A Malebranchean theory of recognition?

A Malebranchean Theory of Recognition?

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Abstract

This thesis examines the place of Nicholas Malebranche in the history of theories of recognition. According to Axel Honneth's and Charles Taylor's seminal works in recognition theory, the place of recognition in the formation of the self was first thematised by G.W.F. Hegel. In earlier periods, they claim, the significance of the need for recognition was concealed by the fact that its satisfaction never posed a problem. Recently, Honneth has conceded that there are some pre-Hegelian theorists of recognition. I argue, however, that his view remains unduly limited. The history of recognition is more extensive and diverse than he and Taylor allow.

Focusing on one excluded figure, I argue that Malebranche's account of the intersubjectivity of postlapsarian identity makes a significant contribution to the history of the concept of recognition. Whilst the most influential contemporary recognition theorists assume that recognition is a beneficial phenomenon with positive effects, Malebranche prompts us to question this view. As he sees the matter, our dependence on the approval of others is the fruit of self-love, and has distinctly negative consequences. Consumed by our need to see ourselves as worthy of esteem, we postlapsarians simulate the possession of valued qualities in order to elicit esteem from others. Then, by sympathising with the passions of those around us and the opinions that underlie them, we come to understand ourselves intersubjectively, through the eyes of others. In short, Malebranche proposes, our deep-seated need for the recognition of others becomes a barrier to self-knowledge.

Taken in tandem, Malebranchean subjectivity and contemporary recognition theory prove to be mutually illuminating. Considering Malebranche's treatment of subjectivity from the perspective of contemporary recognition theory effects a gestalt shift, bringing to the fore certain hitherto unappreciated aspects of a philosophy so often read as strikingly individualist. Conversely, a

reexamination of contemporary recognition theory through a Malebranchean lens highlights some of its limitations, revealing its positive understanding of recognition as contestable and unduly narrow. Contrary to the historical narrative of mainstream contemporary recognition theory, recognition is revealed as a central theme in early modern philosophy.

Introduction

The central claim of this thesis is that Nicholas Malebranche's account of the intersubjectivity of postlapsarian identity forms a part of the history of recognition theory. I will make the case that these two, apparently disparate, fields of philosophy are interrelated in mutually enlightening ways. By approaching Malebranche from the perspective of recognition theory, we better place ourselves to uncover the richness of his understanding of subjectivity. At the same time, Malebranche's inclusion in this tradition reveals some of the central tenets of recognition theory as contingent and contestable, underlining the critical role that a more historically-minded approach to the history of recognition theory can perform.

My argument for Malebranche's inclusion in this history comes in two phases: the first is critical, the second constructive. I begin the first phase by questioning the historical narrative with which contemporary recognition theory traditionally comes hand-in-hand. Seminal articulations of recognition theory claim that Hegel was the first philosopher to thematise the human need for the recognition of others, and to acknowledge its importance for the undistorted development of subjectivity. This narrative, I argue, is problematically stunted, and it has inaugurated a tradition of thinking about recognition which has sidelined sensitive historical investigation of the concept.

At the same time, historical narratives regarding the philosophical commitments of early modern philosophers have lent additional weight to the claim that such theorists have nothing valuable to contribute to recognition theory's history. Prominent recognition theorists have contended that the

early modern period was enthralled by a mistaken philosophical atomism which put a block on the thematisation of the need for recognition. According to historically influential interpretations of Descartes, for instance, he presents us with an account of the self as an atomistic, disembodied thinking thing. As a Cartesian, I propose, Malebranche has been tarred with a similarly sparse account of the self. The prospect of Malebranche possessing any relevance to the history of recognition theory looks bleak.

The second phase of my thesis begins the constructive work of making the case for a new reading of Malebranche which grounds his inclusion in recognition theory's history. In the *Search After Truth*, I argue, Malebranche outlines a picture of postlapsarian subjects as afflicted by a disordered self-love which unceasingly produces desires both for pleasure and for grandeur. These two strands of self-love, I propose, engender two different aspects of subjectivity. First, the love of pleasure underpins our understanding of ourselves as embodied subjects. Whilst this is insufficient for grounding Malebranche's inclusion in recognition's history, his account of the intersubjectivity of postlapsarian identity is. The love of grandeur engenders subjects hungry for the esteem of others, and willing to engage in deception in order to elicit it. A further disposition for sympathising, not only with the passions of others, but with the opinions that lie behind them, begets extensive changes in postlapsarians' conceptions of themselves. Postlapsarian individuals come to understand themselves through the eyes of those around them, adopting self-conceptions which are deeply intersubjective.

Malebranche's theory of recognition, I conclude, acts as a corrective for the positive theories of recognition which dominate contemporary discussion. Such recognition theories suppose that the painful nature of experiences of misrecognition motivates subjects to engage in struggles for greater

recognition. But Malebranche's account reveals the contentious nature of this claim by proposing a more complex account of misrecognition.

I begin, in Chapter 1, with an introduction to recognition theory. My exposition focuses on the theories of two seminal contemporary recognition theorists: Axel Honneth and Charles Taylor. According to contemporary recognition theory, to recognise another subject is to approvingly acknowledge their possession of valuable qualities and capacities. Further, the reception of such recognition is argued to be a fundamental psychological need. This is because it is only through the enjoyment of intersubjective recognition that individuals can experience the undistorted development of personal identity. Subjectivity, the recognition theorist claims, is essentially dialogical (Taylor 1994).

Next, I turn to the historical narrative which accompanies the seminal articulations of recognition theory. Whilst the need for recognition is perennial, Honneth and Taylor are also, at least in earlier works, in broad agreement on a historical narrative which understands the thematisation of the need for recognition as a relatively recent phenomenon. G.W.F. Hegel, it is proposed, was the first philosopher to acknowledge it. That such a vital need should have gone unnoticed for so long is a radical claim. I propose three factors that motivate Honneth and Taylor to subscribe to it: first, the symmetrical nature of recognition in traditional honour-based societies; second, the atomistic premises of early modern social contract theory, and third, the narrative of inwardness of early modern philosophical culture. Each reason, I argue, fails to fully exclude the possibility of the thematisation of recognition prior to Hegel. We are thus justified in re-examining the history of philosophy in the hope of discovering previously unseen sensitivities to the human dependency on the approval of others.

Recognition relations, this thesis will argue, were thematised before Hegel. Chapter 2 begins the work of substantiating this claim by turning to consider recent attempts to extend the history of recognition to include a later philosopher, Jean-Jaques Rousseau. I examine Frederick Neuhouser's argument, not merely for Rousseau's inclusion in recognition's history, but for crediting him as the originator of the tradition on the basis of his positive account of amour propre (or self-love) (2008, p. 13). Amour propre, he proposes, can take both positive and negative forms. Negative, or *inflamed*, amour propre engenders subjects fixated on achieving positions of superiority, and this pernicious desire results in a dependence on others that leads to the twin harms of a loss of integrity and self-estrangement. According to Neuhouser's controversial reading of amour propre, however, the positive rendering of this sentiment is a necessary condition of 'rationality, morality, and freedom—subjectivity itself' (2008, p.2). Consequently, Neuhouser urges us to recast our understanding of Hegelian recognition theory as an attempt to work through problems first raised by Rousseau (2008, p.13).

Neuhouser's argument raises questions about historical methodology and calls for clarification of the requirements for inclusion in recognition theory's history. Neuhouser's approach to recognition's history, I argue, is problematically teleological in nature: Rousseau's inclusion is predicated on the extent to which he preempts the central insights of Hegel's treatment of recognition. But this is not the only story we can tell about this concept's history. I argue, instead, for a (broadly speaking) genealogical approach, which considers the contingent and contestable ways in which the human need for the recognition of others has been understood. Such a way of reconstructing recognition's history permits us to include Rousseau on the basis of his insight into the alienating nature of inflamed amour propre. Honneth's (2020) revised history of recognition sees his partial adoption of this approach. Nevertheless, I conclude, his narrative retains a teleological tinge which constrains its ability to appreciate the full extent of recognition's historical guises.

Chapter 3 begins the constructive work of this thesis. I argue that the core claim of contemporary recognition theory—the notion that individuals depend on the recognition of others to form and sustain their identity—is not first announced by Rousseau, but plays a lively role in 17th century philosophy. First, I turn my attention to the negative treatments of self-love that are found in the works of a variety of early modern, neo-Augustinian writers. Figures like Cornelius Jansen, Blaise Pascal, Pierre Nicole, and Jean-François Senault, I propose, all understood Original Sin to have transformed a healthy drive for self-preservation into a pernicious self-love which desires superior status and the esteem of others. The lamentable consequences of such desires include the epistemic threat of self-estrangement, which Rousseau would later highlight as the result of inflamed amour propre.

Against this depiction of early modern treatments of self-love, I turn to Malebranche. I begin with a brief introduction to his life and major works, before exploring how, against the background of Original Sin, Malebranche conceives of the attenuated nature of postlapsarian subjects. After the Fall, he argues, human nature was vitiated; God withdrew from human subjects and, to the same degree, strengthened their connection to their body. Henceforth, postlapsarians are persistently subordinated to illusions, both about themselves, and the nature of the world around them. Turning to Malebranche's veridical account of human nature, I outline his commitment to Cartesian dualism, before focusing on his understanding of the natural inclinations. He recognises three: that towards the good in general, that towards self-love, and that towards friendship with others. Postlapsarian self-love, I shall argue, underpins Malebranche's account of the intersubjectivity of postlapsarian identity. It is on the basis of this account that I shall argue for his inclusion in recognition theory's history.

With Malebranche's primary philosophical commitments outlined, Chapter 4 turns to his understanding of bodily subjectivity. As I argue in Chapter 1, the standard historical narrative to which contemporary recognition theorists subscribe discounts the relevance of the early modern period. Early modern writers, it was suggested, are held hostage to a regrettable philosophical atomism. In this chapter, I begin to dismantle this narrative, beginning with Descartes. According to Taylor's reading, which I call the 'Traditional View', Descartes understands the self as an atomistic, disembodied thinking thing. As one of Descartes' most famous disciples, Malebranche, I propose, has been tarred with a similarly impoverished account of subjectivity. In response, I argue that Descartes presents us with an account of the self as a human being, consisting of both spiritual and material aspects. Drawing on recent work by Colin Chamberlain (2016, 2020), I argue that the Cartesian account of the bodily self is underpinned by experiences of affective bodily sensations, like those of pleasure or pain. We locate these affective sensations in our bodies, and represent them as good or bad for *ourselves*.

With the Cartesian Traditional View defused, a re-examination of Malebranche's treatment of subjectivity is motivated. Turning to Malebranche, we find a strikingly similar account of bodily subjectivity. Like Descartes, Malebranche presents an account of the embodied self which is underpinned by the experience of affective sensations: the postlapsarian experiences pleasure and pain as belonging to themselves in some way, and, taking such sensations to inhere in the physical body, they identify this body with themselves. Far from understanding themselves in a way which is in line with the atomism inherent in the Traditional View, Malebranchean postlapsarians often fail to acknowledge that they even possess a soul at all. We should think of this self-conception, I argue, as stemming from the love of pleasure which is engendered by the natural inclination towards self-love.

Chapter 4's account of the bodily self demonstrates that Malebranche holds an account of subjectivity beyond that of the Traditional View. Yet, this account does not appear capable of contributing anything substantial to the history of recognition theory, which is centrally concerned with the ways in which our conceptions of ourselves are deeply dependent upon the views of others. In Chapter 5, however, I argue for an additional Malebranchean notion of subjectivity that reveals a sensitivity to the inherently social nature of the self. Malebranche's Augustinian-inspired account of human nature portrays postlapsarian subjects as afflicted by a love of grandeur. This self-love generated desire gives rise to a deep-seated need for the approving esteem of others. We tend to seek this esteem, Malebranche argues, through dissimulation: Malebranchean subjects focus on appearing to possess socially valued qualities, at the expense of actually cultivating them. When they are esteemed by others for their supposed possession of these qualities, I argue, they come to understand themselves as they appear in the eyes of others, and an act of self-forgetting occurs. The result is a new, intersubjective conception of the self, but one which is deeply illusory. It is the central claim of this thesis that this intersubjective account of postlapsarian subjectivity forms a part of recognition theory's history.

Chapter 6 clarifies and develops the nature of Malebranche's place in the history of recognition theory by broadening the basis upon which his inclusion is premised. Whilst his appreciation of the postlapsarian need for esteem and his account of fallen subjectivity are sufficient for his inclusion, I argue that Malebranche also proposes a more complex understanding of the nature of misrecognition, thus undermining Honneth's oversimplification of this phenomenon. In doing so, I not only demonstrate the extent of Malebranche's right to inclusion in recognition's history, but, further, outline the ways in which contemporary recognition theorists can benefit from taking a more historically-minded approach to the concept of recognition.

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Chapter 1 Setting the Scene: Recognition Theory, its History and A-historicity

As I have outlined in the introduction, my aim in this thesis is to defend the claim that Malebranche, the 17th century Cartesian-Augustinian philosopher, must be included in any persuasive history of the concept of recognition. In this chapter, I will set into motion the argument for Malebranche's inclusion by outlining the central claims of contemporary recognition theory as it is understood by its two best known proponents, Axel Honneth and Charles Taylor. The landmark publications of these two philosophers in the 1990s inaugurated the creation of a philosophical research paradigm which remains the site of intense interdisciplinary interest and philosophical creativity.

Research projects about the nature of the need for recognition arrive at a range of diverse conclusions. But, so far, there has been a remarkable degree of consensus about its history. This chapter will present an overview of contemporary recognition theory, and introduce some preliminary critiques of the historical story with which it often comes hand-in-hand. In their early writings, both Honneth and Taylor propose a truncated history of the thematisation of the need for recognition, finding the concept's roots in Hegel. This chapter will discuss three pillars of support for this narrative. It will then go on to suggest reasons for doubting these supporting arguments, thus undermining the plausibility of the narrative itself. By the end of the chapter, I hope to have justified my project of examining philosophers prior to Hegel, with the aim of finding earlier analyses of the view that our subjectivity depends on the recognition of others.

I begin by clarifying the nature of recognition theory, limiting myself to the seminal works of the two pioneering authors I have mentioned. §1 introduces recognition theory in broad outline, before detailing its more specific formulations in Honneth's *The Struggle for Recognition* (1996 [1995]) and Taylor's *The Politics of Recognition* (1994). §2 turns to consider their historical narrative for the

concept of recognition. Prior to the work of Hegel, it is claimed, the human need for recognition was always met, and thus never became visible in a way that would enable it to become an object of theory. This contention has inaugurated a tradition of thinking about recognition which has sidelined extensive historical investigation.

Given Honneth's and Taylor's view that recognition is a universal and perennial human need, this truncated historical narrative should be approached with cautious suspicion. In §3 I explore three supporting arguments for their narrative. The first pillar of support, on which both Honneth and Taylor rely, has already been mentioned: our theorists appeal to the unproblematic nature of the satisfaction of recognition in traditional, hierarchical societies. The second draws on the atomistic premises which are said to underly early modern social contract theories. The atomistic assumption that individuals exist prior to society functions, it is argued, to divert attention away from the social conditions necessary for the development of subjectivity. Lastly, I turn to Taylor's narrative of inwardness in *Sources of the Self* (1989), where he suggests that early modern philosophers focused on the inner at the expense of the outer, including the relationships between one person and another. Taken together, the three narratives tend to the conclusion that early modern philosophers were not concerned with the need for recognition. To show that this is not the case, I shall need to challenge them.

