

# Nicolas Malebranche | Encyclopedia.com

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(*b.* Paris, France, 5 August 1638; *d.* Paris, 13 October 1715)

*philosophy, science.*

Malebranche's life spanned the same years as [Louis XIV](#)'s, and a famous contemporary, [Antoine Arnauld](#), termed his philosophy "*grand et magnifique*," adjectives historians often apply to that monarch's reign. The grandeur of his philosophy consists in the way he assimilated the whole of the Cartesian heritage and attempted to elaborate, on theological foundations, an original, rationalist-oriented speculative system. The passage of time and the recently concluded publication of his works have restored to Malebranche the stature of a remarkable intellect, for whom the polemics in which he ceaselessly engaged were merely occasions to buttress his "search for truth." Yet, while his personality can be understood in terms of the profound—and religious—unity of his thought and life, the influence of his work is not free from paradox: Voltaire honored him as one of the greatest speculative thinkers, and d'Alembert placed his portrait above his writing table. A discussion of Malebranche would be incomplete without an attempt to comprehend why Enlightenment philosophers accorded him this praise, suspect as it was in the eyes of theologians.

The youngest son of a large family, Malebranche was born with a delicate constitution. Through his father, a royal counsellor, he was linked to the rural bourgeoisie. His mother, Catherine de Lauson, belonged to the minor nobility; her brother, Jean de Lauson, was governor of Canada. His family's modest wealth allowed him to pursue a special program of studies adapted to his physical disability. It was not until age sixteen that he entered the college de la Marche of the University of Paris. He received the master of arts degree there in 1656 after having attended the lectures of the renowned Peripatetic M. Rouillard. His piety inclined him toward the priesthood, and for three years he studied theology at the Sorbonne. It seems, however, that he was no more satisfied with this instruction than he had been with commentaries on Aristotle. He entered the Congregation of the Oratory on 20 January 1660, no doubt attracted by its reputation for liberty and culture in the service of the inner life. The impression he made on his new teachers was not altogether favorable. Although he was judged to be suited for the religious life and endowed with the virtues required in communal life, his was considered an "undistinguished intellect."

The explanation of this judgment may well be that, during his four years of Oratorian training, Malebranche, who was ordained priest on 20 September 1664, does not seem to have been sympathetic to the newest elements of the curriculum: an interest in history and erudition, and a passion for positive theology founded on critical study of the Scriptures. Malebranche was taught by the leaders of this tendency, Richard Simon and Charles Lecoigne, but did not adopt their views. However that may be, he did become acquainted at the Oratory with the ideas of [St. Augustine](#) and Plato.

The stimulus for Malebranche's independent intellectual development came from Descartes, during the first year of his priesthood. It was said that this change resulted from his reading of the newly published *Traité de l'homme*, whose editors had sought to emphasize the broad area of agreement between Descartes and Augustine that was revealed by this posthumous work. Whatever the event that decided Malebranche in favor of this disputed book, it is certain that within three or four years he had completely redone his studies and had made the Cartesian legacy an integral part of his thought. Evidence for this assertion is to be found in *De la recherche de la vérité*, begun as early as 1668. The title itself reveals the inspiration he drew from the manuscripts generously made available to him by the circle around Claude Clerselier. Indeed, the content of the first volume exhibits this inspiration so clearly that Malebranche became involved in difficulties with the censors and had to postpone publication until 1674.

The following year, 1675, saw the publication of a revised edition of the first volume, the second volume, and Jean Prestet's *Éléments des mathématiques*. The simultaneous appearance of these three books is significant. Prestet, a young man with no resources, owed everything to Malebranche and was evidently his pupil even before the Congregation decided officially in 1674 to recognize Malebranche as professor of mathematics at the seminary. The extremely gifted Prestet rapidly accomplished what Malebranche himself was unable to achieve while he was embroiled in difficulties over his philosophical writings. It was Malebranche, however, who was responsible for the simultaneous publication of 1675, for he wished to place before the public an original philosophical and mathematical synthesis attesting the vitality of Cartesianism.

The general impression given by this synthesis—an impression that accounts for its success—was not deceptive. It was indeed from Descartes that Malebranche attempted to discover a science and a method of reasoning founded on clear and distinct ideas. Later he himself declared that what Augustine lacked was the opportunity to learn from Descartes that bodies are not seen in themselves. From the beginning of his philosophical career Malebranche let it be known that he considered this a fundamental lesson. Rejecting sensible qualities, he held, like Descartes, that things are to be judged solely by the ideas that represent them to us according to their intelligible essence.

