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**DRAFT for discussion in the Intellectual History Colloquium Workshop of April 8,**

**2016--please do not cite without author's permission (smnadler@wisc.edu)**

### **Malebranche's Miracles**

Writing to Leibniz in March of 1687, after receiving an outline of his *Discourse on Metaphysics*, Antoine Arnauld is, among other emotions, a bit puzzled. He does not see any difference between the Cartesian theory of "occasional causes" and Leibniz's doctrine of preestablished harmony. An occasionalist like Malebranche claims that substances in nature do not, despite appearances, really causally interact. Rather, they and their states of being serve only as "occasions" for God to exercise His unique and ubiquitous causal efficacy. Leibniz, too, insists that finite substances do not interact; rather, each substance generates its own states and actions by virtue of its intrinsic nature, although the natures of all substances in this best possible world are "synchronized" in their activity by God at creation so as to bring about a harmonious and providential state of affairs. Arnauld suggests that Leibniz's view

says the same thing in other terms that those way who maintain that my will is the occasional cause for the movement of my arm and that God is its real cause; for they do not claim that God does this at the moment by a new act of will each time that I wish to raise my arm, but by a single act of the eternal will by which he has chosen to do everything which he has foreseen that it will be necessary to do, in order that the universe might be such as he has decided it ought to be. (LA 173).

Arnauld wonders whether the causal picture of substances that Leibniz offers in the *Discourse on Metaphysics* "does not come to this very same thing"?<sup>1</sup>

In his reply, Leibniz appeals to what he takes to be an important difference between his preestablished harmony and occasionalism—namely, that the occasionalists introduce perpetual miracles into nature. "The authors of occasional causes", he says, "introduce a miracle which is not less miraculous for being continual, for it seems to me that infrequency does not constitute the conception of miracles." A miracle, according to Leibniz, is an event or state of affairs "that exceeds the powers of created things" (G IV.520; L 494); it is something whose occurrence cannot be explained by the natural powers of finite substances. He explains that "God performs a miracle when he does anything that surpasses the powers which he has given to created things and that he maintains in them"; and since the occasionalists do not allow there to be *any* natural powers in finite substances in the first place, everything that occurs among those substances through God's activity must be a miracle (LA 185).

Malebranche, Leibniz and their respective partisans (including Pierre Bayle) would end up debating whether in fact Malebranche's theory of causation does introduce "perpetual miracles" into nature. And this, of course, requires each philosopher's camp to specify what exactly constitutes a miracle.<sup>2</sup>

In his response to Leibniz and elsewhere, Malebranche states that a miracle is not defined as an event that is directly caused by God rather than by natural substances, since *all* events are directly caused by God, but rather as an event that occurs in nature but is an exception to or violation of the general laws of nature. This seems straightforward enough, sort of. But in fact there is a complexity and interesting set of ambiguities in

Malebranche's account of miracles. What I would like to do today is explore just a few of these.

The central text of Malebranche on this topic is the *Traité de la nature et de la grace*, first published in 1680. In this work, Malebranche addresses the problem of evil, that is, the question of why there are imperfections—physical traumas and disasters, moral crimes, etc.—in a world created by an all-powerful, all-knowing, wise and just God. The centerpiece of Malebranche's theodicy, or resolution of this problem, is his account of the nature of God's causal activity and especially his distinction between different kinds of volitions that occur in God.

Malebranche insists that God "is obliged to act always in a manner that is worthy of him, by ways that are simple, general, constant, and uniform" (TNG 143, OC V.49-50; R 128). He puts this in more idiosyncratic terms by saying that God acts only by "general volitions [*volontez générales*]" and (almost) never by "particular volitions [*volontez particulières*]". Here is how Malebranche distinguishes these sorts of volition: "God acts by general volitions, when he acts in consequence of the general laws that he has established. ... I say, on the other hand, that God acts by particular volitions when the efficacy of his will is not determined by some general law to produce some effect" (TNG E1, §§1-2: OCM V.147-48/R 195). A general volition is a will to do something that is in accordance with or follows from some law or general principle. A law of physics, for example, specifies that if a body of a certain size at rest is struck by a body of a certain size in motion, then it will be moved in a certain way. When Malebranche's God then moves a body in the appropriate way on the occasion of its being struck by another body, He is acting by a general volition. Similarly, if God causes a feeling of pain in some