§1 Contemporary Recognition Theory

I have already spoken many times of 'recognition theory', but have yet to offer a definition. The term 'recognition' is ambiguous and quite clearly possesses a number of meanings, not all of which are relevant to the contemporary political discourse surrounding the need for recognition. The kind of recognition at play here does not concern an act of intellectual apprehension, as when I recognise

that, given the speed at which my bus is travelling, I am going to be late; nor does it concern acts of identification or distinguishing, as when I recognise a friend for who she is when I see her made up on the stage. The meaning of 'recognition' that dominates contemporary political discourse is the one employed by Axel Honneth and Charles Taylor: to recognise another is to approvingly acknowledge their possession of valuable qualities.

According to these contemporary recognition theorists, such approving acknowledgment is a crucial psychological need. Only through the enjoyment of intersubjective recognition, it is maintained, can we experience the undistorted development of personal identity. At the heart of recognition theory is a rejection of the monological in favour of the dialogical. As Taylor puts it:

> In order to understand the close connection between identity and recognition, we have to take into account a crucial feature of the human condition ... This crucial feature of human life is its fundamentally *dialogical* character ... My own identity crucially depends on my dialogical relations with others (1994, pp.33-34).

And, as Honneth writes:

> The only way in which individuals are constituted as persons is by learning to refer to themselves, from the perspective of an approving or encouraging other, as beings with certain positive traits and abilities (1996, p.173).

As Taylor and Honneth make clear, recognition is not only necessary for viewing ourselves as possessing certain positive traits. More than this, it is crucial for understanding ourselves as persons at all. Further, because it is only through recognition that subjects become capable of viewing

themselves as possessing certain valuable qualities, it is also a condition of freedom. As a result, Honneth and Taylor consider themselves committed to a positive view of freedom which calls for more than simply non-interference. As Honneth puts it:

> ...unless one presupposes a certain degree of self-confidence, legally guaranteed autonomy, and sureness as to the value of one's own abilities, it is impossible to imagine successful self-realisation, if that is to be understood as a process of realising, without coercion, one's self-chosen life-goals. With regard to such a process, 'lack of coercion' and 'freedom' cannot be understood simply as the absence of external force or influence, but must rather signify the lack of inner barriers as well as psychological inhibitions and fears ... This sort of confidence, these unanxious ways of dealing with oneself, constitute aspects of a positive relation-to-self that can only be gained through the experience of recognition (1996, p.174).

Similarly for Taylor, because recognition is crucial for the development of identity, its absence reduces our options in a way that is freedom-constraining. ‘Nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, [and] can be a form of oppression’, he explains, ‘imprisoning someone in a false, and reduced mode of being’ (Taylor 1994, p.25).

The crucial role that appropriate relations of recognition play in the attainment of healthy subjectivity and freedom make ‘due recognition’ not just a ‘courtesy we owe people ... [but a] vital human need’ (Taylor 1994, p.26). Moreover, our struggles to achieve it are often conflict ridden, or, to use Honneth's terminology, take the form of a *struggle.* We should understand the need for recognition, Taylor urges, as both the ‘driving force behind nationalist movements in politics’ and behind groups’ demands for due recognition in a politics of multiculturalism (1994, p.26).

Whilst Honneth and Taylor take similar stances towards recognition, their accounts are distinct in as many ways. In order to deepen our understanding of recognition theory, it will be beneficial to consider each approach in turn.

§1.1 Axel Honneth: The Struggle for Recognition

The Struggle for Recognition is much more than an account of the intersubjective nature of personal identity. Rather, Honneth's ambitious book presents its reader with an attempt to construct a 'formal conception of ethical life' which outlines 'the entirety of the intersubjective conditions that can be shown to serve as necessary preconditions for individual self-realisation' (1996, p.173). This formal conception, Honneth proposes, should be substantial enough to act as a guide for discovering and attaining the conditions necessary for self-realisation, but abstract enough so as 'not to raise the suspicion of representing merely the deposits of concrete interpretations of the good life' (1996, p.173)[1]. It should, as Heikki Ikäheimo puts it, 'be able to point out claims about necessary social prerequisites of a good life that are substantial, yet universalizable in the sense of [being] in principle valid in any culture or tradition' (2009, p.33).

Honneth's formal conception of ethical life is informed by an understanding of social life shared by the early Hegel and George Herbert Mead. The central idea is that:

> ... the reproduction of social life is governed by the imperative of mutual recognition, because one can develop a practical relation-to-self only when one has learned to view oneself, from the normative perspective of one's partners in interaction, as their social addressee (Honneth 1996, p.92).

[1] For a critical account of Honneth's attempt to do this, see Zurn (2000).

Honneth looks to produce an account of the specific relations of recognition that are essential to practical identity formation. This more substantive—yet, he claims, appropriately neutral—conception of ethical life can then be used as a vantage point for critique, as a normative standpoint from which one can 'evaluate particular social formations as either progressive or regressive with respect to their capacity for allowing and instantiating full self-realisation for each of that society's members' (Zurn 2000, p.118). It also explains the nature of social change. Such change is driven, Honneth argues, by groups and individuals who engage in struggles for the recognition they feel themselves to have been unjustly denied. That is, because social struggles are driven by experiences of misrecognition, systematic misrecognition functions as a galvanising force, producing effective social movements. Moral progress is to be understood as constituted by increases in the *individualisation* and *inclusion* of relations of recognition, 'where individualization means that individuals gain social recognition for more aspects of their personalities, and inclusion means that more individuals are fully recognized in society' (Jütten 2018, p.84).

Some consideration must be given to the place of Honneth's theory of recognition in the tradition of Critical Social Theory, rooted in the philosophical approaches of Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno and other members of the Institute for Social Research, known collectively as the Frankfurt School. Honneth's aim is to produce not just a theory of recognition, but a *critical* theory of recognition. We can understand Critical Social Theory, Zurn suggests, as an 'interdisciplinary social theory with emancipatory intent' (2015, p.4). A critical theory should begin by proffering an accurate description of a current society that is 'particularly attuned to any and all explicit and implicit struggles occurring within contemporary social relations', and it should pair this description with an explanation as to 'why the present situation is as it is' (Zurn 2015, p.4). The resulting descriptive and explanatory account should combine the insights of a range of traditionally separate disciplines,

including philosophy, sociology, anthropology and history. Finally, a Critical Social Theory should go beyond the level of description and explanation. It must reject the idea of social reality as a given and pursue the possibility of overcoming 'unjustifiable or unreasonable forms of constraint or oppression' (Zurn 2015, p.5). In Horkheimer's famous phrase: critical social theory aims 'to liberate human beings from the circumstances that enslave them' (1982, p.244).

§1.2 A Threefold Typology of Recognition

In order to clarify what it means for self-understanding to be dependent on the recognition of others, I will consider Honneth's threefold typology of recognition relations. Whilst not all of these recognition relations will be extensively drawn on in this work, an overview of the role that each plays in the development of identity will give us a sense of the spectrum of interpersonal interactions to which Honneth thinks we have a normative claim, and thus of the multiple domains with reference to which society must be assessed. This typology will also be of use later on, when I shall ask which philosophers we should turn to in order to understand the development of recognition theory.

The first and most fundamental form of recognition is that experienced in intimate relations of love, and it is crucial for the development of the practical relation-to-self of self-confidence. Honneth is appealing here, not to a romantic conception of love, but to a broader notion of love as a relation constituted by ‘strong emotional attachments among a small number of people’ (1996, p.95). Love relations represent the ‘first stage of reciprocal recognition’ in which subjects ‘mutually confirm each other as ‘needy creatures’ with ‘concrete needs’ (Honneth 1996, p.95). The possibility of experiencing this form of reciprocal recognition arises in early infancy.

Drawing on Donald W. Winnicott, Honneth proposes that the core functions that the primary care giver performs for a young infant are so essential that it is a ‘misleading abstraction’ to consider the infant as an ‘independent object of inquiry’ who can be studied in isolation from others (1996, p.98). Rather, a caregiver and an infant are merged to such a degree that we should understand both subjects to be characterised, not by individuality, but by 'symbiosis' and ‘undifferentiated intersubjectivity’ (Honneth 1996, p.98). It is thus intersubjectivity that is primary, not individual subjectivity.

Caregiver and infant learn to differentiate themselves from each other through an experience of love that is understood as a 'system of mutual recognition, where each acknowledges the other as a vital, living, embodied physical being with its own particular urges and emotions' (Zurn 2015, p.30). The infant initially experiences something close to omnipotence, but, as they grow, finds that their caregiver ceases to gratify all their needs immediately. Honneth suggests that this phase is aptly characterised as involving a *struggle for recognition,* through which ‘the child realises that he or she is dependent on the loving care of an independently existing person with claims of her own’ (1996, p.101). Thus the love relation between caregiver and infant leads to the latter’s first notions of themselves as an individual with concrete needs. When the love relation is sufficiently 'lasting and reliable', it assures the infant that their needs will continue to be met, enabling them to recognise their (circumscribed) independence and cultivate the practical relation-to-self of self-confidence, which is manifested in the ability to be alone (Honneth 1996, pp.104-107).

Reciprocal love relations engender individuals who have the necessary self-confidence for 'autonomous participation in public life', and it is within public life, in the sphere of legal relations, that Honneth locates the second kind of recognition relation (1996, p.107). Drawing on Hegel and Mead, he argues that individuals are only capable of cultivating the practical relation-to-self of self-

respect through their participation in, and enjoyment of, the legal rights awarded by a legal community.

The experience of recognition through the enjoyment of legal rights engenders self-respect, because partaking in a legal community requires one to occupy the point of view of a 'generalised other' (Honneth 1996, p.108). From this perspective, one sees that there are 'generalised normative expectations that adhere to all subjects universally, within a generalised system of reciprocal normative expectations' (Zurn 2015, p.37). In other words, one grasps that all human beings are capable of autonomously forming reasonable decisions concerning norms, and thus that they possess moral self-responsibility. Because all individuals possess this capacity, each should be recognised both as bearing certain rights and as being bound by normative obligations towards others. From the point of view of the generalised other, one recognises *oneself* as included in this group. That is, one recognises oneself 'as *deserving* of legal rights, as a morally responsible subject of law, and so as deserving of self-respect' (Zurn 2015, p.37).

Whereas love recognition necessarily involves strong emotional attachments, it is the purely cognitive nature of the universal respect central to legal recognition that ensures that such reciprocal relations are not dependent on, or distorted by, strong emotional bonds (which are often fickle and always partial). Whilst the intimate nature of love relationships necessarily restricts their number, the scope of the cognitive attitude of respect towards others has no obvious limit, making respect recognition a possible feature of entire communities.

Whilst it is possible to adopt a universally distributed respect towards other human beings in virtue of the moral autonomy that all share in common, Honneth recognises that legal communities do not always take such a form. Only in modern societies, he supposes, do we find the attempt to construct

a legal community in which all individuals are recognised as possessing the same capacity for autonomous decision-making, and thus as being equally deserving of respect, as well as entitled to an identical array of rights and duties (Honneth 1996, p.109). In traditional societies, Honneth proposes, legal recognition is 'completely fused with the social role' that one is accorded (1996, p.109), so that the 'recognition of someone as a legal person is, to a certain extent, still bound up with the social esteem accorded to individual members of society in light of their social status' (1996, pp.110-111). The greater the esteem that accrues to someone as a consequence of their social role, the more extensive are the rights afforded to them. With the transition to modernity, the notion that rights and duties are dependent upon one's place in a social hierarchy gives way to an acknowledgement of the free and equal status of all human beings, and thus to the full separation of legal recognition from social status. Recognition of someone as a legal person 'must be directed toward every subject to the same degree', and 'exceptions and privileges' for certain groups are no longer seen as admissible' (Honneth 1996, p.111-113).

In addition to the two forms of recognition canvassed already, Honneth maintains that 'human subjects always need ... a form of social esteem that allows them to relate positively to their concrete traits and abilities' (1996, p.121). In order to develop self-esteem, one must be capable of apprehending the value of one's own qualities with respect to their society's shared evaluative framework. Only from the perspective of this shared evaluative horizon can an individual understand which of their qualities contribute to their worth and are deserving of esteem.

Like legal recognition, social esteem is historically contingent and exhibits significant transformations in the move from the traditional hierarchical societies of the pre-modern period to modernity. In traditional hierarchical societies, the evaluative framework against which one is measured is determined by one's social status. Esteem is measured in terms of social honour, where

‘honour’ designates the relative level of social standing that people can attain when they manage to habitually conduct themselves in line with the collective expectations set by their social status (Honneth 1996, p.123).

With the decline of hierarchy, the value system against which one was measured changed from one which was class-specific to one in which a subject ‘entered the contested field of social esteem as an entity individuated in terms of a particular life history’ (Honneth 1996, p.125). From this point on, ‘it is a form of value pluralism—albeit one defined in class-specific and gender-specific forms —that constitutes the cultural framework of orientation within which individuals’ level of accomplishment and thus their social worth are defined’ (Honneth 1996, p.125). Which accomplishments, traits and forms of life are to be especially valued, however, forms an ongoing cultural conflict. Whilst it is not explicitly addressed in *The Struggle for Recognition,* it becomes clear in later work that Honneth sees social esteem as regulated by the value system inherent to 'bourgeois-capitalist society', with esteem apportioned in line with one's 'achievement as a "productive citizen"' (Honneth 2003, p. 141).

§1.3 Misrecognition, Disrespect, and Struggles for Recognition

Each of the three forms of recognition outlined are crucial for self-realisation. Further, as Zurn notes, the practical relations-to-self that they make possible are 'onto-genetically fulfilled in a developmental hierarchy with a directional logic’—that is, self-confidence is a necessary condition of self-respect, and both of these relations-to-self are essential for achieving self-esteem (2000, p.117). For each form of recognition, Honneth identifies related forms of misrecognition. The way in which we utilise concepts like *insult*, *humiliation,* and *disrespect*, he argues, lends further support

to the idea that achieving a healthy sense of self is dependent on the reception of appropriate forms of recognition from others, because we cannot use such terms 'without implicit reference to the claims to recognition that one makes to one's fellow human beings' (Honneth 1996, p.131).

Honneth proposes that we understand disrespect as the 'withholding or withdrawing' of recognition, and that, since we find three varieties of recognition, we should find just as many types of disrespect (1996, p.132). The most fundamental form of disrespect takes the form of physical injury, like torture and rape (which, of course, also have a strong psychical component). Such experiences inflict lasting damage to the self-confidence which is fostered in intimate love relationships (Honneth 1996, p.132). Second, when one is denied the full spectrum of legal rights to which others have access, one is denied the status of being 'a fully-fledged partner to interaction', and such disrespect does damage to an individual's intersubjectively derived conception of themselves as a person in possession of moral autonomy (Honneth 1996, pp.133-134). Lastly, having one's way of life denigrated robs a subject of 'every opportunity to attribute social value to their own abilities', thus ensuring that they cannot relate positively to their qualities in ways that foster self-esteem (Honneth 1996, p.134).

Central to the status of Honneth's theory of recognition as a critical theory is the notion that instances of misrecognition, or disrespect, motivate individuals to engage in struggles for greater recognition. By eliciting negative emotions (like shame, fear, and indignation), Honneth proposes that experiences of disrespect reveal to a subject that they are being denied recognition to which they have a claim (1996, p.136). Such emotions compel individuals to act—to engage in political resistance and struggle for greater recognition—because it is only by initiating some response that a subject can dispel their 'emotional tension' (Honneth 1996, p.138).

§1.4 From Axel Honneth to Charles Taylor: *The Politics of Recognition*

The notion that the essentially intersubjective experience of recognition is essential to the formation of personal identity is equally central to Charles Taylor's approach in *The Politics of Recognition* (1994). Whilst my exploration of Honneth's theory has given us a good grounding in the basics of recognition theory, I want to complement it by briefly exploring the ways in which it agrees with, and comes apart from, Taylor's account. Although the majority of my engagement with recognition theory will be with Honneth, Taylor's theory is important to my project insofar as it proposes a similarly truncated history of the concept. Here, I will briefly elaborate on Taylor's theory, first by outlining his typology of recognition, and then by highlighting the philosophical context in which he is writing.