All the same the *Recherche de la vérité* touches on various subjects that are not at all Cartesian: primacy of religious goals, refutation of the doctrine of innate ideas, negation of composite substance, union of the problems of error and sin, explanation of the creation by God's love for himself, and affirmation that God acts in the most simple ways, that he is the sole efficient cause, and that natural causes are only "occasional" causes. The list of new branches that Malebranche grafted onto the Cartesian trunk and that corresponded to his hope of establishing a truly Christian philosophy could be expanded; but at this stage of his career it was a matter of possible materials for a new doctrine rather than such a doctrine itself.

Progress toward this goal is represented by *Conversations chrétiennes* (1677) and the third volume of the *Recherche* (1678), "containing several elucidations concerning the principal difficulties of the preceding volumes." But it was with the *Traité de la nature et de la grâce* (Amsterdam, 1680) that Malebranche emerged as the creator of a new system of the world. Inspired by a discussion with Arnauld in 1679, the book's immediate goal was to refute Jansenist ideas concerning grace and predestination. But in order to untangle this essentially religious problem, he transferred the debate to the philosophical plane, thus demonstrating to what extent he disagreed with Descartes on the value of extending rational reflection to question of theology.

In examining this book one grasps the essential difference between the two thinkers. A believer and a philosopher, Malebranche did not experience the hyperbolic doubt expressed in the first Cartesian *Méditation*; he did not confront the "Cogito" as the initial indubitable existence; he did not have to seek to escape from a structure of thought closed in upon itself by discovering a God who could guarantee the universality and immutability of truth. For Malebranche, as for Descartes, God was undoubtedly the keystone and foundation of all truth, but for the former he was not the God reached by philosophical speculation whose essence is demonstrated by his existence. Rather, he is Augustine's God *intimior intimo meo*, whose presence in man is the source of the believer's daily meditation and from whom all light descends. He is also the God of wisdom, creator of a universe ordered according to laws that are both perfectly simple and perfectly intelligible—the God who, acting uniquely for his own glory, created man that he might live in union with him and participate in his reason, in his word itself.

Thus, whereas Descartes refused as a vain undertaking any speculation on divine motivations, Malebranche found in this realm something on which he could base the exercise of human reason. In his doctrine the union of man and God is not only the goal of the religious life, it is also the means of attaining a vision, in God, in which there occurs the fullest possible communication of wisdom and intelligibility. Of course, Malebranche does not claim that this communication, the supreme guarantee against error, is a blessing easily obtained or permanently assured. But he does assert that in making the effort to discern the coherence of rational discourse, sinful man, whether Christian or atheist, always obtains some reflection of the universal reason, even if he is unaware of or actually denies its divine nature. Indeed Malebranche contends that attention is a *natural prayer* that God has established as the occasional cause of our knowledge.

The term and the notion of occasional cause are not due to Malebranche, but his use of them and the importance he gave to them were incontestably original. Assigning the source of all effective action to God, he took causality in the strict sense out of the created world. This world is indeed regulated by divine wisdom, but as a function of relationships that carry in themselves no necessity whatever. Moreover, the means that man has received to make it intelligible could only be indirect, that is, occasional. Malebranche thus arrived at a philosophical system that goes far beyond the theological problem that was, so to say, the occasion for its own complete formulation.

When the *Traité* appeared, it was already several years since Malebranche had been assigned any specific duties. Starting in 1680 he devoted all his time to writing and to his role as mediator between theology and Cartesian natural philosophy. He was assailed by polemics that obliged him to review, correct, and improve his system. It is impossible to recount this highly complicated story in a few lines or to discuss in detail the modifications he made in response to a flood of objections and difficulties. However interesting the debates in which Malebranche found himself involved (for example, over the coordination of the two different perfections represented by the divine laws and the divine work) and whatever accusations he was forced to counter (destroying Providence, excluding miracles, minimizing grace to the advantage of liberty), he did not need to modify for the scientific public the basic positions of his philosophy as outlined above.

It should be merely noted in passing that Malebranche, who was more skillful in the art of revising his texts than in that of controversy, rapidly alienated a number of people, even in the Oratory. In Arnauld's opinion he was incapable of maintaining a suitable degree of detachment, and Bossuet judged him severely. Most important, he failed to escape papal censure: the *Traité* was placed on the Index in 1690 while he was in the midst of preparing the third edition appeared in 1712, along with the sixth edition of the *Recherche*.