person's mind on the occasion of his body being pricked by a needle, this is done through a general volition, since it is in accordance with the laws of mind-body union that He has established. A particular volition, on the other hand, does not obey any law, but is (relative to the laws) *ad hoc*. If God were to move a body without its having been struck by another body, or if He were to cause pain in someone without anything having happened to that person's body, He would be acting by a particular volition.<sup>3</sup> Thus, Malebranche's God not only institutes the most simple laws when creating the world, but He also is bound by his own nature—as a wise, good, immutable, and absolutely simple being who acts with perfect constancy—to follow those laws in the causal operations through which He makes nature function.

Why, then, is there evil in the world? Why are individuals born without limbs, why are there floods and droughts, why is there sin and suffering, and why do virtuous people sometimes suffer while vicious people prosper? And why, especially, are not all human beings saved by the grace of a God who, we are told, wants everyone to be saved? Malebranche believes that it is important, above all, to bear in mind that God does not will any of these evils with a particular volition. God does not choose them for their own sake and regardless of what else happens to be the case.

If rain falls on certain lands, and if the sun roasts others; if weather favorable for crops is followed by hail that destroys them; if a child comes into the world with a malformed and useless head growing from his breast, and makes him wretched; it is not that God has willed these things by particular volitions.<sup>4</sup>

These unfortunate events occur because God allows them to occur—or, rather, brings them about—as a part of the ordinary course of nature as this is regulated by its most

simple laws. General laws have a wide variety of effects. As anyone whose picnic plans have ever been upended by the weather knows, these laws, which on the whole make for an orderly and predictable world, cannot take into account the convenience and wishes of particular individuals or even an entire species. Birth defects, earthquakes, and other natural disorders are but the “necessary consequences [of] laws so simple that they serve to produce everything beautiful that we see in the world.”<sup>5</sup> God, obliged as He is to following the laws of nature, “makes it rain on fallow lands as well as on those that are cultivated”, because that is the meteorological result to which the laws lead. Likewise, if a person should be “dropping rocks on the heads of passers-by, the rocks will always fall at an equal speed, without discerning the piety, or the condition, or the good or bad dispositions of those who pass by.”<sup>6</sup> Just as the rain falls where it must, regardless of what lies underneath, so the rocks, falling as rocks do, will land on the heads of the virtuous and the vicious alike. In these and other cases, God is simply carrying out the natural consequences of the laws of nature—laws that are so simple that they admit of no exceptions, and that specify that when certain things occur, other things must happen.

God, then, is more committed to acting in a general way and to a nature governed by the most simple laws than He is to the well-being of individuals and the justice of the distribution of rewards and punishments. As the universal cause, He follows those laws, come what may to those affected by them. For this reason, Malebranche says that God “permits disorder but He does not create it, He does not will it”.<sup>7</sup> But the word ‘disorder’ is ambiguous. An event is a disorder in one very relative sense if it frustrates the ends or ambitions of an agent. A rock falling on one’s head is certainly a disorder for the injured party. But from a more global perspective, such an event is perfectly ordered, since it

follows from the sequence of previous events in a law-like way. "It is no disorder for lions to eat wolves, wolves sheep, and sheep the grass that God tends so carefully that He has given it all the things necessary for its own preservation."<sup>8</sup> For Malebranche, nature is perfectly well-ordered—and that is exactly why disorders happen.

Thus, there is sin and suffering in the world, rain falls on the oceans while inseeded soil suffers drought, there are murders, deformities of birth, and tsunamis, and not every individual receives the grace necessary to move him to faith. But none of this happens because God directly wills it. Rather, such things happen as a result of the simple laws of nature and grace instituted by God at creation and which He is committed to carrying out, come what may for many individuals affected by them.