Like Honneth, Taylor produces a threefold typology of the forms of recognition which are crucial for the healthy development of persons and for freedom. In the first instance, Taylor considers the basis of the 'politics of equal recognition' (1994, p.37). Like Honneth, he draws on the transition from traditional, honour-based societies, which were hierarchically organised and involved the unequal distribution of rights and entitlements, to modern, *dignity*-based societies (Taylor 1994, p.37). This transition is said to usher in a 'politics of universalism' that turns on the traditionally Kantian demand for the equal recognition of all persons in light of their common humanity (Taylor 1994, p.37). This equal recognition entails the universal provision of an 'identical basket of rights and immunities' (Taylor 1994, p.38).

Second, Taylor argues that a politics of universalism must be complemented by a politics of difference. Whilst the former is concerned with recognising what is universally the same, the latter demands that we also recognise 'what is peculiar to each' (Taylor 1994, p.39). The principle is both

particular, in the sense that it calls for us to recognise what is specific to an individual, and general, in the sense that it makes a universal claim about human beings: each and every subject has a unique identity and should be recognised as such (Taylor 1994, p.39). Taylor's politics of difference is principally concerned with recognising the cultural distinctness of individuals or groups, rather than 'glossing [it] over' in favour of the 'dominant or majority identity' (1994, p.39). Nevertheless, we can see this form of recognition as broadly speaking analogous with Honneth's account of esteem recognition.

Third, Taylor identifies a kind of recognition specific to the 'intimate sphere', where we engage in a dialogue (often a struggle) over our identity with significant others (1994, p.37). Insofar as Taylor's primary concern is with the kind of recognition at play in the public sphere, and specifically with the challenge of multiculturalism in liberal societies, he has far less to say about this kind of recognition. Here, then, the focus of our two contemporary recognition theorists diverges.

We should recognise that Taylor's and Honneth's theories, despite their overlaps, are developed in distinct philosophical contexts. Whilst Honneth's theory of recognition is placed squarely within the tradition of critical social theory, Taylor is first and foremost a political theorist and a historian of philosophy. Nevertheless, their views converge. Taylor takes issue with those political philosophies that were committed, consciously or unconsciously, to atomistic premises, advancing a 'vision of society as in some sense constituted by individuals for the fulfilment of ends which were primarily individual' (Taylor 1985, p.187). Instead, he proposes, 'self-understanding is not something we can sustain on our own', for 'our identity is always partly defined in conversation with others' (Taylor 1985, p.209). Despite their different contexts, Taylor and Honneth thus share ideas about the nature of human beings and the conditions of personhood.

Honneth's and Taylor's accounts of recognition have been described as sharing a further feature in common: positivity about recognition[2]. In the first instance, this is because the term 'recognition' is synonymous with a kind of approval: experiences of recognition are inherently positive, because it is only as a result of such approving acknowledgment that one attains self-realisation (Lepold 2019, p.3). Misrecognition, by contrast, threatens such ideals, ‘plac[ing] recognition and disrespect [misrecognition] in opposition to one another' (Schick 2022, p.3). This Manichean perspective leaves no room for ambivalence: 'recognition is deemed ‘a relation between self and other that affects individual lives for the better’, whereas disrespectful misrecognition ‘affects individual lives for the worse’ (Ikäheimo et al., 2021, p.3, cited in Schick 2022, p.2).

There is good reason to go further than this in our characterisation of Honneth's theory of recognition as positive, for there is a sense in which he considers experiences of misrecognition as positive too. As Kristina Lepold argues, Honneth frames the ‘*practice of recognition as a whole …* in a very positive light’, so that misrecognition, insofar as it occupies a place in this whole, can be considered positively too (2019, p.3, emphasis in original). Honneth’s characterisation of the practice of recognition includes two central positive claims. First, he maintains that misrecognition is not just 'the negative counterpart of recognition', because it is also 'the motivational impetus for social resistance and conflict' (Honneth 1996, p.132, quoted in Lepold 2019, p.4). Second, it is a central tenet of his critical theory that such struggles bring about emancipatory social change by expanding recognition relations, propelling society ever further towards a 'state of communicatively lived freedom' (Honneth 1996, p.5, quoted in Lepold 2019, p.4).

[2] Although this is generally speaking true for Taylor as well as Honneth, critical engagement with recognition theory as *positive* tends to be directed towards Honneth’s account.

There are good reasons to doubt the credibility of these two claims. First, we should be sceptical of the idea that disrespect always motivates acts of resistance, because 'it is not easy to see how someone whose value has just been called into question can find the strength to resist' such disrespect (Lepold 2019, p.9). Second, the contention that struggles for recognition will bring about emancipatory social change is disputable. Honneth rationalises this claim by pointing to the fact that 'the parties to a struggle always already treat each other as normative co-authorities' (Lepold 2019, p.10). That is, when A disrespects B by failing to recognise her possession of valuable qualities, A will, on Honneth's view, respond to B's struggle for recognition, because B's views hold normative weight for her. But it is unclear why this is the case. A's misrecognition of B suggests that she does not consider B a normative co-authority, making it unclear why B's struggles would hold normative weight for A, and therefore unclear how such struggles could realise emancipatory change.

These briefly introduced concerns should give us pause when it comes to characterising the practice of recognition as positive. I shall return to consider misrecognition in more detail in Chapter 6. As we shall see, historical approaches to recognition have often taken a predominantly *negative* approach to human dependence on the approval of others.

§2 Honneth and Taylor on the History of Recognition

I have presented an overview of Honneth's and Taylor's theories of recognition, but there is an additional aspect not yet canvassed on which they are largely united: the history of recognition theory. Whilst both theorists hypothesise recognition as a perennial human need, they further maintain that we have only recently become aware of it. As Taylor writes:

> A form of dependence [on others] was always there. The socially derived identity was by its nature dependent on society. But in the earlier age recognition never arose as a problem. General recognition was built into the socially derived identity by virtue of the very fact that it was based on social categories that everyone took for granted (1994, p.34).

Only with the collapse of pre-modern hierarchical societies, Taylor suggests, is our need for recognition discernible[3]. Prior to this, the need was unproblematically satisfied in a way that precluded its existence as an object of inquiry.

Whilst Honneth has recently published an updated history of the concept of recognition—the details of which will occupy me in the next chapter—in his first, and most influential, articulation of recognition theory he defends a similar view to Taylor. Hegel, Honneth argues, was the first philosopher to thematise the need for recognition. Dismissing the idea that social struggles should be understood along Hobbesian or Machiavellian lines as motivated by self-interest, Honneth proposes, Hegel recast them as struggles among subjects for 'the mutual recognition of their identity' (1996, p.5).

We might wonder why Honneth and Taylor commit themselves to such an exclusively modern history. If we accept the view, advanced by both theorists, that recognition is a fundamental human need, the provision of which is an essential condition, not only for undistorted self-understanding,

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3 Neither Honneth nor Taylor specify exactly what they mean by ‘pre-modern’, but I follow Joel Anderson (1996, xiv), who authors the preface to *The Struggle for Recognition*, in taking the end of the pre-modern period and the beginning of modernity to be marked by the bourgeois revolutions of the late 18th century. Both Honneth and Taylor criticise the philosophical approaches of early moderns like Descartes, Locke, and Hobbes for their perceived atomism or commitment to social contract theories, thus it seems correct to interpret Honneth's and Taylor's claim that recognition is only thematised with modernity to point to a time period after these writers.

but of our being subjects *at all*, then the proposed timeline for the thematisation of the need for recognition should give us pause. That such a vital need should have gone unnoticed for so long is a radical claim indeed.

Over the next sections I will propose three explanations, on Honneth's and Taylor's views, for this lacuna. First, the symmetrical nature of recognition in traditional, honour-based societies; second, the atomistic premises of early modern social contract theory; and third, the narrative of inwardness of early modern philosophical culture. Each of these three factors lends weight to the notion that, prior to Hegel, the human need for recognition was not thematised. Each reason, however, fails to fully exclude the possibility that it may have been.

§2.1 Recognition in Honour-based Societies

Honneth and Taylor suggest that the need for recognition, when it is straightforwardly satisfied, will not surface as a philosophical or psychological problem. That is, when individuals unproblematically receive recognition, the very fact that they need it is obscured. Prior to Hegel, Taylor argues, 'people didn't speak of "identity" and "recognition" … because these were then too unproblematic to be thematised as such': the obdurately hierarchical nature of society ensured that individuals possessed an inherited social status and enjoyed a form of recognition that was intimately bound up with their social role (1994, p.35). Honneth likewise suggests that, in the pre-modern period, subjects' need for recognition was generally satisfied. Within premodern, hierarchically-organised societies, he proposes, an individual's social standing was recognised as honourable when they managed to 'conduct themselves habitually in line with the collective expectations that are ethically linked to their social status' (Honneth 1996, p.123). An individual's

need for social esteem, for instance, was met by the provision of in-group esteem that was 'internally symmetrical' (Honneth 1996, p.123). At the same time, inter(social)group recognition relations were asymmetrical: individuals could only attain the honour appropriate to their social status, and lower status groups could attain far less honour than higher status groups. Such an unequal distribution of honour remained stable, Honneth proposes, because it was generally endorsed. Only with the collapse of pre-modern social hierarchies do the conditions arise in which, as Taylor puts it, 'the attempt to be recognised can fail', so that the need for recognition can 'be acknowledged for the first time' (1994, p.35).

This narrative of the transition from recognition-satisfying hierarchical societies to modern legal communities in which what is worthy of esteem forms an 'ongoing cultural conflict' is the first point of support for the limited history of recognition acknowledged by Honneth and Taylor (Honneth 1996, p.127). However, there is good reason to think that they overstate the ease with which hierarchical societies fulfilled subjects' need for recognition, and thus good reason to think that the need for recognition itself was not psychologically inaccessible prior to Hegel's thematisation.

Honneth's and Taylor's understanding of the unproblematic nature of the unequal distribution of honour is open to critique from two different angles. In the first instance, we might be suspicious of the idea that in-group recognition relations could ever be fully symmetrical. Honneth refers to the honour a subject *can* achieve '*when* they manage to conduct themselves habitually in-line with collective expectations' (1996, p.123, emphasis added). That one habitually achieves this conduct is not guaranteed, an accomplishment rather than a given. D. Clifton Mark has raised this kind of question about Honneth's and Taylor's depiction of honour-based societies, arguing that scholarship belies their picture of harmonious pre-modern social relations (2014, p.16). Honour does not consist

in a single form of hierarchical, group-based recognition, Mark argues, but rather comes in two stripes. Whilst ‘categorical’ honour, or recognition, is unproblematically awarded in-line with the status group to which an individual belongs and is 'possessed equally by all members of the group’, comparative honour is not (2014, p.16). Rather, this latter kind of honour is always distributed unequally, sorting members into an 'intra-group hierarchy based on their relative merits’, and rendering recognition-based conflicts ‘endemic to honor societies’ (Mark 2014, p.16). Because they fail to recognise the distinction between these two forms of honour, Mark argues, Honneth and Taylor overlook 'the sharply competitive nature of recognition between equals' (2014, p.28). In doing so, they also overlook the possibility that the need for recognition was psychologically available in such societies.

In the second instance, Honneth’s and Taylor’s contention that the need for recognition went unrecognised in pre-modern, hierarchically-ordered societies assumes peaceful acceptance of the fact that honour was distributed unequally across social groups. But such a contention seems questionable. Whilst a carpenter might not take a stand against the fact that they enjoy far less esteem than a courtier, they might still *want* the degree of recognition that the courtiers enjoy, both amongst themselves and from groups of lower status. Acceptance of an unjust social order does not preclude an awareness of the desire for recognition.

These considerations should give us pause when it comes to accepting the standard history of recognition. If struggles for comparative recognition were a permanent feature of honour societies, then it is no longer right to assume that ‘recognition never arose as a problem’, because the possibility of the unequal distribution of comparative honour makes room for the generation of sharp intra-group conflict (Taylor 1994, p.34). Whilst this is no guarantee that such conflicts were

understood through the lens of recognition, it does suggest that the need for recognition was available for thematisation.

§2.2 Social Contract Theory and the Predominance of Atomism

Honneth and Taylor also contend that the philosophical atomism of the early modern period, particularly as it is manifested in social contract theory, puts a further block on the thematisation of the human need for recognition.

Drawing on Machiavelli and Hobbes, Honneth argues that social contract theorists explained social conflict, not by reference to a need for recognition, but through the lens of self-preservation (1996, p.10). Subjects are characterised 'as egocentric beings with regard only for their own benefit' existing 'in a state of constant competition over interests' (Honneth 1996, p.8). This understanding of social life, Honneth suggests, became so dominant as to seem self-evident. Further, he argues, such social contract theorists are committed to 'atomistic premises', an attachment 'reflected in the fact that they always conceive of the purportedly 'natural' form of human behaviour exclusively as the isolated acts of solitary individuals, to which forms of community-formation must then be added as a further thought' (Honneth 1996, p.12). Insofar as such theorists are committed to atomistic premises, they are held to be committed to the ontological primacy of the individual, and thus to a position incompatible with recognition theory, which understands subjects as the product of intersubjective recognition relations. In making such a claim, Taylor adds, philosophical atomists at the same time commit themselves to the self-sufficiency of the individual (1985, p.189). The kind of self-sufficiency at issue here is not mere physical survival, but rather the possibility of a self-sufficient facility to attain and develop valuable human capacities (for instance, the capacity for

autonomous decision-making). To take an atomistic approach to human nature is to assume that such capacities are attainable outside of, or prior to, life in society (Taylor 1985, p.209). Social contract theorists thus commit themselves to a view about the conditions in which human beings become subjects which puts them at odds with theorists of recognition.

Atomism plays an important role in the history of recognition, both as scourge and as boon. On the one hand, social contract theories and their attendant atomistic commitments are said to have played the distinctly negative role of concealing the social preconditions of human subjectivity. By taking the individual subject as a starting point, the social contract tradition deflects attention away from the conditions necessary for becoming one.

On the other hand, Honneth suggests that Machiavelli's and Hobbes' atomistic social contract theories were instrumentally valuable in generating Hegel's account of the intersubjective conditions of identity. Hegel was convinced that social struggles were to be understood as attempts by individuals to obtain intersubjective recognition of their identity (Honneth 1996, p.5). But he could only develop these insights, Honneth argues, because he was able to adopt the social contract theorists' conception of social struggle (1996, p.5).

It is not clear, however, that a commitment to social contract theory and its concomitant atomism must necessarily obscure the need for the recognition of others. Barbara Carnevali has argued that we ought to recognise Hobbes as one of the first modern philosophers to acknowledge 'that the desire to be thought well of and the aversion to being thought of badly by those around them is one of the most forceful drives of humankind' (2021, p.120). Carnevali's exposition of Hobbes is explicitly presented as a rejoinder to the standard history which is part and parcel of Honneth's and Taylor's theories of recognition. Whilst this history locates the concept's roots in Hegel, Carnevali

argues that we should instead follow the lead of Arthur O. Lovejoy, who identifies the awareness of the need for recognition as emerging in early modern philosophies of the passions (Lovejoy 1961, p.92, quoted in Carnevali 2021, p.120).