These figures are revealing. Malebranche was read in his own time as much by admirers as by opponents. So much is evident. What most clearly appears in this record of publication, however, is a tireless capacity for modifying his positions in the scientific movement of his time to this harmony of his personal qualities with his doctrine of occasionalism.

It is not difficult to understand why occasionalism was a conception particularly conducive to the advance of experimental science. To the degree that nature appeared, to Malebranche, as simply a sphere of relations, the dialogue between reason and experience became for him, inevitably, the fundamental stimulus in the pursuit of knowledge. For when reason was supported by metaphysics, as it was in Descartes, it had much too great a tendency to declare what should be, a priori, and to call upon experience solely for confirmation. In his view, however, the only means of discovery available to the human mind are

occasional causes, that is, causes which could have been totally different and which are the reflection not of some ontological necessity but only of the Creator's will. Consequently, experience is indispensable. Of course, it must be intimately conjoined with the exercise of reason in order to attain knowledge of the relations that God has established in his Creation in fact, and not involuntarily, as it were, to comply with some metaphysical imperative. While Malebranche's philosophy provided, above all, a rationale for the study of physics, what is striking is the way in which he was led to grasp this fact himself and to work simultaneously in very different disciplines.

As noted above, the simultaneous publication of Prestet's *Éléments* and the first edition of the *Recherche* suggests that Malebranche was sufficiently well-versed in Cartesian mathematics to have been capable of inspiring a highly talented disciple and to have worked with him on an up-to-date textbook. [John Wallis](#) in his *Treatise of Algebra* (1684) did not hesitate to attribute to Malebranche the authorship of the *éléments* and to reproach the work for being merely a compilation, one that failed to cite its sources other than Descartes and Viète. In replying to this accusation, Prestet clearly implied that he was not annoyed at the attribution of his book to "a person more skillful than he," but he ironically asserted his astonishment that anyone could have supposed he had read so many specialized works. Dating his own initiation in mathematics to 1671, he artlessly stated that Descartes was virtually his only source and that, moreover, he was completely dissatisfied with the few other books that had come to his attention. These remarks would be as true of Malebranche as of Prestet himself.

It is likely that Malebranche's duties as a professor of mathematics lasted only a short while. In any case they have left no further trace. Moreover, when Leibniz met Prestet at Malebranche's residence during his stay in Paris, he was well aware of their respective roles, as is evident from his later correspondence with Malebranche. The disciple, who clearly surpassed his master in the technical realm, was entrusted with the actual mathematical portion of the work; but the master directed the research, and his orientation of it consisted in giving the greatest possible development to Cartesian mathematics.

The *Éléments* consisted of two parts. The first was devoted to arithmetic and algebra, the second to analysis, that is, the application of the two former disciplines to the resolution of all problems concerned with magnitude (*grandeur*). By magnitude, the author specified that he meant not only what is susceptible of extension in various dimensions but, more generally, everything "susceptible of more and less" (*de plus et de moins*)—in other words, everything that could enter, according to Archimedean logic, into the formal rules of relations. The plan of the work corresponded to one of the aspects of the intelligibility that Malebranche promised to the exercise of the human mind. Prestet added: "We do not attempt to understand or even to reason about the infinite," a point of view which was in accord with Descartes' thinking and to which he always remained faithful. The authors cited in the section on analysis were Diophantus, Viète, and Descartes. In his view, however, Descartes's method was "the most general, the most fruitful, and the most simple of all." In utilizing this method he completed Descartes' effort, notably with regard to equations of the fourth and fifth degree, an area in which he fancied that he had made a theoretical advance.

As to that, he deluded himself a bit, but he did at least provoke Leibniz' curiosity and interest in the subject. Leibniz was disappointed to learn from Malebranche in 1679 that Prestet, who had entered the Oratory and was busy preparing for the priesthood, had not pursued his investigations. This circumstance explains why the theory of equations and the analytic expression of roots constituted the grounds on which Leibniz chose to attack Malebranche. In telling Malebranche that this was the area that most clearly demonstrated the insufficiency and limitations of the Cartesian method, Leibniz was on the right track. Between 1680 and 1690 Malebranche progressively detached himself from Prestet, whose teaching at the University of Angers during these years was marked by painful conflicts with the Jesuits.