Of course, God can always intervene in these cases and keep the rain from falling, prevent a tornado from hitting a town, or stop a person from committing some sin. But this, Malebranche says, would be for God to depart from the generality of His ways and thus perform a miracle; and we must not expect, much less demand constant miracles from God.

Which brings us to our first point. Malebranche—like many other philosophers committed to a rationalist conception of God (like Maimonides)—is clearly uncomfortable with miracles. His primary fealty is to the simplicity, generality, and predictability of God's ways. He believes that God's wisdom, goodness, and power are revealed more by the regular, law-like course of nature than by any unusual supernatural intervention.

Malebranche identifies a miracle with God "acting by a particular volition". "God", he says, " acts by particular volitions only when he performs miracles" (OC

VIII.696). A miracle, he says, "in the most exact and most philosophical sense", refers to "all the effects that are not natural, or that are not at all the consequence of natural laws ... Thus whether an effect is common or rare, if God does not produce it in consequence of His general laws, which are the natural laws, it is a true miracle. If, for example, He causes a thought in my mind or if I have some sensation of pleasure or pain without there being any motion in my brain which is its natural cause, this effect will be miraculous" (OC VIII.696). Thus, every miraculous event is the performance of a particular volition in God; and every practical or effective particular volition in God brings about a miracle.<sup>9</sup>

Now Malebranche seems *prima facie* to rule out the occurrence of miracles altogether, if not in principle then at least as a matter of fact. God, he says straight out, "never acts by particular volitions [*n'agit point par des volontez particulières*]" (TNG XIX). While leaving open the possibility that God can, of course, bring about a miracle, Malebranche seems here to be saying the God never does in fact perform a miracle. Robert M. Adams suggests that this is clearly an "incautious exaggeration" on Malebranche's part, but, as we shall see, I am not so sure.<sup>10</sup> Malebranche does backtrack in the face of Arnauld's accusation that Malebranche's philosophy rules out miracles and says that he did not literally mean that God absolutely, positively *never* acts by particular volitions. The age of miracles may be over, but Malebranche seems not to want to say that God has never performed and never will perform a miracle. In one of his replies to Arnauld during their decades-long debate, Malebranche insists that "I do not intend to prove that God *never* acts by particular volitions" (OC VII.503, emphasis in original text). What he does say, in that same text, is that "it is very rare for God to act by

particular volitions" (OC VIII.661). But, as we shall see, Malebranche's considered, albeit somewhat obscured, position might not even concede this much.

But first, what exactly constitutes a miracle/particular volition for Malebranche? Here is where our troubles begin.

Malebranche distinguishes five kinds of laws. They are hierarchically ordered, with lower level laws able to be suspended for the sake of a higher order law. The types of law are as follows:

1. Laws governing the communication of motion between bodies. The occasional causes of the operation of these laws are collisions among bodies.

2. Laws governing the union between mind and body. These laws dictate how the body will be moved on the occasion of certain thoughts in the mind; and what sensations will occur in the mind on the occasion of certain motions in the body.

3. Laws governing the union of the soul with God, "the intelligible substance of universal Reason". These laws cover the ordinary access that human minds have to ideas in God's understanding in thinking and perception—Malebranche's infamous doctrine of the Vision in God; the occasional cause of their operation is human attention.

4. Laws that provide angels and demons with the power to move bodies. Their efficacy is related to the desires of these spiritual beings. God can move a body on the occasion of a desire by an angel or a demon that it be so moved.

5. Finally, there are the laws of grace. These govern the distribution of interior grace among souls, and their operation is occasioned by the desires in Jesus Christ; that is, God will confer grace upon an individual whom Christ wants to be saved.<sup>11</sup>



Now what is perfectly clear in Malebranche is that if the following two conditions are *both* satisfied, an event is *not* a miracle: first, the event is the effect of a general volition in God, that is, a volition that is carrying out some law on the appropriate occasion; second, the law being carried out belongs to one of the first three kinds of laws. These are, I presume, all "laws of nature" in a loose sense for Malebranche. The laws of physics, the laws setting correlations between states of the body and states of the mind, and the laws determining how all human minds regularly have access to ideas in God are all laws that God follows in the ordinary course of nature.