Further, in an influential recent project, Martin Lenz pushes back against the narrative that early modern philosophers were enthralled by philosophical atomism, or, as he puts it, 'an understanding of the mind as autonomous and individualistic' (2020, p.2). Against such readings, Lenz argues that some early modern philosophers understood the human mind in intersubjective terms. In *Socialising Minds: Intersubjectivity in Early Modern Philosophy*, Lenz tackles what he calls the 'contact problem': given that early modern philosophers tend to understand the mind as something 'tucked away in a body', how can we suppose that one mind is able to affect, and be affected by, another (2020, pp.3-4)? Spinoza, Locke, and Hume, Lenz maintains, not only addressed this problem, but did so in markedly different ways. In doing so, he claims, they 'provided intersubjective accounts of the mind' (2020, p.4).

In sum, just as the postulation of symmetrical in-group esteem is no guarantee that the need for recognition will remain obscured in hierarchical societies, so too a commitment to social contract theory is not incompatible with a sensitivity to the need for recognition. As Carnevali's account of Hobbes shows, careful examination of the complexities latent in early modern philosophies, even those which are in some respects committed to a thoroughgoing atomism, may present us with rich accounts of phenomena which are germane to the concerns of the recognition theorist. Moreover, as Lenz's work highlights, and as I too will argue in this thesis, there are good reasons to believe that it is wrong to interpret many early modern philosophers through the lens of philosophical atomism at all.

§2.3 The Narrative of Inwardness

I have presented two justifications for the view that theories of recognition will not be found in philosophy prior to Hegel. Neither justification, I have argued, is persuasive. I turn now to a third justification offered in Taylor's impressive and influential book, *Sources of the Self* (1989): a narrative of inwardness in the history of philosophy which aims to lend additional weight to the standard history of recognition.

Taylor links an inward turn in the early modern period to the atomistic outlook we have just considered:

> Atomists are more comfortable standing with the intuitions of common sense about the rights of individuals and are not at all keen to open these wider issues [about human nature]. And in this they derive support from those philosophical traditions which come to us from the seventeenth century and which started with the postulation of an extensionless subject, epistemologically a tabula rasa and politically a presuppositionless bearer of rights' (1985, p.210).

Taylor suggests a link between the ontological primacy of the individual in social contract theories and the metaphysical and epistemological stances of those philosophers who play a central role in his narrative of inwardness. According to social contract theory, as Taylor represents it, human subjects are self-sufficiently formed prior to their entry into society. The narrative of inwardness now shores up the plausibility of such a starting point by presenting us with metaphysically and epistemologically thin notions of subjecthood. If, for instance, a subject is merely an extension-less thinking thing, then it becomes more plausible to suggest that its existence is ontologically prior to

its immersion in society. The narrative of inwardness thus plays a similar role to the justificatory reasons already canvassed: it demarcates earlier periods of philosophy as focused on philosophical projects and approaches which were incompatible with a sensitivity to the role played by the approval of others in human life.

Let us turn to consider this narrative in more detail. The narrative of inwardness begins with Augustine's inward turn, which morphs and deepens into a Cartesian disengagement, before being intensified in Locke's punctual self. Here, however, I will primarily be concerned with the narrative of inwardness as it paints Augustine and Descartes, two figures who exerted a powerful formative influence on Malebranche, the central character in this thesis.

Taylor begins by highlighting the radical changes that Augustine wrought on the Platonic world view. Where Platonists interpreted things through the oppositional categories of spirit/matter, higher/lower, and changing/immutable, Augustine subsumed these opposing pairs under one overarching dyad: inner/outer (Taylor 1989, pp.128-129). For Augustine, the inner is spiritual, higher, and immutable, whereas the outer is material, lower, and changeable. Augustine urges us to silence the outer and turn inwards, cultivating a stance of 'radical reflexivity' in which the object of attention is one's own experience (Taylor 1989, p.130). Such a stance reveals a new view of ourselves. Utilising proto-cogito style reasoning, Augustine attains subjective certainty of his existence. '*He* cannot doubt his own existence', Taylor explains, since in order to be deceived, he must exist (1989, p.132, emphasis in original). This self-knowledge 'is crucial to our access to a higher condition—because in fact it is a step on our road back to God' (Taylor 1989, p.132).

The flip side of Augustine's exaltation of the inner is his denunciation of the outer. In our dealings with the changeable and material, we 'drive to make ourselves the centre of our world, to relate

everything to ourselves, to dominate and possess the things which surround us' (Taylor 1989, pp.138-9). But true self-knowledge can only be sought from within. Just how drastically this idea of self-understanding differs from recognition theory can be drawn out by contrasting Augustine's and Honneth's views on infancy. Honneth suggests that the infant's belief in its own omnipotence is a crucial stage in its attainment of self-confidence through love relationships, and thus in its attainment of self-understanding more generally. Augustine acknowledges this same desire for omnipotence, but regards it as a clear sign of sin (*Confessions*, *I vi (10),* 1992, p.9).

Many of Augustine's insights are taken up and used by Descartes: the cogito argument, innate ideas, the withdrawal from the senses, and, crucially, the turn to radical reflexivity[4]. According to Taylor's narrative of inwardness, Cartesianism is radical and 'epoch-making' because it goes further than Augustine in its exaltation of the inner at the expense of the outer (1989, p.143). Whilst Augustine inaugurated the inward turn, the role he allocated to the inner was not unqualified. Although he enjoined us to turn inward toward God, God himself was not something internal (Taylor 1989, p.143). Augustinian inwardness relies on the response of something which is external to, and independent of, us. Something on which we we are utterly dependent.

According to Taylor, Descartes renounces this commitment to externality. The notion of the divinely ordered universe is abandoned, along with any idea of its inherent goodness, to be replaced by disenchanted matter, 'mere mechanism' (Taylor 1989, p.145). This shift generates deep-seated changes in the nature of ideas and the attainment of knowledge. 'The notion of 'idea' migrates from its ontic sense to apply henceforth to intra-psychic contents, to things "in the mind", so that the order of ideas ceases to be something we *find* and becomes something we *build'* (Taylor 1989, p.144, emphasis in original). This self-constructed order of ideas only achieves the status of

4 See Menn (1998) for a detailed exploration of the relationship between Descartes and Augustine.

knowledge when it meets certain—again internal—subjective demands: when it is generated through a chain of clear and distinct perceptions (Taylor 1989, p.145). It embraces both a disenchanted understanding of the world as 'mere extension' and a new understanding of the self—an understanding of 'one's being as immaterial' (Taylor 1989, p.145).

Descartes' theory of knowledge, Taylor claims, appeals to a 'procedural' rather than a 'substantive' conception of reason: rationality becomes an *inner* capacity that we have for constructing order (1989, p.147). The intensity of the Cartesian inward turn becomes even starker when we add to this the ramifications that disenchantment has on the understanding of morality. Because the external world has been discovered to be nothing but extension in three dimensions, nothing outside of us can possess moral value, offer standards by which we ought to regulate our conduct, or set us ends. Instead, Taylor claims, Descartes is led to a conception of morality that locates the source of moral judgment internally, *within us*.

This narrative serves to justify Honneth's and Taylor's conception of the history of recognition theory by offering us another reason to believe that the human need for recognition was effectively concealed from view until the 19th century. This time, the concealing factor is the historical-philosophical tendency to degrade the role of the external in favour of the internal, thus masking the dialogical nature of self-understanding. This is Taylor's claim. However, I suggest we should approach this explanation with caution. We need to ask both whether Taylor's narrative of inwardness offers an accurate description of the historical-philosophical positions of its archetypical figures, and whether its overarching story might overlook figures who do not fit. There is good reason to think that, with respect to both concerns, Taylor overstates his case.

Taking up the first of these reservations, I shall draw upon the work of Susan James to suggest that there are a number of ways in which Descartes' philosophy complicates Taylor's dichotomies between a substantive and a procedural view of reason, and between orders of ideas which are found versus orders of ideas which we must build.

I have discussed Taylor's claim that Descartes replaces a Platonic substantive notion of rationality, dependent on an external metaphysical foundation, with a procedural conception of reason that operates via clear and distinct chains of perceptions. But, as James notes, 'the procedural and substantive aspects of reason are more closely intertwined than Taylor allows, as are the categories of internal and external' (1994, p.11). This is because, whilst the standards imposed on the reasoning process might seem wholly procedural, what ensures the rationality of such a procedure is the fact that God guarantees the truth of the ideas with which we reason. Our procedural reasoning is dependent, then, on *external*, substantive support.

A second complication highlighted by James is the ambiguity of Taylor's found/built dichotomy. On Taylor's account, the notion of the Cartesian order of ideas as self-constructed goes hand in hand with the procedural conception of reason: rationality involves reasoning with clear and distinct ideas, and thus engagement in a process of building, rather than of discovery. But this is only partially true. Crucially, not all Cartesian ideas are self-constructed: as James notes, some of our most important ideas are innate, and such ideas must be discovered (1994, p.12).

How should such complications and qualifications affect our understanding of Taylor's narrative of inwardness? In reply to James, Taylor clarifies that *Sources of the Self* was never aiming at the production of absolute categories, but rather aimed to provide 'something like 'ideal types' in Weber's sense', whilst 'at the same time commenting on historical figures, who never quite fit the

types' (1994, p.215). The narrative of inwardness and its central dichotomies were never intended to be exhaustive and unambiguous ways of understanding its central characters, even for the most representative figures like Descartes.

Taylor acknowledges, however, that his methodology was not entirely explicit and, as a result, 'has led to some confusion, not all of which is in the minds of readers' (1994, p.215). The simple fact that his narrative has been read as categorical is important. *The Politics of Recognition* (1994) explicitly links the emergence of the modern ideal of authentic identity with the philosophical positions attributed to the central figures of the narrative of inwardness, suggesting that the inward-looking philosophies of figures like Augustine, Descartes, and Locke have had an obscuring effect on the essentially dialogical nature of human identity. But it turns out that the narrative *itself* may also be having such an obscuring effect. By misleadingly presenting its paradigmatic figures as fitting into absolute categories—as focused purely on the inner, at the expense of the outer—it paints them as more focused on the monological than they truly are. The fact that Taylor's influential narrative comes across as a categorical one has had the effect of averting interest in seeking out earlier accounts of the human need for recognition. The categorical-seeming nature of Taylor's exploration of inwardness appears to exclude the possibility of finding a philosophy in the early modern period which has something to say about how external factors—in particular our relationships with others—affect the ways in which we understand ourselves. Thus, the narrative directs the focus of contemporary research into the history of recognition theory away from the early modern period and towards Hegel and those influenced by him.

§3 Moving Forward: A Broader History of Recognition

In the previous sections, I have expanded upon three different arguments through which Honneth and Taylor defend their commitment to a narrow history of recognition. In different ways, each of the supporting arguments suggest that the need for recognition was rendered invisible prior to Hegel. However, I have suggested that all three are open to criticism. In each case, there are reasons for doubting that the sharply defined historical view they present is capable of capturing the messy nature of historical reality. I thus hope to have shown that we would be wrong to reject the possibility of recovering insights into the nature of recognition from philosophical traditions prior to Hegel. Whilst Honneth and Taylor portray the early modern period as a particularly barren landscape when it comes to the appreciation of the role of intersubjectivity, I have suggested that—accidentally or otherwise—they have overstated their case.

I take the weakening of the reasons for adopting a history of recognition that begins with Hegel as a justification for re-examining the history of philosophy in the hope of discovering previously unseen sensitivities to the human dependency on the approval of others. Recognition relations, this thesis will claim, *were* theorised before Hegel. In fact, as I have alluded to at points in this chapter, work to substantiate this claim has already begun. Carnevali (2021) has attempted to reclaim insights into recognition from Hobbes, a figure actively sidelined within the mainstream of contemporary recognition theory. Charles L. Griswold (2017) has emphasised the importance that Adam Smith placed on achieving a self-conception informed by others, and in doing so by-passing the threat of self-delusion. Frederick Neuhouser (2008) has argued that Rousseau details a theodicy of self-love in which amour-propre drives human individuals to seek the recognition of their fellow human beings.

Recognition relations, I will argue, were also thematised by a figure who may seem an unlikely suspect: the 17th century French philosopher, Nicholas Malebranche. Whilst his philosophical

approach, a unique synthesis of the philosophy of Augustine and Descartes, might be assumed to be hopelessly inward-looking, we find in his treatment of postlapsarian experience a complex appreciation of the myriad ways in which human beings are dominated by a need for the approval of others, and are dependent for their self-conceptions on the ways that such others view them. Whilst the historical endeavour of recuperating Malebranche as a recognition theorist is in one sense profoundly at odds with Taylor's approach to the early modern period, it is congruent with his general approach to understanding the nature of identity. As he tells us: ‘I don’t think we can grasp this richness and complexity [of identity] unless we see how the modern understanding of the self developed out of earlier pictures of human identity’, because ‘understanding modernity aright is an exercise in retrieval’ (Taylor 1989, xi).

Chapter 2 Recognition Theory and its History: what do we want from a History of Recognition?

We saw in Chapter 1 that the principal contemporary theorists of recognition have taken the view that the notion that recognition constitutes subjectivity originates in Hegel. Prior to this, they have argued, recognition was not fully thematised. This chapter will examine a challenge to Honneth's and Taylor's original narrative of recognition's history raised and defended by Frederich Neuhouser. Contesting a line of argument to be found in Taylor's *Sources of the Self*, Neuhouser contends that the founder of recognition theory is in fact Jean Jacques Rousseau[1].

In *Rousseau's Theodicy of Self-Love: Evil, Rationality, and the Drive for Recognition* (2008), Neuhouser introduces the idea that Rousseau is a fully-fledged player in the history of recognition theory[2]. The claim is controversial, not only because it looks to upset the established Hegel-focused history of recognition, but also because Neuhouser's argument relies on a contested reading of Rousseauian amour propre. Whilst Honneth initially rejected Neuhouser's historical thesis, he has recently accepted it. A central aim of this chapter will be to critically consider this shift in Honneth's conception of the history of recognition. Whilst he has significantly relaxed his criteria for qualifying as a theorist of recognition, I argue that his approach remains problematically teleological, and that a broader history of recognition would do well to take a genealogical approach.

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[1] In *The Politics of Recognition*, Taylor identifies Rousseau as 'one of the points of origin of the modern discourse of authenticity' (1994, p.5). At first glance, the Rousseauian ideal of authenticity appears starkly at odds with the intersubjective notion of identity at the heart of recognition theory. As Taylor contends, this ideal emphasises the importance of an 'authentic moral contact with ourselves', where the self is understood as the 'voice of nature within us' (1994, p.29). Not only does Rousseauian authenticity thus require an inward turn, but it sees an amour propre-derived dependence upon others as the central cause of self-estrangement and the most vexing obstacle to achieving authenticity (Taylor 1994, p.27). These aspects of Rousseau's philosophy lead Taylor to dismiss him as a significant recognition theorist.

[2] However, the importance of Rousseau to the history of recognition has also been highlighted by Robert Shaver (1989), Théophile Pénigaud de Mourgues (2017), and Barbara Carnevali (2012).

I begin, in §1, with an overview of Neuhouser's reading of the negative strand of Rousseauian amour propre. Such inflamed self-love leads subjects to ferociously pursue their good standing in the eyes of others. Crucially, this desire to be well thought of engenders a dependence on others that leads to the twin harms of a loss of integrity and self-estrangement. But, as §2 explores, Neuhouser contends that Rousseau's claim to a place in the history of recognition theory should be grounded on his account of *positive* amour propre as a necessary condition of 'rationality, morality, and freedom —subjectivity itself' (2008, p.2). Neuhouser urges us to recast our understanding of Hegelian recognition theory as Hegel's attempt to work through problems first raised by Rousseau (2008, p.13).

