the event of the Incarnation, which he deems necessary for the creation of a world worthy of God. The second is his determination to see God's wisdom and providence as actively expressed in the world through the simplicity of his ways.³⁸ With respect to both of these commitments, his position is at odds with the main tendencies of Leibniz's thought. According to Leibniz, God's sole aim in creation is the production of the maximum possible goodness; and this he conceives most basically as *metaphysical* goodness: that is, perfection or reality.³⁹ Working from a position that identifies goodness with being, Leibniz assumes that God is naturally disposed to create something rather than nothing, and that he is antecedently inclined to create any possible world in proportion to its degree of goodness.⁴⁰ Within his scheme, the issue of the worthiness of the created world vis-à-vis God receives a completely different treatment than in Malebranche. Quite simply, we can say that the only possible world worthy of God is that world which contains, in and of itself, the greatest perfection or reality.

The notion of divine wisdom plays no less central a role in the theodicy of Leibniz than it does in that of Malebranche; however, again, this wisdom is conceived very differently. Leibniz defines God's wisdom as his "knowledge of the good" (L 564), which is to say his knowledge of the perfection,

38. Compare *Traité*, "Premier Éclaircissement," III:

On the basis of these definitions, one sees that far from denying providence I assume on the contrary that it is God who brings about everything in all things; that the nature of pagan philosophers is a chimera; and that properly speaking what is called *nature* is nothing other than the general laws that God has established in order to construct or conserve his work by means of very simple ways, by an action that is always uniform, constant, perfectly worthy of an infinite wisdom and universal cause. (OC V, 148)

39. On the first point, see *Causa Dei*, §§25–26: "The antecedent will of God tends toward actualizing all good and repelling all evil, as such, and in proportion to the degree of goodness and evil. . . . The consequent will arises from the concurrence of all antecedent acts of will. When the effects of all antecedent acts of will cannot be carried out together, the maximum effect which can be obtained by wisdom and power will be obtained" (G VI, 442–43/S 119). On the second point, see *Causa Dei*, §30: "*Metaphysical* good or evil, in general, consists in the perfection or imperfection of all creatures, even those not endowed with intelligence" (G VI, 443/S 120). In an appendix to the *Theodicy*, Leibniz defines a "perfection" as "any purely positive or absolute reality" (G VI, 383/H 384).

40. Leibniz maintains that God would only not create if it were impossible to fix on a single best possible world; see *Theodicy*, §8.

or positive reality, that is contained in the eternal natures or essences of things.⁴¹ In the context of creation, God's wisdom is expressed in two principal ways. First, divine wisdom serves to determine God in his choice of which possible world to create. Motivated by the supreme goodness of his will to create the best world possible, God is informed by his wisdom, or knowledge of the good, as to which possible world contains the greatest perfection.⁴² Second, in willing into existence a particular series of contingent events, God is constrained by his wisdom to act in accord with the principle of intelligibility, that is, to will only those events that can be explained by the natures of created things. The reason for this constraint, crucial to Leibniz's case against occasionalism, can be understood as follows. God's wisdom, according to Leibniz, is identical with his knowledge of what is positive or unlimited in the natures of things. Thus, God is guided by his wisdom insofar as he wills only those contingent events that can be explained through "limitations" of the perfections definitive of those natures. These, we may assume, will be just those events that can be conceived as "explicable modifications" of the attributes of created beings.⁴³

Although our survey of the theodicies of Malebranche and Leibniz has not been exhaustive, we have established grounds for seeing the conflict between occasionalism and preestablished harmony as predicated on a much deeper disagreement concerning the wisdom that guides God's will in creation. When Leibniz criticizes Malebranche for advancing a theory that is at odds with the principle of intelligibility, he is in effect calling into question Malebranche's understanding of divine wisdom and its relation to the perfection of the created world. While Malebranche conceives of God as bestowing activity on a world of otherwise passive creatures, and thereby realizing perfection through the exercise of his wisdom or the simple and uniform mode of his willing, Leibniz conceives of perfection as resident in the essences or natures that are themselves constitutive of the world. God exercises his wisdom in Leibniz's view by acting in ways that conform to

41. Leibniz's standard examples of perfections are the attributes of power, knowledge, and will. The nature of any possible substance can be defined by limitations of these primary perfections. See "Monadology," §48, "Principles of Nature and of Grace," §9, Preface to the *Theodicy* (G VI, 27/H 51), and, especially, Grua, 126.

42. Compare *Theodicy* §225: "The wisdom of God, not content with embracing all the possibles, penetrates them, compares them, weighs them one against the other, to estimate their degrees of perfection or imperfection. . . . The result of all these comparisons and deliberations is the choice of the best from among all these possible systems, which wisdom makes in order to satisfy goodness completely; and such is precisely the plan of the universe as it is" (G VI, 252/H 267-68). See also "Observations on the Book Concerning 'The Origin of Evil,' Published Recently in London," §21 (G VI, 423/H 428).

43. I am here merely sketching a line of argument that needs to be filled out in greater detail.

his knowledge of the perfection of those natures. In addition to this specific point of disagreement, we have located a more general tension between the ways in which Malebranche and Leibniz each approach the problem of creation. Malebranche remains committed to constructing a metaphysics that is consistent with the fundamentals of Christian doctrine, one that acknowledges the central place of the Incarnation and the essential dependence of created beings on God. Leibniz, by contrast, develops his position largely under the influence of a conception of God as an infinitely skillful craftsman, one who is disposed to create that world which in and of itself contains the greatest possible perfection.

Given the theological distance that separates Leibniz from Malebranche, there is no easy way to judge the success of his critique of occasionalism. We can perhaps best see it as an attempt to push forward the program of rationalist metaphysics unencumbered by the demands of religious orthodoxy.⁴⁴ This is not to suggest that Leibniz rejects the significance of theological concerns—his philosophy is of course infused with them—but rather that his God is, to a more significant degree than Malebranche's, the God of a philosopher: the divine mathematician, the infinitely skillful artisan. Confronted with the occasionalist position, Leibniz will insist that in denying created things natures sufficient to account for their effects, Malebranche has effectively robbed God of the honor of having conceived and created that artifact which best displays his wisdom. Rather than being a worthy product of God's creative will, the world becomes no more than a continuous expression of God's personal power.⁴⁵

44. Compare Wilson, *Leibniz's Metaphysics*, pp. 297–303. Wilson's book emphasizes another strand of Leibniz's thinking that is at odds with orthodox Christianity: his sympathy for a Neoplatonic account of creation as emanation (see pp. 275–81). Arguably, this is a point on which Malebranche's position is also at risk.

45. In a somewhat unlikely place, Hume's *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, we find a compelling statement of this distinctively Leibnizian complaint. According to the occasionalists, Hume writes,

every thing is full of God. Not content with the principle, that nothing exists but by his will, that nothing possesses any power but by his concession: They rob nature, and all created beings, of every power, in order to render their dependence on the Deity still more sensible and immediate. They consider not, that, by this theory, they diminish, instead of magnifying, the grandeur of those attributes, which they affect so much to celebrate. It argues surely more power in the Deity to delegate a certain degree of power to inferior creatures, than to produce every thing by his own immediate volition. It argues more wisdom to contrive at first the fabric of the world with such perfect foresight, that, of itself, and by its proper operation, it may well serve all the purposes of providence, than if the great Creator were obliged at every moment to adjust its parts, and animate by his breath all the wheels of that stupendous machine. (sec. vii)