Now it often seems that Malebranche intends *only* these three types of laws to constitute the set beyond which lies the domain of miracles. That is, perhaps a miracle is an event that is brought about by God but just not in accordance with these laws of nature. For example, when God moves a body on the occasion of a desire by an angel (rather than that of a human soul), in accordance with the fourth set of laws, this is a miracle; or that the distribution of grace by God on the occasion of desires in the soul of Christ, according to the fifth set of laws, is always a miraculous event.

There is indeed some strong textual support for this reading. In the *Dialogues on Metaphysics*, Malebranche has his spokesperson, Theodore, say that "when God performs a miracle and does not act as a consequence of *the general laws which are known to us*, I maintain either that God acts as a consequence of other laws unknown to us, or that what He does is determined by certain circumstances He had in view from all eternity in undertaking that simple, eternal, and invariable act which contains both the general laws of His ordinary providence and also the exceptions to these very laws" (VIII.3, OC XII.177; JS 131). Here Malebranche allows that a miracle might be an event brought

about by a general volition, as long as the law being thereby carried about by God is not among those laws generally known to us. While the first three set of laws are, he says, known to us by "experience and reason" (*Entretiens* XIII.9, OC XII.319), he explicitly says elsewhere that the laws governing angelic motion and the laws governing grace are not, in fact, known to us<sup>12</sup>—such events, then, do not belong to nature but to the supernatural. Likewise, in a note to *Dialogue* XII.13, Malebranche states that "by 'miracle' I mean the effects which depend on general laws which are *not known to us naturally*" (OC XII.295; JS 231, my emphasis).

Moreover, there is this important passage, which allows that events brought about in accordance with the laws of grace are miraculous:

There are indeed certain very rare occasions when these general laws governing motion must cease producing their effect. It is not that God has changed or corrected these laws, but rather it is because of the order of Grace, to which the order of Nature is subservient, that there occur miracles in certain circumstances [*il est de l'ordre de la Grace, auquel celui de la Nature doit servir, qu'il arrive des miracles en certaines rencontres*] (TNG, OC V.34).

It is thus apparently a miracle when God suspends the laws of nature to do something that is in accordance with, even demanded by, the laws of grace.

Finally, Malebranche suggests that the miracles of the Old Testament can be accommodated by his account of divine volitions. To believe otherwise would be to assume that

I do not recognize any other general laws according to which God executes his designs that those regarding the communication of motion ... I am persuaded that

most of the miraculous effects of the ancient Law took place as a consequence of several general laws, since the general cause must never execute his designs by particular volitions ... But I am far from believing that these extraordinary effects are only the consequence of the natural laws of the communication of motion.

(TNG, Dernier Ecl., OC V.197-8).

All of this suggests that miracles can be the result of what should be called general volitions, albeit general volitions that answer to the higher order laws of angelic motion and of grace, as opposed to the physical and psycho-physical laws of nature or the laws of human understanding.<sup>13</sup>

However, the problem with this reading is that it clashes with Malebranche's frequent claim that miracles are equivalent to events caused by particular volitions, and particular volitions are those divine volitions that are *not* in accordance with or the carrying out of *any* general laws, whether it be the laws of nature or the angelic laws and the laws of grace. On the suggested reading, events brought about by God in accordance with the two higher-order sets of general laws—those governing the angelic motion of bodies and those governing grace—would be miracles even though in such cases God is acting by general volitions. But if this were the case, Malebranche could not then say, in the very same works, that "miracles are not such except because they never happen in accordance with general laws" (TNG I.59, OC V.63), and "everything that God does by particular volitions is certainly a miracle, since it does not occur by general laws which he has established" (TNG, Ecl. I.13, OC V.160).<sup>14</sup> Moreover, Malebranche also explicitly notes elsewhere that as long as God is following the laws of grace, God is *not* performing a miracle.<sup>15</sup>