Turning to Honneth, we find that his response to the view that Rousseau is the originator of recognition theory comes in two distinct phases. §2.1 addresses Honneth's initial rejection: Rousseau cannot be the originator of recognition theory, Honneth argues, because he was ultimately ambivalent about the desirability of the dependence upon others that amour propre generates. §2.2 explores his subsequent volte-face. In *Recognition: A Chapter in the History of European Ideas* (2020), Honneth accepts Neuhouser's contention that Rousseau is the originator of recognition theory. Unlike Neuhouser, however, he grounds this claim on Rousseau's account of negative amour propre. Whilst this is a welcome development, §2.3 introduces some methodological reservations about Honneth's teleological approach to the history of recognition. In §3, I make the case for a more genealogical approach.

§1 Rousseau, Amour Propre, and the Desire for Recognition

§1.1 Neuhouser's Rousseau

Neuhouser was not the first to suggest that the kinds of desires that flow from Rousseauian amour propre might be termed desires for recognition[3]. As Robert Shaver explained in 1989, when I am motivated by Rousseauian amour propre, I desire 'honours, reputation, rank, nobility, and all that which exists only in the opinion of men … Put most broadly, I want recognition' (1989, p.263).

Whilst scholars often note Rousseau's interest in our preoccupation with opinion, Shaver complains that 'there are few careful accounts' of this problem and 'even fewer with an awareness of [its] history' (1989, p.261). Neuhouser's recent work, which sets out 'the significance to human beings and society of the drive for recognition' appears to answer Shaver's complaint (2008, p.19). In investigating Rousseau's account of amour propre, Neuhouser claims to discover what Rousseau considers the central facet of human nature:

> Rousseau goes so far as to claim that rationality, morality, and freedom—subjectivity itself—would be impossible for humans if it were not for *amour propre* and the relations to other subjects that it impels those who possess it to establish (2008, p.2).

Shaver's complaint is only partially answered, however, because rather than taking a primarily historical approach, Neuhouser approaches Rousseau's texts with an eye to extracting points of 'philosophical promise' that are taken up later in the tradition, particularly with respect to Rousseau's contribution to the history of recognition theory (2008, p.13). As Neuhouser writes:

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[3] In addition, Timothy O'Hagan notes that Rousseau understands amour propre as a desire for recognition (2006, p.26).

> The appropriators of Rousseau who figure most prominently in my interpretation are Adam Smith, Hegel and Freud, although strains of thought developed by other philosophers—Kant, Mead, Sartre, Habermas, Rawls—can be detected at various points as well. In response to the forward looking stance that guides my interpretation, some readers of partial drafts of this book have accused me of turning Rousseau into Hegel. Whilst acknowledging a kernel of truth to these charges, I nevertheless plead not guilty to them. My defence is that all of the doctrines of later thinkers that find their way into my interpretation of Rousseau—Smith's naturalistic account of the formation of moral character; Hegel's dialectic of recognition as the very core of reason—can plausibly be understood as the results of attempts to think through various aspects of the problems that Rousseau's theodicy of *amour propre* addressed (2008, p.12).

Rousseau's analysis of amour propre, Neuhouser contends, provided 'philosophical resources' which would be fruitfully explored by later thinkers, including those who put such resources to work in theories of recognition (2008, p.13). Neuhouser's characterisation of the supremely influential nature of Rousseauian philosophical ideas thereby establishes Rousseau as a major figure in the history of recognition theory. In order to understand his defence of this claim, the following sections will focus on Neuhouser's interpretation of Rousseauian amour propre.

§1.2 Rousseau on Self-love: Amour Propre and Amour de Soi

Rousseau distinguishes two kinds of self-love: amour propre and amour de soi. The distinction between them is clarified in the *Second Discourse*[4]*:*

> *[Amour de soi-même]* ... is a natural sentiment that inclines every animal to attend to its self-preservation ... Amour propre is only a relative sentiment, factitious and born in society, that inclines every individual to set greater stock by himself than by anyone else, inspires men with all the harms they do to one another, and is the genuine source of honour … In the genuine state of nature, Amour propre does not exist (DI 219).

As a natural sentiment, amour de soi possesses a primacy that amour propre lacks: 'man's first sentiment', Rousseau tells us, 'was that of his existence, his first care that for his preservation' (DI 164). This does not mean that amour de soi motivates only the pursuit of things which are crucial for our continued physical existence. The point is rather that when we pursue something through amour de soi we act for reasons unconnected to the desire for esteem associated with amour propre.

Amour de soi, it is generally agreed, is a wholly good inclination. Amour propre, on the other hand, is the source of the worst in human behaviour. It generates in us the desire 'to have a position, to be a part, to count for something' (Rousseau, *Emile II, 160*, cited in Neuhouser 2008, p. 30). It is a desire, as Neuhouser parses it, 'to be esteemed, admired, or thought valuable' (2008, p.30); in other words, it is a desire for recognition. This desire is relative in two respects. First, to desire good standing is to desire a certain standing *in relation to* some others; that is, good standing is a positional good. Second, the good that amour propre seeks consists in 'the opinions of one's fellow beings' (Neuhouser 2008, p.33), making amour propre an 'inherently social passion, not a possible

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[4] *Discourse on the Origin and the Foundations of Inequality Among Men or Second Discourse* henceforth referred to as 'DI' followed by the page number in V. Gourevitch 2018.

feature of individuals 'in themselves'' (Neuhouser 2008, p.38). The end of amour propre is essentially intersubjective (Neuhouser 2008, p.38)[5].

Whilst amour de soi is a natural sentiment, the fact that amour propre is 'born in society' makes it an artificial, or factitious, human feature (Neuhouser 2008, p.38). This is not to say that it is either avoidable, or worth avoiding. Because we must live in societies, we cannot live without amour propre, but we *can* alter the forms in which we experience it by altering the nature of our social relations. Amour propre's 'extreme malleability' is crucial for Neuhouser's reading, because it makes the dangers and evils associated with it 'the effects of contingent circumstances that depend on human will' (Neuhouser 2008, p.40). This leaves open the possibility of altering human society so as to eliminate the negative facets of amour propre, making it instead a crucial stepping stone in the achievement of 'rationality, morality, freedom [and] subjectivity' (Neuhouser 2008, p.2). Before I consider this positive rendering of amour propre, I will first turn to its inflamed form.

§1.3 Inflamed Amour Propre

Neuhouser identifies a negative strand of amour propre, which he calls *inflamed* amour propre, on which I will focus here. Whilst he explores five distinct dangers associated with inflamed amour propre, I will concentrate on three of them: dependency, alienation, and self-falsification. I do not draw on these features because they are immediately relevant to Neuhouser's interpretation of Rousseau as a theorist of recognition: Neuhouser, as we shall see shortly, draws on Rousseau's *positive* account of amour propre when he makes this claim. Rather, I focus on these negative

[5] In practice, of course, satisfying the ends of amour de soi also cannot be done alone: 'in any but the most unusual of human conditions, satisfying the needs of self-preservation will also require, as a matter of practical necessity, cooperation with others' (Neuhouser 2008, p.34). What distinguishes amour de soi from amour propre on this front is that collaboration is conceptually necessary for the satisfaction of amour propre.

features of amour propre because, as I shall argue later, they provide more appropriate building blocks for Rousseau's theory of recognition. As such, they are key to the overarching claim of this chapter, and my exploration of Neuhouser's account of them introduces useful conceptual resources and terminology.

According to Neuhouser, the desire for recognition associated with amour propre is just as fundamental as the desire for self-preservation that flows from amour de soi. We pursue its end with equal and extreme ferocity. In the case of amour propre, this is cause for concern. An initial reason for this is that amour propre inspires acts of 'cruelty and violence' that do not arise from amour de soi (Neuhouser 2008, p.72). Contra Hobbes, Rousseau is adamant that the life of the savage in the state of nature was not a violent one. It is only once amour propre gained a hold in human society that men grew 'bloodthirsty and cruel' (DI 170). This facet of human nature, once inflamed, exhibits a 'virus-like capacity to infect virtually all of life's activities, investing them with its own significance and commandeering them in service of its own foreign ends' (Neuhouser 2008, p.72). Activities that might formerly have been pursued for the inherent satisfaction they produce become, instead, opportunities to garner esteem.

Our striving for amour propre, we have said, is a striving for a positional good—good standing in relation to others. As Neuhouser explains, this makes it dangerous because it introduces a tendency to compare oneself with others (2008, p.74). The desire to be recognised not merely as good, but as better than other people has grave societal consequences. Problematically, one can only be recognised as superior in relation to some inferiors, and yet amour propre's quest for superior standing is universal—no one is willing to play the part of the inferior. This makes 'the systematic

satisfaction of *amour propre* … impossible', and guarantees 'systemic conflict' (Neuhouser 2008, p.75-6)[6].

Serious as this is, the cardinal danger of amour propre lies in its devastating effects on self-knowledge. The problem with living in societies where everyone relentlessly seeks recognition is that this passion generates a deep dependency on the views of other people (Neuhouser 2008, p.78). This dependency engenders two, interrelated negative effects: (1) a loss of integrity, and (2) alienation. First, depending on the views of others for one's sense of self-satisfaction encourages subjects to undermine their own integrity. The overwhelming desire to be regarded favourably makes one 'subject to the temptation to let [one's] actions be dictated by the values and preferences of others', and thus to 'will in accordance with their wishes and values rather than [one's] own' (Neuhouser 2008, p.79). In adopting only those values that we believe will garner recognition from others, we allow a part of who we are to be defined for us. In making ourselves dependent on the views of others in this way, we undermine our own integrity, and thus fail 'to realise an essential characteristic of genuine selfhood' (Neuhouser 2008, p.81).

Second, this dependence upon others leads to alienation. 'Sociable man', Rousseau explains, is 'always outside himself, [and] is capable of living only in the opinions of others and, so to speak, derives the sentiment of his own existence solely from their judgment' (DI 193). We ought to understand the 'sentiment of existence', Neuhouser argues, as the feeling 'that one is somebody', that one is a self (2008, p.83). The dependency on the opinions of others generated by amour propre

[6] N.J.H. Dent makes a further point with respect to positional goods which highlights their paradoxical nature and which has resonances in a similar point made by Honneth. Putting positional goods centre stage, Dent notes, is 'self-destroying' (1988, p.63). This is because inflamed amour propre's attempts to gain recognition as a 'significant person' require that 'others accept or are forced into positions of subjection directly referential to oneself as dominant over them' (Dent 1988, p.63). The problem is that seeking regard from these others is self-defeating, because 'that which is nothing cannot, by its comportment under one, prove to one that one is something' (Dent 1988, p.63). Honneth similarly notes that relationships of recognition must be mutual and reciprocal, because it is only those who have an appropriate value and identity that can offer me proper recognition. This feature of the desire for recognition has typically been thought to have its origin in Hegel's master-slave dialectic, but it is Dent's suggestion that we find the germ of the idea here in Rousseau too.

is dangerous because it threatens to make this sentiment of ourselves wholly dependent upon the way in which others view us, thereby alienating us from our true selves.

The process of alienation begins with a subject's concession of integrity. As we adopt and internalise the approving opinions of others, we construct new, externally derived, ersatz selves, which we mistake for our real selves. Our sentiment of ourselves is henceforth authored from the outside (Neuhouser 2008, p.83). In Barbara Carnevali's image, '*the centre of gravity of subjectivity shift[s] inevitably from inside to outside*' (2020, p.73, emphasis in original). By prompting us to derive our sense of self externally, amour propre encourages harmful practices which further entrench our alienation. If one were to present oneself without dissimulation, deriving one's sense of oneself from the responses of others might still generate a kind of subjectivity with some relation to reality. But the ferocity of amour propre means that Rousseauian individuals are animated to seek the approval of others by pretending to possess valuable qualities, thus presenting themselves as other than they really are (DI 193). By putting on a mask, we dupe both those around us and ourselves. Through calculated social play-acting, we hoodwink others into reflecting back to us a flattering counterfeit image, which we then come to accept as genuine.

Talk of play-acting might seem to raise the possibility of a means of escape: might amour propre not move us, Dent wonders, to engage in 'social games', consciously presenting ourselves in ways that exploit others for esteem, whilst at the same time preserving genuine subjectivity by leaving our inner, authentic selves untouched (1989, p.32)? After all, Neuhouser seems to suggest that what Rousseauian amour propre desires is simply the good opinions of others. Play-acting might permit us to achieve this whilst retaining a grasp of what we truly are.

The problem is that maintaining the separation of a real and performed identity is difficult, if not impossible. As Charles L. Griswold proposes, our preoccupation with the way in which we appear to others 'leads us to play out our assigned parts in a script', accepting its norms and prescribed roles (2017, p.162). But subjects forget that they are acting out a part, so that their conscious assumption of a role 'morph[s] into unself-conscious "action": 'self-forgetfulness and appearing to others as we imagine they think we should are now conjoined' (Griswold 2017, p.162). We should, however, be careful not to characterise this form of alienation as the result of mere passive forgetfulness. Amour propre generates a longing for recognition so intense that the approving opinions that our dissimulation arouses come to count for more than a continuing grasp of reality (Neuhouser 2008, p.88). The excellence of my manufactured self, reflected back to me in the opinions of others, is beguiling to my desire for recognition, so that I come to care more about this self than about my real self. That is to say, it benefits me to confound the two.

§2 Positive Rousseauian Amour Propre and Recognition Theory

The process of forming a false self naturally raises questions about the nature of the true self that has been obscured. Rousseau suggests that at least one other form of subjectivity is possible: the savage in the state of nature, possessing only amour de soi, is unaware of the gaze of others and so untroubled by alienation. But a return to this state is impossible. If Rousseauian amour propre is to be rehabilitated, Neuhouser must show that not all forms of social existence lead to loss of integrity and alienation. This is the central claim he wishes to defend: that amour propre is not necessarily alienating, but also possesses 'redemptive potential' (Neuhouser 2008, p.3). Neuhouser's analysis of positive Rousseauian amour propre is intricately constructed. Here I offer only an overview of his central claims in order to set the stage for interpretations of the history of recognition.

Neuhouser argues that Rousseau presents us with a two-pronged approach for avoiding inflamed amour propre. The first prong concerns education. The right pedagogical programme, he proposes, will inculcate a mature capacity for pity capable of constraining amour propre's drive for superiority (Neuhouser 2008, p.177). The second prong concerns the nature of social and political institutions. By limiting social inequalities and providing equally distributed 'institutional sources of respect and esteem', individuals are able to satisfy their desires for recognition in ways that do not rely on the existence of fundamental asymmetries in social power (Neuhouser 2008, pp.163-166).

The most original aspect of Neuhouser's project, however, is his contention that Rousseau saw amour propre as necessary for 'nearly everything that elevates human life and makes it a thing of value' (2008, p.187). As he elaborates:

> Rousseau's suggestion is that rationality, morality, and freedom—indeed, subjectivity itself—would be impossible if it were not for amour propre and the relations to other subjects it impels human beings to establish (Neuhouser 2008, p.187).

Amour propre does not directly enable these capacities. Human subjects do not seek to become rational, moral, or free because 'doing so satisfies … their desire to have value in the eyes of others' (Neuhouser 2008, p.190). Rather, through their attempts to satisfy their desires for recognition, Neuhouser argues, subjects are inadvertently led to develop the 'cognitive and conative capacities … for reason, morality, and freedom' (2008, p.190). In the first instance, amour propre is a necessary condition of rationality. Morality, freedom, and subjectivity are indirectly dependent upon amour propre insofar as each of these capacities depends on reason.