True, a new person in Malebranche's immediate entourage, the Abbé Catelan, lent Prestet a hand in assimilating English mathematics and in attempting to attach Barrow's method and Wallis' arithmetic of the infinitesimals to Cartesian mathematics. But Malebranche also became acquainted with a young gentleman, the Marquis de L'Hospital, whom he considered more receptive to the changes that he suspected might be necessary. Prestet died in 1691 after having published two volumes of *Nouveaux éléments*, (1689), leaving in manuscript a third volume on geometry that was never published because of Malebranche's unfavorable opinion. For a few months Catelan sought to continue Prestet' work, but the cause was already lost. From 1690 to 1691 Malebranche devoted all his attention to the compromise that L'Hospital had worked out and then ardently followed what the latter was learning from Johann I Bernoulli in 1692. The arrival in Paris of this messenger of Leibniz' new calculus was the "occasion" that completely rearranged the mathematical landscape. Malebranche left to his Oratorian collaborators the task of completing the fair copy of the manuscript recording the mathematical reform elaborated by L'Hospital the preceding year, and the two of them became converts to the movement emanating from Hannover.

This rapid sequence of events within the space of only two or three years undoubtedly reproduced, in a certain way, the situation of 1671–1675. Malebranche assimilated the innovations, pen in hand, and convinced himself of the necessity of encouraging research in the new direction. L'Hospital was the real mathematician, the one who mastered the material and proceeded faster. He soon asserted his own independence from Malebranche; in 1696 he published his *Analyse des infiniment petits* without consulting him. This independence, moreover, was the sign of a new reality. The rapidity with which mathematics was developing reflected the fruitfulness of analysis, which combined consideration of the infinite with the operational procedures of the differential and [integral calculus](#). And the rapid pace accentuated the distinction between those who truly deserved to be considered mathematicians, and the partisans who could only follow, more or less closely, with greater or less difficulty. Malebranche henceforth belonged in the second category.

All the same, he possessed the valuable assets of freshness and enthusiasm. In this regard Leibniz said he had to laugh to see how Malebranche was so enamored of algebra, so enchanted that Malebranche found in the mathematics of the infinitesimal analysis attests to the same naïveté. He failed to distinguish clearly between the respective roles of logic and calculation. Believing that the new mathematics was within striking distance of perfection, he could not understand what restrained the great masters from placing their discoveries before the public. What diminishes Malebranche's standing as a mathematician in the eyes of the specialists, his naïveté, was the same quality that made his advocacy more effective.

In the fifth edition of the *Recherche de la vérité* (1700), Malebranche replaced all the mathematical references he had previously given with L'Hospital's *Analyse* and a work on [integral calculus](#) that his former secretary, Louis Carré, had just compiled from material in the archives of the Oratory. Fully aware of its deficiencies, Malebranche expressed the hope that a better work would shortly appear and hinted that the required effort was under way. He had good reason for doing so, because in 1698 he had, in effect, assigned this task to the Oratorian Charles-René Reyneau, Prestet's successor at Angers. And to the extent that this outstanding teacher encountered great difficulties in absorbing the infinitesimal methods, there were grounds for thinking that the result of his labor would correspond to the conditions required for the dissemination of the new ideas in the schools and would, in short, constitute a good textbook.

The enterprise was marked by many vicissitudes and was not completed until 1708, after the happy conclusion at the Académie des Sciences of the polemic provoked by Michel Rolle against the infinitesimals. (Malebranche played the most active role in bringing about this happy ending.) Although Reyneau's *Analyse démontrée* appeared in 1708, later than expected, it answered all the more fully to the hopes placed in it. The first textbook of the new mathematics, it fulfilled the important social function indispensable to all reform. It was from one of this work's posthumous editions that d'Alembert learned the subject.

It is evident that Malebranche holds no place in the history of mathematics by virtue of any specific discovery, nor any claim to be considered a true mathematician. Nevertheless, the history of mathematics at the end of the seventeenth century—at least in France—cannot be described without referring to his activity. The mainspring of the spread and development of Cartesian mathematics, Malebranche successively insisted on the need for reform and fostered the introduction of Leibnizian mathematics. Throughout these changes, moreover, he was concerned with their implications for teaching.

While the importance of intelligibility in his philosophy accounts for his special interest in mathematics, it was, rather, toward physics and the natural sciences that Malebranche turned his attention. The first edition of the *Recherche* clearly demonstrates that this vast subject attracted Malebranche's interest from the start and that he had already read extensively in it. In the realm of physics, Rohault's recent publication seemed to Malebranche both adequate and faithful to the Cartesian method. The only topic in which Malebranche felt obliged to make a personal contribution was that of the laws of collision. It is also the question to which he returned in 1692 in publishing a small volume entitled *Des lois de la communication des mouvements*.