The proponent of this first reading could reply that the notion of a *particular* volition is a relative one: relative, that is, to a specific set of laws. A particular volition would then comprise not a divine volition that is undirected by any law whatsoever, but rather a divine volition that is an exception to some specified laws, but nonetheless required by another, higher set of laws. This strikes me as an especially ad hoc solution to the problem, however. I see no reason for thinking that Malebranche's particular volitions are supposed to be anything but *absolutely* particular—that is, not in accordance with any general laws whatsoever—and not merely relatively particular. Malebranche himself could not be more clear about this: "I say that God never acts by particular volitions when He acts as a consequence of general laws" (*Réponse à Arnauld*, OC VIII.651).

But what, then, are we to do with the above passages and the problematic reading they seem to support? They come from various stages of Malebranche's career, including both the 1680 *Treatise on Nature and Grace* and, eight years later, the *Dialogues*, so they cannot be dismissed as representing an immature and eventually abandoned position.

It seems to me that what Malebranche is doing in these instances is slyly and cautiously suggesting that many of the so-called "miracles" of the Hebrew Bible, "la Loi Ancienne", are in fact not, strictly speaking, miracles at all. This is because while they are violations of the laws of nature, they occurred as a consequence of higher-order general laws and so were not really brought about by particular volitions. This would be in keeping with Malebranche's apparent desire to minimize the number of miracles in history. At one point in the *Treatise on Nature and Grace* he explicitly notes that the angelic motion of bodies, common in the Hebrew Bible, does *not* count as a miracle. He says that those things that occurred under "la Loi des Juifs" that were "contrary to the

natural laws known to us" were *not* miracles because they were not produced by God through particular volitions; to support this he cites the fact that angels have powers in the present world because of general laws unknown to us (TNG I.20.addition, OC V.34). In fact, Malebranche is emphatic in his debate with Arnauld that "most of the miraculous effects of the ancient Law happened in consequence of general laws" (OC VII.489), and so they are not truly miracles but only "miracles" in a secondary sense, as wondrous and unusual events (*des prodiges*), because we do not know the relevant laws. Elsewhere, Malebranche concedes that "'miracle' is an equivocal term. It can be taken either to refer to an effect that does not depend on the general laws known to man"—and so is an event that surprises us because of its novelty—or it can be taken "more generally, to be an effect that does not depend on any laws at all, neither known nor unknown" (*Méd. Chrét.* VIII.26, OC X.92; *Réponse aux Réflexions* [d'Arnauld], OC VIII.695-6).<sup>16</sup> The angelic events of the Old Testament, such as when a person walks on water, are miracles only in the first sense, thus not really true ones. As Malebranche says, "the frequent miracles of the Old Testament do not at all prove that God often acts by particular volitions" (OC VII.593).

It is the latter sense of 'miracle', however, that offers a stricter and more proper Malebranchian notion of what a miracle is, and it seems *prima facie* to restore their status as products of particular volitions. According to a second reading of Malebranchian miracles, a miraculous event is one whose occurrence transcends *all five orders of law*: all the laws of nature *and* all the laws of angelic action and of grace. A miracle is an event brought about by a divine volition that is not the carrying out of some law, neither the familiar laws of nature nor the higher-order "laws unknown to us". That is, we should

take Malebranche at his word when he says that "miracles are such only because they never occur as a result of general laws" (TNG I.59, OC V.63). Thus, before the birth of Christ and so in the absence of his desires functioning as occasions for the operation of the laws of grace, God distributed grace to the Patriarchs through particular volitions. This was miraculous, just because "whatever God does by particular volitions is certainly a miracle, since such things never occur through the general laws He has established" (TNG, Ecl. I.13, OC V.161-2). Similarly, God's creation of this world had to be a particular volition—in fact, it had to involve an extraordinary number of particular volitions, in so far as it includes the initial creation of many members of each of the species of fauna and flora and the initial setting of bodies into motion, and before the creation of the world there were no laws to follow and no natural substances to occasion their operation (*Rép. aux Réflexions* [d'Arnauld], OC VIII.759; *Entretiens* X.16, OC XII.245f; JS 189f).