I will begin with the relationship between amour propre and reason. According to Neuhouser, reason consists in the practical ability to take up a 'deliberative stance' and strive 'to legislate for [one's] state in accordance with the general will' (2008, p.191). However, he argues, it is amour propre's striving for recognition that furnishes a subject with the capacities and dispositions necessary for adopting the standpoint of the general will (or the standpoint of reason) (Neuhouser 2008, p.191). The general will, Neuhouser explains, is the will that 'directs the collective body', which consists of a group of individuals 'governed by the social contract' (2008, p.193). The aim of the general will is to secure subjects' fundamental interests: 'the goods, life, and freedom of each member' (Rousseau, *Discourse on Political Economy*, 9*,* quoted in Neuhouser 2008, p.194). Occupying the standpoint of the general will requires, first, that a subject develops a self-conception which is informed by their essential equality with all other subjects, grounded in their shared possession of the set of fundamental interests outlined above. Second, it requires the motivation to sacrifice one's particular, non-fundamental interests for the sake of the fundamental interests of others. Amour propre, Neuhouser claims, provides the cognitive and motivational resources necessary for both of these conditions.

First, Neuhouser argues that a subject cannot develop the self-conception necessary for occupying the standpoint of reason without the ability for perspective-taking provided by amour propre. He recalls Rousseau's description of the subject who lacks amour propre: such a subject 'regards himself as the sole spectator' and can occupy only his own perspective on the world (Neuhouser 2008, p.220). Amour propre inculcates in its hosts an ability 'to anticipate others' desires and needs', thus furnishing subjects with the cognitive resources necessary for 'view[ing] the world from a standpoint other than one's particular perspective' (Neuhouser 2008, p.220).

This ability for perspective-taking is necessary for developing a conception of oneself as possessing an essential equality with others—a crucial facet of the adoption of the standpoint of reason. It does so by enabling subjects to make comparisons. By comparing oneself with others, Neuhouser claims, a subject is able to see that all citizens possesses the same fundamental interests, and that one's own fundamental interests 'have the same status as everyone else's' (2008, p.199). Further, such comparisons reveal to a subject that fulfilling the fundamental interests which undergird one's essential equality with others should take priority over one's own, particular non-fundamental interests (Neuhouser 2008, p.199).

Second, then, Neuhouser explains how it is that amour propre provides subjects with the motivation to forsake their non-fundamental interests for the sake of the fundamental interests of others (2008, p.194). His claim is that amour propre provides subjects with the motivation for making such sacrifices by offering them the opportunity to earn recognition (Neuhouser 2008, p.232; 2008, p.199). We are motivated to act rationally, to will from the standpoint of the general will, because there is 'a kind of honour or esteem in doing so' (Neuhouser 2008, pp.260-261).

Neuhouser's broader, more ambitious claim is that amour propre is also a condition of morality, freedom, and subjectivity insofar as these capacities depend on reason. Given his focus on the relationship between amour propre and rationality, the further connections between these capacities are harder to glean. When it comes to morality, Neuhouser appears to claim that subjecting oneself to the general will is a crucial part of virtuous action. As we have seen, occupying the standpoint of reason requires subjects to conceive of each member of the collective body as essentially equal, as possessing what Neuhouser's calls 'moral equal[ity]' with others (2008, p.218). He thus appears to suggest that we equate rational action—willing in accordance with the general will—with moral action (Neuhouser 2008, pp.222-229).

Whilst this may seem to undermine autonomy, Neuhouser's suggestion is that a subject can only be truly autonomous when they rise above the fickle desires of the mere inclinations of inflamed amour propre. The 'ideal of rational autonomy', he argues, involves each subject's own assessment 'of the rational character of the laws' proposed by the social body of which they are a part (Neuhouser 2008, p.204). It is not the case, though, that the general will is simply identical with the will of the majority (Neuhouser 2008, p.214). Rather, this is only true when the community 'meets certain criteria', most especially the criterion that each subject is motivated by the fundamental interests of each (Neuhouser 2008, p.214). In assessing this, and determining whether or not one should assent to a law, a subject demonstrates their autonomy as a rational agent.

The capacities of rationality, morality, and autonomy just outlined are, it is argued, each dependent upon the resources provided by amour propre. Moreover, insofar as the possession of these capacities is essential to the enjoyment of subjectivity as we know it, amour propre is equally a condition of the possibility of being a recognisable self at all (Neuhouser 2008, pp.189-190).

The uncovering of this positive strand of Rousseauian amour propre, Neuhouser contends, has important implications for our understanding of the history of recognition. Rousseau's exploration raises philosophical problems and provides philosophical resources which are said to have a profound influence on Hegel's theory of recognition. Standard narratives of the history of recognition theory see Hegel as the first philosopher to acknowledge a subject's dependence on the recognition of others. In claiming that Hegel was but an 'appropriator of Rousseau', Neuhouser tacitly asserts the need to acknowledge the origins of the theory in Rousseau (2008, p.13).

§2.1 Honneth's Response to Neuhouser

The notion that Rousseau is the founder of recognition theory is, Honneth argues, 'of downright subversive significance in the history of ideas' (2016, p.190). Nevertheless, there are some respects in which Honneth accepts Neuhouser's interpretation. Notably, he agrees that Rousseau did not intend to present an entirely negative account of amour propre. Rousseau's positive account, Honneth concedes, is an antecedent of the later Hegelian theory, and Hegel was 'intuitively' aware of the seeds of his theory in the Genevan philosopher's work (2016, p.201). What Honneth intends by this is less than clear. Responding to Neuhouser's revision of the standard narrative of the history of recognition theory, he is quick to assert that Hegel's treatment of the need for recognition was essentially discontinuous with Rousseau's treatment of amour propre (Honneth 2016, p.202). In defence of this claim, Honneth advances two interconnected reasons for rejecting the proposal that Rousseau is the originator of recognition theory.

First, Honneth argues that Rousseau's treatment of amour propre is ambiguous enough to lend itself to all manner of differently angled interpretations and 'diverse conclusions' (2016, p.198). Plenty of readers are convinced by Rousseau's negative analysis of amour propre, and remain unaware (or, indeed, skeptical) of any alternative, positive rendering of this notion (Honneth 2016, p.198). Rousseau's obscure and enigmatic treatment of positive amour propre, Honneth concludes, suggests that we should refrain from supposing that Hegel—who never uses the term 'amour propre'—clearly understood its double meaning (2016, p.202).

Second, Honneth doubts whether Rousseau ever fully committed himself to the possibility of a rehabilitated amour propre. Rousseau's œuvre, he argues, fluctuates between two 'fundamental motifs', which disclose his hesitancy to wholly affirm the advantages of our dependence on others

(Honneth 2016, p.202). Whilst the first motif is 'the Stoic idea of personal independence from all external attachments', the second expresses Rousseau's 'intersubjective idea of a deep-seated dependence on others' (Honneth 2016, p.192). In Honneth's eyes, Rousseau never entirely shed his reservations as to whether 'it would not be more conducive to the good life to mentally overcome our dependence on others' (2016, p.202). This vacillation as to the significance of intersubjective dependence not only makes for interpretative difficulties, but ultimately prevents Rousseau from being able 'to clearly make this intersubjectivity the foundation of his entire ethical theory' (Honneth 2016, p.191).

Whilst Rousseauian amour propre might play an important role in the history of ideas, Honneth maintains that we must deny him the label of the 'originator' of the theory of recognition. It thus becomes clear that Honneth's conception of the history of recognition theory is only attentive to a single strand of the concept. Whilst Honneth acknowledges that Rousseau is concerned with thematising the nature and role of the human need for recognition, he maintains that his unresolved vacillation as to whether the dependence on others that flows from amour propre is desirable bars him from assuming originator status (2016, p.206). Though never making the point fully explicit, Honneth thus conveys that he is working with a conception of the history of recognition which can include only those theorists who unambiguously acknowledged the need for recognition in positive terms. Rousseau, he concludes, has no place in such a history.

This conclusion is, I think, unconvincing. Even if we remain skeptical as to the persuasiveness of a Neuhouserian reading of Rousseau, it is very hard to shake the sense that Rousseau's treatment of negative, inflamed amour propre constitutes an important stage in a more expansive history of recognition, in which the concept takes on a variety of meanings and normative tones. Like Honneth, then, I take issue with Neuhouser's basis for including Rousseau in the history of

recognition, though my reasons for doing so are different. Neuhouser's niche analysis of the positive function of amour propre is, as he concedes, founded on 'scattered remarks' and 'elusive passages' (Neuhouser 2008, p.189). As a result, it remains contestable. But rather than appealing to this positive strand of amour propre in order to confirm that Rousseau has a place in the history of recognition, one can base this conclusion on a less controversial reading of Rousseau's position—on his account of the way that amour propre inflames our desire for the recognition of others, thus leading us to construct false selves. That is, Rousseau's inclusion in recognition's history need not, contra Honneth, hang on his presentation of a positive theory of recognition.

It is fortunate, then, that Honneth comes to reconsider Rousseau's inclusion. In *Recognition: A Chapter in the History of European Ideas* (2020)[7], Honneth aims to construct a history of recognition which acknowledges that the concept has followed 'different paths and takes on ever new and revealing meanings' (2020, p.3). Strikingly, this revised history identifies in Rousseau the 'origins of the theory of recognition', a shift of opinion which results from a sequence of changes in Honneth's understanding of what it is to be an originator (Honneth 2020, p.12). Whilst these changes are not made explicit, they are disclosed through the fact that Honneth retains his earlier reading of Rousseau, but revises his assessment of its place in recognition's history. Honneth's pronouncement that Rousseau should be seen as the progenitor of the concept is now predicated on the very view that previously justified Rousseau's exclusion: his negative account of amour propre (2020, p.21). Honneth's history of recognition thereby expands, taking into account the fluidity of the concept's meanings and normative character.

If Rousseau's negative account of amour propre is the first articulation of a theory of recognition, it is because, in Honneth's eyes, he is the first to produce a systematic account of the human need for

[7] Henceforth '*Recognition*'.

the approval of others, positive or otherwise. Whether or not Rousseau is in fact the first philosopher to do this is a matter of debate. Honneth pauses to consider Istvan Hont's (2015) contention that Thomas Hobbes should be declared the originator of this view on the grounds that he was 'the first to emphasise the paramount importance of recognition for human co-existence' (Honneth 2020, p.11). Hobbes' place in recognition's history is subject to deeper investigation: Barbara Carnevali, too, has recently proposed that we categorise Hobbes as a recognition theorist (2021). In order for Hobbes to deserve this title, Honneth argues, he would have had to have put ''psychological' human desires ... at the core of his political philosophy'—something of which Honneth is unconvinced (2020, p.11). It is thus made clear that, in Honneth's eyes, to bestow originator status upon Rousseau is to at the same time acknowledge that he meets this condition: that he acknowledges the human desire for the approval of others and places this psychological desire at the centre of his theory.

With his condition for inclusion in recognition's history thus reformulated, *Recognition* (2020) sees Honneth develop a broader history which encompasses more than the concept's positive strand. I want to briefly outline this new history, before turning a critical eye to Honneth's methodology. I will argue that his approach retains a teleological bearing which unjustifiably constrains his history of recognition in two ways. First, by constricting his understanding of relevant philosophical figures, and second, by excluding some thinkers who deserve a place within it. In its place, I will urge a more genealogical approach to the history of recognition.

§2.2 A New History

Honneth's new history of recognition utilises three Weberian ideal types: the French, British, and German (Honneth 2020, p.6). This approach is motivated by his contention that there are three distinct approaches to the concept of recognition, and that the natural dividing lines between them are national. The particular colouring that recognition takes in each of these forms is due, he proposes, to each nation's 'particular sociocultural conditions' (Honneth 2020, p.6). Consequently, Honneth's new history is not limited to the history of the meaning given to the term by the German idealists. Instead, it includes a range of interpretations of a particular 'constitutive thought': 'the fact that we are related to each other by means of various forms of recognition' (Honneth 2020, p.2).

Honneth begins by asking whether there is something like a 'big bang' moment for recognition (2020, p.2). His answer to this question takes us to the French tradition, and to Rousseau in particular (not withstanding the fact that Rousseau was, of course, Genevan) (2020, p.12). The distinctly French political and sociocultural conditions that shape attitudes toward recognition are, Honneth proposes, the bitter antagonisms of courtly life, and the conceptual vehicle for it is that of amour propre (2020, p.18-19). Amour propre generates desires for superior standing, prestige, and esteem, which encourage individuals to feign characteristics that they do not really possess, ultimately rendering their true nature epistemically inaccessible to them (Honneth 2020, pp.18-30). Rousseau thus inaugurates what Honneth sees as the negative French tradition of recognition, in which this concept consistently 'refers to the need to be esteemed', raising the epistemic threat of alienation from one's true self (2020, p.135; 2020, p.139). Though the conceptual vehicle of amour propre was abandoned at the end of the eighteenth century, the notion that subjectivity involves a dangerous dependence upon others re-emerges, 'like a malignant shadow', in the works of Sartre, Lacan, and Althusser (Honneth 2020, p.38; 2020, p.13). Despite the changing faces of French recognition, Honneth sees it as retaining similar conceptual outlines.

The British tradition is markedly different. Centred around the existence of a 'self-interested economic subject' with a 'capitalist mentality', Honneth argues that British thinkers develop a positive notion of recognition, in which the concept of amour propre is replaced by that of sympathy (2020, p.54-5; 2020, p.57). The germ of the British notion is located in the positive anthropology of Lord Shaftesbury, and picked up by Francis Hutcheson, though Honneth identifies David Hume and Adam Smith as its most representative figures.

Hume, Honneth argues, believed that we could redress partiality and irregularity in our moral judgements by appealing to the 'steady and general point of view' of an impartial spectator, to whom we grant the moral authority to restrict our beliefs (2020, p.73). Smith's reiteration of Hume's view explains why individuals want their moral conduct to be judged in an impartial manner (Honneth 2020, p.72). His claim, Honneth suggests, is that we afford moral authority to an impartial spectator because we desire to be considered praiseworthy (2020, pp.78-84). In short, the positive British conception of recognition refers to the human desire for acceptance within a social community, and subjects' desires to be praised for their conduct (Honneth 2020, p.135-6). Alienation is no longer a peril. Rather, Honneth proposes, subjects acquire a positive skill for 'conform[ing] to the standards of social community' (Honneth 2020, p.139).

Last, there is the German tradition. In Kant, Honneth argues, we find the key idea that the attitude of respect towards others 'effects a change in our nature', placing limits upon the bounds of one's self-love (2020, p.106). This motif of respect is markedly different to the French and British conceptions of recognition: the object of analysis is no longer the desires of needy human beings, but instead 'the kind of recognition we pay or owe to others' (Honneth 2020, pp. 108-9). The Kantian notion of respect entails that 'all human beings ... are mutually obligated to respect each others' right to autonomy' (Honneth 2020, p.112). But, Honneth argues, the Kantian account lacks

an explanation of subjects' motivation to engage in reciprocal moral recognition—something that Fichte and Hegel would later provide (2020, p.112).

According to Fichte, reciprocal recognition between subjects is itself 'a condition of the possibility of self-consciousness', of being able to experience oneself as a free and 'rationally active' being (Honneth 2020, p.120). His development of the Kantian position inspired Hegel to provide a more 'empirically substantial concept of recognition', to look for real historical instances in which subjects restricted their self-interest and showed respect for each other (Honneth 2020, p.123; 2020, p.127). Still, the German concept of recognition continued to distinguish itself by conceptualising recognition, not as a subjective desire, but as 'a condition of becoming a rational, autonomous being' (Honneth 2020, p.136). Mutual recognition is motivated by a subject's need to prove its rationality, and is the condition 'of the possibility of individual self-determination' (Honneth 2020, p.140).