The date 1692 in itself is significant, but to understand fully Malebranche's statement that this short treatise was written in order to meet Leibniz' criticisms, it is not sufficient to consider only the mathematical developments outlined above. It must also be recalled that in 1686–1687 Leibniz had launched an attack in the *Acta eruditorum* against the Cartesian identification of force with the quantity of motion and had thereby provoked a bitter controversy with Catelan, who was then friendly with Malebranche. Moreover, in 1692 Malebranche was the recipient of a manuscript copy of Leibniz' *Essay de dynamique*. The brief work that he brought out almost simultaneously shows that Malebranche was able to assimilate criticism without capitulating to it.

Although Malebranche agreed to revise the whole of his presentation of the subject, he did not consent to abandon any more of the Cartesian legacy than he had already done in dropping the principle that a force inheres in the state of rest. Further, he assumed that he had answered Leibniz' objections by distinguishing three types of laws, corresponding to the “different suppositions that may be held relating to colliding bodies and to the surrounding medium.” On this occasion, moreover, he gave greater importance to the notion of elasticity. Nevertheless, his conclusion, presented with highly interesting remarks on the respective roles of theoretical speculation and experiment, makes clear that he was not satisfied with his work and was ready for a more radical revision. He undertook such a revision in several steps in the years 1698 to 1700, characterizing his own publication of 1692 as a “wretched little treatise.”

In the course of this tumultuous development of his ideas Malebranche made his most original contribution to the scientific movement—and did so in his capacity as speculative philosopher. In his exposition of the third law of impact, he invested [collision theory](#) with a clarity that was lacking in Mariotte's *Traité de la percussion ou chocq des corps* (1673). After concisely expressing the principles of research, he judiciously chose numerical examples and then stated a position that he firmly maintained in the following years: the scientist's duty is to begin with the diversity of observations and then to establish laws. These laws, when submitted to mathematical operations, should reflect natural effects step by step. It was in this connection that Malebranche was dissatisfied with Mariotte's propositions. The latter had, it is true, clearly distinguished between two operations. First, he disregarded elasticity and treated the bodies as if they were soft. Second, he superimposed the effect of elasticity, which consisted in assigning the respective velocities in inverse ratio to the masses. But in Malebranche's view the first operation was unintelligible, since bodies without elasticity were, he supposed, necessarily hard. And the second operation ran into serious logical difficulties, for taking the force to be the absolute quantity of motion led to paradoxical results. Malebranche satisfied himself with regard to the first point in 1698–1699 by means of a modification of the concept of matter, the subject of his “Mémoire sur la lumière, les couleurs etc.” He attempted to overcome the second problem by considering the

property of reciprocity, which Mariotte's laws assumed, to be a "revelation" of the experiment, the sort of principle of intelligibility to which all rational effort must be subject. While correcting the proofs for the fifth edition of the *Recherche*, he was rewarded by the discovery that the whole question became clarified if the absolute quantity of motion were replaced by the algebraic quantity, that is, if the sign were taken into account.

This discovery led to the final corrections, which now furnished an original way of demonstrating, without paralogism or *petitio principii*, the laws of elastic collision. Moreover, this method of improving Mariotte's presentation avoided adopting Leibniz' point of view and preserved as much as possible of Descartes's conception.

Convinced that he had found a solution, Malebranche turned his attention all the more resolutely toward other problems. The memoir alluded to above won him membership in the Académie des Sciences at the time of its reorganization in 1699. Henceforth, Malebranche actively participated in scientific life, while gathering the material he was to incorporate in the sixth edition of the *Recherche* (1712), in which he made the necessary revisions, corrections, and additions in those sections devoted to all the topics in which he thought science bore on his philosophy.

It is most important to note that certain authors have erred in ridiculing the patching up of the Cartesian vortices that Malebranche is supposed to have begun. To be sure, he speaks of subtle matter and vortices, but his system arises from a syncretism that borrowed much from recent advances in physics and especially from the work of Huygens. Malebranche's subtle matter is a unique primary substance that, forced to move at high speed in a closed universe, is obliged to whirl in vortices the dimensions of which can decrease without limit, a property predicated on the supposition that no vacuum can exist. The formula for centrifugal force then requires that these small vortices, which are actually the universal material of all physical entities, be not only perfectly elastic but capable, as well, of releasing a "fearful" force upon breaking up. A theoretical model of this sort is not a trivial invention.