It is important to bear in mind, however, that for Malebranche any divine departures from the laws of nature and grace are not rationally unmotivated; God's particular volitions do not happen indifferently or ad hoc. Malebranchian miracles are, in fact, in accordance with a higher law that Malebranche calls "Order". God, he says, "never acts by particular volitions except for good reasons" (OC VIII.661), and those more weighty reasons are found in Order. "The immutable Order", Malebranche says, "consists in the necessary relations among the divine perfections, and is the inviolable law and rule of all of [God's] volitions" (OC VIII.753; also OC V.33). Order is the "Eternal Wisdom" in God Himself, and bears the uncreated principles of truths, beauty, and justice. It dictates that God is more worthy than a creature, that a soul is more worthy

than a body, and that a human being is more worthy than a beast. Above all, Order informs God that His wisdom, justice and other attributes are sometimes better honored by an exception to the laws of nature and grace than by following them.

In one of his responses to Arnauld, Malebranche defends himself against the accusation that on his view God *never* acts by particular volitions, and thus never performs miracles. "On the contrary," Malebranche replies, "I have said many times that God has always acted by these kinds of volitions, when Order wanted it and often when Order permitted it, since Order is the inviolable law of divine volitions" (OC .267-8). In the *Dialogues*, Theodore notes that God has "these important reasons" to suspend the laws and depart from the simplicity and generality of his ways "when the glory that He derives from the perfection of His work counterbalances that which He receives from the uniformity of His conduct ... He has these serious reasons when what He owes to His immutability is equal to or of less consideration than what He owes to another one of His attributes in particular" (XII.12, OC XII.293-4; JS 230-1)—for example, to His justice. God has necessary and sufficient reason to execute a particular volition and perform a miracle "when He acts as much or more according to His nature by departing from the general laws He has prescribed for Himself than by following them ... [God] inviolably follows the immutable order of His own perfections".

But notice that once again we have a problem about particular volitions. What this account of Divine Order means is that Malebranche inscribes even miracles in the strict sense within a law-like framework.<sup>17</sup> A miracle may transcend all five sets of laws of nature and grace, but they still remain within the domain of divine reason and, more importantly, are still a consequence of law—this time the highest-order law, an eternal

law that can require the suspension of all other laws. So it might be objected that even here we are not dealing with absolutely particular volitions—that is, with divine volitions that, while certainly purposive and not capricious, are truly ad hoc and do not represent the carrying out of some general law.

But in the end, maybe this is precisely Malebranche's point. Perhaps he really did mean it when he said that God "never acts by particular volitions", since even "miracles" in Malebranche's second, more proper sense are in accordance with some law or general principle.

Are there then, in Malebranche's system, *any* divine actions that are beyond even the rational demands of Order—true and pure miracles in the sense that they are the result of absolutely particular volitions and do not follow from *any* law whatsoever?<sup>18</sup> As a matter of fact, there seems to be only one instance: God's decision to create something distinct from Himself in the first place. Because God is all-perfect and completely self-sufficient, God's decision to create something outside Himself is not motivated by any law or principle or need. Having decided to create, God's choice to create *this* world rather than some other world was dictated by Order; but the decision to create in the first place was, he says, a matter of "perfect freedom and complete indifference" (*Entretiens* VIII.2, OC XII.176; JS 130).<sup>19</sup> Malebranche makes a distinction between those things that Order "requires" and those that Order "permits" (OC VII.490). Almost all of the particular volitions that constitute proper Malebranchian miracles—as opposed to the merely apparent miracles of the Hebrew Bible—are exceptions to the laws of nature and grace that Order requires. By contrast, God's decision to create something in the first



place is not required by Order, although it is not contrary to Order and so is permitted by it. It is, however, in its arbitrariness, the exception that seems to prove the rule.<sup>20</sup>

And this is precisely what drove Malebranche's critics, like Arnould and Fénelon, to distraction. Malebranche's shrinking of the number of miracles and his reduction of even true miracles to law-governed events, in effect "naturalizing", even necessitating them, seemed to his opponents only to confirm that he was, at heart, a Spinozist.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In fact, Arnould misreads occasionalism; see Nadler.