Finally, Honneth attempts to link together these ideal types into a kind of meta theory in which all three treatments are 'productively complementary' (2020, p.144). We can only do this, he proposes, by making one ideal type fundamental, and asking 'what we would have to change, correct or supplement in the image of our social life in order to integrate the other two models of recognition' (2020, p.146). The German model, Honneth proposes, must be taken as fundamental: insofar as it describes the 'communicative conditions under which social recognition can take place at all', this model is logically prior to the others (2020, p.148). Only when we have accounted for the authority that others have over us can we incorporate the French and British variants, which both presuppose that this prior issue is settled.

With the centrepiece in place, the supplemental elements can be added. The British variant is said to advance Hegel's theory by helping us understand how it is that 'cooperatively constructed norms become anchored in individuals' own systems of motivation' (Honneth 2020, p.156). Next, whilst the French conception resists easy integration, the negative strands of Rousseau's work are said to be explanatory for Hegel's theory. Like Rousseau, Hegel recognised that those who are excluded from 'institutionalised relations of recognition' can exhibit amour propre-like behaviours in the form of pretentiousness and 'the vain display of supposed merits' (Honneth 2020, p.162). In essence, Honneth seems to claim, the value of Rousseauian amour propre lies in its ability to draw attention to these under-appreciated aspects of Hegel's thought, whilst also helping us to apprehend the psychology of self-distorting attempts to achieve recognition.

Honneth readily discloses his reluctance to resign himself 'to the finding that Europe is home to very different ways of philosophically understanding our dependence on others' (2020, p.145). Through his synthesis of the three ideal types, he takes himself to have brought order into the manifold conceptions of recognition he identifies, and thus to have successfully avoided this pitfall.

We might wonder, however, whether resigning oneself to a multiplicity of meanings need be given such a negative ring. Why should we resist acknowledging that unique sociocultural conditions have given rise to conceptions of recognition which may not admit of integration into a systematic meta-theory? *Pace* Honneth, I want to suggest that we should not hesitate to acknowledge this disparity of meanings and should be wary of attempts to integrate them. Honneth's attempt at a synthesis has distinct drawbacks. Conversely, leaning into the distinctness of historical conceptions of recognition has advantages.

§2.3 Methodological Reservations

Let us begin with the construction of ideal types divided along national lines. Their construction necessitates the elimination of complexities and ambiguities from various divergent treatments of recognition[8]. Taking French recognition first, we find Honneth proposing that this national ideal type is characterised by an essential negativity concerning the epistemic dangers of recognition. However, it is unclear whether this is an accurate characterisation even of Rousseau, the central, archetypical figure of Honneth's French ideal type. As my discussion of Neuhouser's work has made evident, whether or not Rousseau did ultimately take a negative stance towards subjects' desires for the recognition of others is still a matter of controversy. The construction of a unified, negative French ideal type, then, has forced Honneth to overlook the complexities and ambiguities of different accounts of recognition, in favour of a harmonising account which selects just those features that unite diverse treatments of a complex concept.

The British ideal type is plagued by similar issues. Thomas Hobbes poses a problem for the characterisation of British recognition as essentially positive. Honneth discusses the case of Hobbes, declining to name him the progenitor of the theory of recognition on the grounds that he does not place the human desire for honour and distinction at the centre of his political philosophy (2020, p.11). Given that Hobbes does not feature in the discussion of the British ideal type at all, we can only assume that making this desire the centre of one's theory is one of Honneth's requirements for inclusion in the history of recognition. But this is problematic. Why should a historian make such a demand? The placing of unwarranted constraints on the history of recognition is an important issue in relation to the argument of this thesis. As I shall show, Malebranche stands to make an important

[8] Problems also attach to Honneth's decision to focus on these three particular national ideal types—why focus on these countries? Honneth's appeal to Reinhart Koselleck's argument that the different forms of bourgeouis society in France, Britain and Germany represent the 'fundamental alternatives with respect to how the new social order could develop' is less than fully convincing as a justification (2020, p.7).

contribution to the history of recognition, though it would arguably be wrong to say that he places the concept at the centre of his theory.

For Honneth, both resisting the pressure to relax the entry requirements to his history and capitulating to it have problematic consequences. A refusal to include within his ideal types those theorists who do not place recognition at the very centre of their theorising imposes, I have argued, unwarranted constraints. At the same time, relaxing this condition seems to threaten Honneth's construction of homogenous ideal types. For example, as I have suggested, it might allow space to include Hobbes' negative account of the desire for glory within the British strand of recognition theory. However, to do so would be to complicate Honneth's portrayal of British recognition as essentially positive.

This leads us to my second concern. If Hobbes were to be included in the British strand of recognition, this would not only threaten the simplicity of Honneth's ideal types, but also pose difficulties for his attempt to unite them into a systematic theory. In order to do this, Honneth is forced to further simplify the central themes of his already selectively chosen ideal types, distilling each national portrait into 'summarising formulations' which are, as he himself admits, largely 'independent of [the] individual thinkers themselves' (Honneth 2020, p.134-6). Not only does this further simplification attract the same criticisms as the production of ideal types; it may also raise suspicion that, to at least some extent, Honneth's ideal types are reverse engineered with an eye to facilitating the production of 'summarising formulations' which make a synthesis possible (Honneth 2020, p.136).

Honneth's systematic theory also encounters further objections, notably that his approach remains distinctly Hegel-centred. The Hegelian theory, taken to be fundamental to an overall synthesis, is

treated as if it naturally or inevitably exemplifies the central core or essence of the concept of recognition. Further, it is taken as the key to understanding the earlier French and British formulations. The Hegelian notion of recognition, we have seen Honneth claim, is logically prior to the French and the British notions in virtue of the fact that 'it describes the communicative conditions under which social recognition can take place at all' (2020, p.147). The French and British concepts, Honneth claims, can only be fully realised when they are no longer 'weighed down by the theories from which they originate' and become incorporated into the Hegel-focused synthesis (Honneth 2020, p.136). Honneth's methodology thus appears to be problematically tinged by teleological aims: earlier formulations of recognition seem to find their full expression only through the Hegelian conception, which is purported to be necessary for making proper sense of earlier views (Honneth 2020, p.147).

We find a similar stance in Neuhouser's attempt to install Rousseau as the originator of recognition theory. Neuhouser's positive interpretation of Rousseauian amour propre grounds Rousseau's inclusion in the history of recognition in the identification of philosophical resources which proved crucial to the Hegelian account. But the accuracy of Neuhouser's Hegelian-tinged reading of Rousseauian amour propre has been questioned—and not only by Honneth. Neuhouser himself gives us reason to doubt that Rousseau deserves inclusion in the history of recognition on this basis. As Neuhouser himself acknowledges, his account of amour propre is 'guided less by the aim of presenting a historically accurate picture of the views Rousseau actually held', and more by the aim of reconstructing a philosophically 'interesting' position (2008, p.25). Whilst this retroactive reading of Rousseau as 'stumbling towards Hegel' might be interesting, it is also problematic (Simpson 2009, p.778). As Matthew Simpson has argued, the deeper Neuhouser enters into a discussion of 'the relations between recognition, reason, morals and freedom' the 'farther he gets from Rousseau' (2009, p.779). Just as Honneth's construction of a systematic theory requires him to

distil the French and British concepts into pithy notions which can be incorporated into the Hegelian model, so Neuhouser's portrayal of Rousseau as the founder of recognition theory depends on the embellishment of Rousseau's proto-Hegelian facets. Neuhouser's approach thus threatens to distort our understanding of Rousseau's approach to the problem of the desire for recognition by potentially downplaying the negative aspects of subjects' desires for esteem.

As Honneth's more recent work allows, we need not set the bar for inclusion in the history of recognition so high that Hegel is its only begetter. This development, whilst it is clearly an improvement on Honneth's earlier position, is ultimately double-edged. On the one hand, his now wide-ranging and inclusive approach to the history of recognition is welcome. Explorations of this topic have flourished in recent years, and Honneth's foray into the history of ideas lends additional credence to attempts to identify other pre-Hegelian recognition theorists. On the other hand, as we have seen, Honneth's attempt at a synthesis remains firmly Hegel-centred and distinctly teleological. His attempt to consolidate diverse treatments of recognition into a systematic theory both overlooks the complexity of individual accounts, and excludes those accounts that do not easily fit within his ideal types. Honneth thus fails to appreciate the breadth and complexity of historical treatments of the concept of recognition, leaving many stones unturned.

§3 Genealogy and Recognition

In taking an approach that could be broadly described as genealogical, we are better able to appreciate the view that Honneth wishes to minimise: 'that Europe is home to many different ways of understanding recognition' (2020, p.145). An approach that is genealogical in sentiment allows me to focus on the discontinuity of the history of recognition, on the idea that this concept's history is more multi-faceted, open-ended, and messier than teleologically-minded theorists wish to admit.

We are thereby better placed to achieve Honneth's aim: ‘a more complex understanding of what it means for us humans to be dependent on others’ recognition’ (Honneth 2020, p.145).

Whilst I do not wish to conform exactly to any particular theory of genealogy, it is worth dwelling briefly on the outlines of a genealogical approach, distinguishing it from the teleological mindset that I am looking to cast off. As Mark Bevir explains it, a genealogy ‘is a historical narrative that explains an aspect of human life by showing how it came into being’, and I use it here to refer to the tradition of radical historicism that begins with Nietzsche and is significantly developed by Foucault (2008, p.263). A radical historicist approach to the history of philosophical concepts stands in stark contrast with the developmental approach which dominated in the 19th century. Philosophers and social theorists of this time—such as Auguste Comte, Karl Marx and G.W.F. Hegel—understood human life as unfolding in accordance with certain teleological principles, as ‘defined by creative and purposeful intentionality’, and ‘guided or structured by certain principles …[which] give a progressive direction to history’ (Bevir 2008, p.266). Genealogies do away with such talk of principles and developmental perspectives, favouring instead an approach that sees ‘the development of humanity [as] a series of interpretations’ (Foucault 1977, p.152); ‘a series of contingent even accidental appropriations, modifications, and transformations from the old to the new’ (Bevir 2008, p.267).

Following Bevir, we can understand genealogies as embracing three central features: nominalism, contingency, and contestability (2008, p.263). The nominalism of this approach stems from its refusal to search for unifying principles, emphasising instead the particularities of specific historical interpretations. Its understanding of historical concepts reflects the fact that they have developed against a particular background of ‘human actions, practices, [and] institutions’ (Bevir 2008,

p.266-7). The meaning and nature of concepts and practices change over time, but this is not to be explained, as developmental historicists would have it, by appeal to overarching narratives (Bevir 2008, p.267). Rather, the path that history follows is 'discontinuous and contingent', even accidental (Bevir 2008, p.267). The contingency of change alerts us to its *contestability:* there are 'always innumerable ways in which a thing ... may be interpreted, transformed, or overpowered' (Bevir 2008, p.268).

Crucially, a genealogy is not just a way of constructing a historical narrative, but also always a form of critique, the force of which cuts against Honneth's teleological methodology. In the first instance, by distilling the central insights from French and British approaches to recognition into supplementary features for the German theory, Honneth removes these theories of recognition from the contexts in which they arise, violating Foucault's invocation to 'leave things undisturbed in their own dimension and intensity' (1977, p.156). Thus dislodged, the insights of the French and British theories appear to Honneth as mere 'fragments' of a larger theory. Yet is it any surprise that they appear as such when they have been extracted from, and cleansed of, their historical context?

Secondly, as Bevir notes, genealogies emphasise the contingency and contestability of certain interpretations, 'unsett[ling] those who ascribe a spurious naturalness to their particular beliefs and actions' (2008, p.271). In doing so, they function as a type of denaturalising critique, disturbing, as Foucault writes, 'what was previously considered immobile' (1977, p.147). It seems clear that both Honneth's narrower and broader histories of recognition accord the Hegelian interpretation of the concept a kind of naturalness or inevitability. In response, genealogies remind us that the Hegelian theory of recognition, like all earlier articulations of the concept, is contingent and contestable, the product of distinct historical circumstance, and that any naturalness that seems to attach to it is spurious. By highlighting the fact that certain privileged beliefs or interpretations are historically

contingent, and that divergent historical contexts have brought forth disparate understandings, genealogy 'frees us to imagine other possibilities' (Bevir 2008, p.272).

By taking an approach to the history of recognition that is genealogical in sentiment, we must be led to eschew neat, teleological narratives, which see earlier fragments of the history of recognition as finding full expression only when extracted from their native contexts and housed within a later, more insightful account. Instead, genealogy favours the tracing of diverse and messy historical pathways, bringing to light differences and complexities which may have been obscured by the constraints of conventional narratives and the pressure of teleological explanations. We thereby clear the way for accepting diverse treatments of the significance of the human dependence upon others into a broader history of recognition.

§4 Conclusion

This chapter has made the case for embarking on a broader history of recognition by considering the case of Rousseau. For Neuhouser and (early) Honneth, Rousseau's inclusion turned upon the possibility of discovering an unambiguously positive strand of Rousseauian amour propre which was a recognisable antecedent of the Hegelian formulation. Such a teleological approach, I have argued, is liable not only to distort Rousseau's position, but also to mask the existence of other, more negative narratives in the history of recognition.

Honneth's later approach is more permissive, including Rousseau on the basis of his negative account of amour propre. However, I have taken issue with Honneth's reformed history on the basis of its surviving teleological elements. Instead, I have argued that we might take a more genealogical approach to recognition's history, one which recognises the fact that the concept has been

understood in a multitude of diverse fashions, the insights of which may not be compatible with each other.

In acknowledging the Rousseauian account of inflamed amour propre as part of a broader history of recognition, we also open the door to prior philosophers who endowed the human need for recognition with an equally negative normative tone. Crucially, Rousseau's understanding of the epistemic dangers presented by amour propre are far from novel. Drawing on an Augustinian anthropology, early modern figures like Jansen, Pascal, Nicole, and Senault understood Original Sin to have transformed a healthy drive for self-preservation into a pernicious amour propre. Not only did many neo-Augustinians see the desired end of amour propre as the approving recognition of their fellow beings, but some, like Pascal, advanced an understanding of subjectivity as dependent upon these approving views. Despite prevailing accounts of the Hegelian roots of recognition theory, then, we find a pathway that winds its way from Rousseau back to early modern thinkers—plausibly even to Augustine himself—who were very much alive to the ways in which the desire for recognition generated a lamentable dependence upon the opinions of others, which could mould one's very sense of self.

In the remaining chapters of this thesis, I want to delve deeper into the historical roots of the need for recognition by focusing in detail on the views of another early modern neo-Augustinian: Nicholas Malebranche. As I will argue, Malebranche's inclusion in the history of recognition is grounded on his treatment of the deep-seated postlapsarian need for the esteem of others, which leads subjects to form false, yet deeply intersubjective, conceptions of themselves.

Chapter 3 Extending the Narrative: From Rousseau to Malebranche

I now turn to the main work of this thesis: to establishing that the core claim of contemporary recognition theory—that individuals depend on the recognition of others to form and sustain their identity—is not first announced by Rousseau, but plays a lively role in 17th century philosophy. As I have explained, my principal aim is to show how Malebranche articulates the centrality of recognition within human life. In this chapter I shall set the scene by outlining some of his key philosophical commitments. First, however, I shall indicate that Malebranche's concern with recognition was not entirely novel. Along with a number of 17th century moralists, he follows a well-trodden path that leads back to Augustine.

In §1, a sketch of philosophy in early modern France reveals that Rousseau's focus on the negative facets of amour propre, and on the epistemic threat it poses to self-knowledge, does not break new ground. This brisk overview of the views of a group of neo-Augustinians conveys a sense of a widespread concern with amour propre and provides contextual background for my focus on Malebranche.