Nor is there anything trivial about the manner in which Malebranche utilized this model to study luminous phenomena and to provide an account of universal gravitation, of planetary motion, and of gravity. This model, considered in itself as the seat of action in the universe, inspired his idea that light consists of vibration in a medium under pressure. And considered in all its ramifications, it led him to conceive of the gross matter accessible to our senses as the result of a condensation in the neighborhood of a vortical center. This picture was imposed by the inapplicability to the case of large vortices of a homogeneous mechanical model centered on a point with invariant properties for distances near to or far from the center.

Although all this theoretical effort must be granted a certain originality, none of it was adopted by eighteenth-century science. It was not until much later that scientists again took up the idea that frequency is characteristic of colors or the idea that orthography can help establish the laws of central systems of small diameter—and when they did they were unaware that Malebranche had advocated such views.

Nor did anything come either of the hours that Malebranche spent at the microscope or of his botanical observations. Despite the importance he accorded to the experimental method after 1700, he never considered himself more than an amateur, concerned simply to grasp what it was that the specialization of others was accomplishing. The only experiment that we can confidently attribute to his own efforts—before his reading of Newton's *Opticks*—concerned the virtual equivalence of air and of the vacuum produced in the air pump as mediums for the propagation of light. It was a perfect example of the ambiguity of so-called crucial experiments. Malebranche's improvements in methods for observing generation in eggs in the hatchery were trivial and presupposed confirmation of the ovist theory. Even though the science of life seemed to him a realm apart, incomprehensible without the idea of finality, he applied to it what is now known as the notion of structure, deriving from his mathematical critique of being and extension. That is why he advocated the doctrine of the *emboîtement des germes*.

It has to be admitted that Malebranche came to a scientific career, in the broad sense, too late in life. It was unusual enough that at age sixty he was able to carry out experimental research which showed a greater command of the subject than he could have won from books alone; and more should not be asked of him. Faithful to his speculative temperament, he was ardently concerned to preserve from his Cartesian past those values he thought enduring and to bequeath a system reconciling this past with the science of his day. This arduous enterprise condemned him to be a follower, not a leader, and it is not surprising that his work failed to exhibit intimate knowledge of the most advanced developments of contemporary science. The reformulation of results that have become common knowledge always requires the discovery of new results, if it is to incite interest. Malebranche failed to go beyond the reexpression of either the sine law of refraction of light or the inverse-square law of gravitation, and he left his vibratory theory of colors in only a rudimentary state.

Still, the high level of reflection he demanded from his readers exerted an influence on the most diverse thinkers both in France and abroad. As in the case of mathematics, Malebranche has a claim to be remembered in the history of physics, a science the autonomy of which was scarcely recognized in the last years of the seventeenth century and which had to formulate a charter for itself. In this respect Malebranche indisputably answered to the needs of his time, and his efforts were not in vain.

Thus, to the extent that Malebranche enriched theoretical speculation and worked to fashion a suitable basis for the union of the rational and the experimental, he made a genuine contribution to the autonomy of science. His activity was always inspired by his religious philosophy and, reciprocally, his results appeared to him to provide support for it. Others could complete the separation, retaining the autonomy and discarding the philosophy.

In preparing this account the author has sought to adhere to the facts available to him. This same fidelity, however, obliges him to restore to Malebranche something beyond the authorship of a body of thought that advanced an enlightened rationalism. The restitution concerns the virtues that Malebranche constantly displayed during his life: a capacity to correct himself, a sensitivity to the difficulties of the ordinary reader and to the needs of his time, and a perseverance in educating himself in many fields. In Malebranche, the man is inseparable from the thinker, and the man was wholly imbued with Christian faith. One may, of course, not share this faith, and then the separation of science from belief is easy to effect. But whoever accepts the lesson to be learned in contemplating the total, integrated image of a life will no less easily perceive the violence of such an act. This is why, after several centuries, the message offered by Malebranche endures.

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Six eds. of *De la recherche de la vérité* were published, at Paris, during Malebranche's lifetime: the first three, in 2 vols. (1674–1675, 1675, 1677–1678); the 4th and 5th, in 3 vols. (1678–1679, 1700); and the 6th, in 4 vols. (1712). The *Traité de la nature et de la grâce* (Amsterdam, 1680) was followed in 1681 by *éclaircissement, ou la suite du Traité...*

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Pierre Costabel