<sup>2</sup> See Rutherford, Brown, etc.

<sup>3</sup> Malebranche's clearest statement on general vs. particular volitions is at *Traité de la nature et de la grace* (1680; henceforth, TNG), Eclaircissement I. Recent lit includes Stencil/Walsh JHP, Pessin JHP, Black, Pyle.

<sup>4</sup> TNG I.18, *Oeuvres complètes de Malebranche*, André Robinet, ed., 20 vols. (Paris: J. Vrin, 1958-76; henceforth, OC), vol. V, p. 32.

<sup>5</sup> TNG I.18, OC V.32.

<sup>6</sup> TNG I.59, OC V.63.

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<sup>7</sup> *Entretiens sur la métaphysique* IX.9, OC XII.212. The translation is from *Dialogues on Metaphysics and on Religion*, Nicholas Jolley, ed., David Scott, trans. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997; henceforth, JS), 161.

<sup>8</sup> *De la recherche de la vérité*, Eclaircissement XV, OC III.218. The translation is from *The Search After Truth*, trans. Thomas M. Lennon and Paul J. Olscamp (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1980; henceforth, LO), 665.

<sup>9</sup> Distinction between simple vs. practical volitions. OC VIII.651. Pellegrin seems not to agree with the identification of miracle with particular volition. In her book, she does say that "toutes les volontés particulières de Dieu sont des miracles" (175); but in communication with me she claims that for Malebranche being a particular volition is only a necessary (but not sufficient condition for being a miracle)—it must also be a violation of an existing law. And since before creation there are no laws, the act of creation, while the product of a particular volition, is not a miracle.

<sup>10</sup> Adams, "Malebranche's Causal Concept", p. 69.

<sup>11</sup> The laws are detailed in *Entretiens sur la métaphysique* XIII.9, OC XII.319-20; JS 252-3.

<sup>12</sup> TNG I.20.Addition, OC V.34. *Recherche de la vérité*, Ecl. XV, OC III.221.

<sup>13</sup> Adams is willing to countenance for Malebranche miracles that are nonetheless events brought about by general volitions (p. 71). Pellegrin agrees, in a sense, when she speaks of "la résorption du miracle dans une légalité supérieure" (186).

<sup>14</sup> Nor could Malebranche say that "when I say that God always follows the general laws He has prescribed for Himself, I am talking only of His general and ordinary providence.

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I am not at all ruling miracles or effects which do not follow from His general laws"

(*Entretiens* VIII.3, OC XII.177; JS 130).

<sup>15</sup> *Recherche de la vérité*, Ecl. XV, OC III.221.

<sup>16</sup> See Gouhier, *La Philosophie de Malebranche et son expérience religieuse*, 65-6.

<sup>17</sup> As Marie-Frédérique Pellegrin puts it, Malebranche subjects even miraculous events to a kind of "legalité".

<sup>18</sup> Pellegrin (177) believes the answer to this question is "no": "L'idée d'une intervention gratuite de Dieu, c'est-à-dire sans nécessité du point de vue de l'ordre, serait une aberration."

<sup>19</sup> Pellegrin seems to miss this point when she says that for Malebranche "la création s'effectue en dehors de toute loi" (134). She conflates the decision to create per se with the act of creating this world; for Malebranche, it seems, the latter is not "dehors de toute loi", since it follows the law of Order.

<sup>20</sup> See Stencil/Walsh JHP article. Pellegrin wants to deny that creation is a miracle, since, while it is the result of a particular volition, it is not a violation of some law (since the laws did not exist yet); see note 9 above.

<sup>21</sup> See Pellegrin 178-9.