In §2, I launch my case for Malebranche's inclusion as a theorist of recognition with a survey of his life and works. In §3, I introduce some of Malebranche's central philosophical commitments, outlining the key elements of his account of human nature as they are presented in his magnum opus, the *Search After Truth.*

§1 Histories of Recognition: Extending the Narrative

The notion that human subjects are tormented by an unhealthy desire for the esteem of others goes back—at least—to Augustine, the first of the Latin Church Fathers to make significant use of the term 'self-love' in claiming that it was responsible for the primal destruction of man.

According to Augustinian theology, human beings suffered a Fall from grace as a result of Original Sin. The Fall disturbed the relationship between the soul and the body, transforming the natural impulses of the human will into perverted impulses of concupiscence—into a love of created things for their own sake, and especially for oneself. Whilst Augustine recognises a good form of self-love as self-preservation, he sees a malignant form of self-love as arising from the Fall.

The notion that Adam's Fall transformed a benign, self-preservatory form of human self-love into something destructive and sinful was enthusiastically reclaimed by 17th century theologians and philosophers, many of whom expressed even more abhorrence for its effects than Augustine himself. The Augustinian tracts of the Dutch Catholic Bishop, Cornelius Jansen (1585-1638), were particularly influential. In his most famous work, the *Augustinus* (published only posthumously in 1640), Jansen outlined his account of the damage done to human nature by the Fall (Moriarty 2006, p.110, drawing on *Augustinus*, vol. II, *De statu naturæ lapsæ*, IV.1–16, 221–56). Like Rousseau, he acknowledged the original existence of a neutral kind of self-love akin to the desire for self-preservation, but argued that, after the Fall, this natural instinct morphed into a malignant self-love which 'ceaselessly stir[s] up the desire for created things' (Moriarty 2006, p.180).

Jansen's anthropology found many a sympathetic ear in 17th century France. His *Augustinus* produced a movement of *Jansénistes*, the most famous of whom are the Port Royal philosophers, Antoine Arnauld (1612-94) and Pierre Nicole (1625-95). The Jansenists are distinguished from other theological writers more by their commitment to factious interpretations of the Augustinian

understanding of grace and salvation than by their acceptance of an Augustinian doctrine of human nature: many other thinkers subscribed to an Augustinian conception of self-love. For example, Jean-François Senault, a preacher at the Oratory of Jesus, agreed that human nature is distorted by the Fall. François Fenelon, too, whilst critical of the Jansenist movement, 'laid equal claim to Augustine's heritage' (Moriarty 2006, p.135).

Neo-Augustinian thinkers, Jansenist or otherwise, tended to share an understanding of self-love. Like Rousseau, they lamented its ferocity and all consuming nature and recognised its urgings as the basis for all our actions (see Neuhouser 2008, p.71). As Nicole observes, the postlapsarian 'loves himself without limits, and without measure; loves only himself, and refers all to himself' (1680, p.124). Fallen societies made up of individuals so motivated were no longer united by their love of, and subordination to, God. Rather, as Senault explains, man forgot 'what he owed to God, [and] he made a God of himself … he took a resolution to rule his affections by his own interests, and to love no longer anything but what was useful and pleasing unto him' (1671 [1641], II.i.2)

Self-love's blinkered and narcissistic concern with the self and what was in its interest was viewed as creating societies where human individuals are pitted against each other, rather than being united by love of God. Neo-Augustinian thinkers of all stripes viewed human social relations as predominantly antagonistic and competitive in a way that resonates with the Rousseauian understanding of the fiercely hostile relationships inculcated by inflamed amour propre.

Despite this myopic fixation upon the self, it was at the same time acknowledged that self-love made individuals highly dependent upon one another. This is because, as we saw in Neuhouser's rendering of Rousseauian amour propre, self-love's desire for the good opinions of others makes its

end essentially relative (Neuhouser 2008, p.33). As Senault puts it, self-love 'makes a man labour only for his own pleasure or glory' (*De l'usage des passions*, 1671, II.i.2). This inclination thus induces in its hosts a desire for glory or esteem which is inherently social and intersubjective, generating deep dependencies upon others.

The crucial Rousseauian distinction between the appearance of the self and the reality of its condition plays a significant role in the works of the French Moralists too. Resignation to one's degenerate nature (brought about by Original Sin) and the brazen pursuit of self-interested ends, these writers assumed, could not possibly attract the glory that self-love seeks. In subscribing to a broadly Augustinian theology, they accepted that the Fall had rendered mankind weak and unhappy —'wretched', in Pascal's assessment (L 978/S 743, p.324-5). But this generated a problem. One's corrupted self-love desires to find the opposite of these realities. Self-love desires greatness, godliness. The question thus becomes: how can human beings mask their pitiful nature, not only from others, but also from themselves?

Only by dissimulation and trickery, most agree, can we extort from others the esteem that they too are seeking[1]. Many Neo-Augustinians saw that surmounting this obstacle involved the construction of a new appearance of the self which would elicit the approving opinions of others, a process that was only wholly successful when the dissimulation gave rise to an absolute self-forgetting. The fallen self, Pascal explains, sees its 'wretched' nature, and tries to mask this reality, 'in the consciousness of itself and others', by seeking to be esteemed by others for something it is not (L 978/ S 743, p.324-5). As William Wood writes, 'only an imaginary self can seem worthy of love and

[1] A less drawn upon, but remarkably interesting and pertinent source, is Baltasar Gracián's *Oráculo Manual y Arte de Prudencia,* or The Art of Worldly Wisdom (1647). Gracián not only emphasises the distinction between being and appearance in the context of the tendency to dissimulate certain qualities, but also the importance of *seeming* to be as well as really *being* something*:* 'things pass for what they seem, not for what they are', he writes, 'it isn't enough to be right if your face looks malicious and wrong' (1992, XCIX).

As Henry C. Clark argues, this work was influential in 'French courtly and salon circles' before its translation was available, and was particularly important for the Marquise de Sablé, who in turn influenced La Rochefoucauld (1994, p.49).

so each person pretends to possess desirable qualities that he does not really have' (2010, p.421). According to Wood, Pascal's postlapsarian account of subjectivity holds that subjects utilise the way one is reflected in the opinions of others in order to construct a false and imaginary self 'that exists for the sake of imagined esteem' (2010, p.425). Pascalian postlapsarian subjectivity is thus a doubly imaginary construct: 'it is my own imaginary projection of how I exist in the thoughts and imaginations of other people' (Wood 2010, p.425).

This brief contextual picture suggests that Rousseau's approach to inflamed amour propre was far from novel, for it is clear that a number of French theorists in the 16th and 17th centuries had also theorised amour propre in a decidedly negative fashion. To this extent, they too are candidates for inclusion in recognition's history. Further, though I will not aim to show that Rousseau's understanding of amour propre grew out of the ideas of these early modern neo-Augustinians, there are striking correspondences between their works. Rousseau was not unfamiliar with these writers, describing himself, in his *Confessions,* as 'half Jansenist' (1953 [1782], p.230). In recent decades, the influence of Augustine—and 16th and 17th century neo-Augustinian thinkers—upon Rousseau has become the focus of greater attention. Both Ann Hartle (1983) and Patrick Riley (1999) have explored the similarities between Augustine's *Confessions* and Rousseau's similarly titled, similarly autobiographical, work. Riley (1988) has also sought to trace the concept of the general will—hitherto generally attributed to Rousseau—to the French Augustinians of the 17th century, especially Antoine Arnauld and Nicholas Malebranche. Against Neuhouser's approach, Robin Douglass has argued that instead of reading Rousseau as a 'forerunner of Kant', we would do well to examine the 'largely neo-Augustinian' context in which Rousseau developed his account of amour propre (2015, p.152). Despite this, the extent to which Rousseau's account of amour propre was influenced by 16th and 17th century French thought has received little sustained attention.

In this brief survey of French neo-Augustinian concern with amour propre, one figure has been conspicuously absent: Nicholas Malebranche. In his *Confessions*, Rousseau reveals his familiarity, not only with the works of Jansenist philosophers, but also with those associated with the Catholic *Oratoire de Jésus.* Founded in 1611 by Pierre de Bérulle, this religious community quickly mushroomed and, by the time of Bérulle's death in 1629, was comprised of 60 communities and 300 priests (Beaumont 2017, p.76). There is, however, only one major philosophical thinker associated with the Oratory: Father Nicholas Malebranche. Rousseau's reference to the works of the Oratory therefore suggests a familiarity with Malebranche's work and, as we've seen, Riley (1988) has argued that Rousseau was indeed influenced by Malebranche. Whilst this relationship deserves more philosophical attention than it has yet received, this is not that project. I turn here to consider the Oratorian in his own right, with the aim of making the case for his inclusion in the history of theories of recognition.

§2 A Brief Introduction to the Life of Nicolas Malebranche

Malebranche was born in Paris in 1638 and died in the same city in 1715. It is customary to note, in introductions to his works, that these birth and death years align with those of the formidable French monarch, King Louis XIV. Aside from an interesting piece of trivia, this coincidence focuses our attention on the incongruity of the two men's temperaments. Malebranche was never attracted by the kind of pomp and ceremony of which the Sun King was so fond. As a child, his biographer, Yves André, suggests, one can aptly apply the description from Matthew 26:41: *l'esprit est prompt, mais la chair est faible* (1886, p.4). Malebranche suffered from such a severe deformation of the spine and sternum that he spent barely a moment without pain. He was sixteen when he first attended school under the tutelage of the peripatetic Rouillard, and it was then that his disillusionment with the state of philosophy in the French schools began.

Malebranche's expectations of philosophy were again dashed at the Sorbonne, where he was discontented with the Scholastic curriculum's focus upon the philosophy of Aristotle and its reliance on this philosopher as an authority figure. In 1660 he left, and entered the Oratory (André 1886, p.10). The decision proved pivotal for Malebranche's intellectual development: it is likely through the Paris Oratorians that he became properly acquainted with the views of the two philosophers who would hold him in their grip for the rest of his life.

The first of these is Augustine. The French Oratory was, in its essence, an Augustinian congregation. In itself, this is unremarkable: Augustine was a widely revered religious authority in the 17th century. However, the kind of Augustinianism that Malebranche would have encountered at the Oratory differed to that defended by the prominent Jansenist movement. Whilst, generally speaking, the Jansenist movement expected its followers to adhere to a demanding morality, living a deeply austere and introspective life in which they relinquished their worldly wealth, possessions, and status, the Oratory was not as severe. Like the Jansenists, however, it was a reformist movement, concerned with the spiritual renewal of the clergy and of the French church. Many in France, Bérulle included, were dismayed by what they saw as the clergy's increasing moral laxity. Bérulle used his position at Oratory to pursue the aim of 'creating and promoting a spirituality available to *all* classes and states of life' (Beaumont 2017, p.75). Such an aim necessitated an approach far removed from the austere and ascetic mood of the Jansenists of Port-Royal des Champs. The Oratory eschewed the Jansenist preoccupation with the 'soul's weakness and salvation' in favour of a focus on God's power and glory (Gouhier 1926, p.124, cited in Skirry 2010, p.35). The strand of Augustinianism which Malebranche would have imbibed centred around the way that God's power 'manifests itself in the world' (a focus which, Gouhier suggests, is born out in Malebranche's doctrine of Occasionalism (1926, p.127, cited in Skirry 2010, p.35)). Where the

Jansenists drew on later Augustinian texts concerning grace and free will, the Augustinianism of the Oratory underscored the role of God as the epistemological foundation for knowledge (Skirry 2010, p.36).

It is most likely through his immersion in the life of the Oratory that Malebranche became deeply acquainted with the works of Augustine, but the familiar tale of Malebranche's encounter with Descartes is more delightfully whimsical and fated. In 1664, he stumbled across a copy of Descartes' *L'Homme* in the Rue St Jacques. The work 'caused him such palpitations of the heart that he had to stop reading in order to recover his breath' (André 1886, p.11-12). At the same time, there is reason to think that Malebranche would have become acquainted with Cartesianism in the Oratory too, despite the fact that the Oratorians rejected Descartes' teachings after 1624, when the Parliament of Paris 'issued a decree requiring that teaching in the university be based exclusively on the works of Aristotle' (Steven Nadler 2008, p.25). As Skirry argues, the Oratory's outer disaffection with Cartesianism was to some extent a front and did not reflect any 'inherent prejudice against it' (2010, p.40). In fact, whilst it would be too strong to call Bérulle a Cartesian, there is evidence that the two men were on friendly terms in the early 1630s (Nadler 2008, p.43). Malebranche's formative experiences at the Oratory, then, significantly developed his knowledge of the works of two philosophers who would serve as inspirations for his own treatise.

§2.1 Major Works and Controversies

The *Search After Truth* (*De La Recherche De La Vérité*) (1674) established Malebranche as one of the leading new Cartesians. In this work, he presents the first formulations of what would become his characteristic doctrines. Firstly, there is his *occasionalism,* probably the philosophical position

for which he is still best known today. According to Malebranchean occasionalism, there is only one true, efficacious cause, and that is God. The purported activity of other things that we have become accustomed to calling 'causes' in fact present only occasions for God to act.

Equally defining of Malebranche's philosophy is his doctrine of Vision in God. In his eyes, this doctrine was the only tenable way to understand perception, and it had a welcome philosophical heritage in the Augustinian notion of divine illumination (Nadler 2008, p.44). Although we may think we are directly perceiving material objects, we in fact directly perceive only God's ideas of them. 'When we perceive something sensible', Malebranche explains, 'two things are found in our perception: *sensation* and pure *idea*' (OCM I 445/LO 234). When one sees a tree, for instance, certain non-representational sensations are caused in the soul (as modes) by God. These non-representational sensory modes are identical with what we commonly think of as the secondary qualities of things themselves: greenness, brownness, the smell of pine, and so on. In Malebranche's view, such qualities can only be modifications of the human soul. The idea, on the other hand, is a representational idea of extension: it is an idea of primary qualities—shape, size—that do inhere in the object itself. When we see the tree, Malebranche claims, we do not see it directly: rather, God reveals to us this representational idea of the tree, whilst also causing the relevant sensations in the soul which make us believe that a tree exists in front of us.

In the eyes of many contemporaries, the Vision in God was an even more outrageous doctrine than Occasionalism. Arnauld objected that Malebranche's theory amounted not just to the 'bizarre' contention that ideas of mundane, everyday material objects existed in God, but, further, than he was proposing the 'reification of ideas' (*Des vraies et des fausses idées*, OA 38: 286, quoted in Schmaltz 2000, p.59). As Nadler notes, Arnauld was not riled simply by an apparently erroneous conception of human cognition, but by its theological ramifications: Malebranche's theory

‘eliminate[d] any differences between the way God knows things and the way human beings know them’, thus suggesting that ‘we have access to divine wisdom’ (2008, p.150). The ensuing debate between Malebranche and Arnauld as to the nature of ideas ‘was one of the major intellectual events of the early modern period’ (Schmaltz 2016, p.154). Whilst the *Search After Truth* successfully established Malebranche as a major philosopher in 1670s Paris, then, it was also the source of major theological controversy, and his later works, especially his *Treatise on Nature and Grace* (1680), simply fanned the flames. This treatise generated heated quarrels over the nature and distribution of grace, both with his abiding adversary Arnauld, and other theologians, including Bossuet, Fénelon, Fontanelle and Nicole.

Malebranche may have ruffled the feathers of some of the 17th century's most influential theologians (indeed, Arnauld succeeded in having the *Treatise on Nature and Grace* placed on the Index of prohibited books in 1690), but he was a fairly popular figure. As serious and technical as the debates in which he became embroiled were, you did not need to be a Port Royal Jansenist or Parisian Oratorian to find something worth reading in his *œuvre*. As Stuart Brown notes, he not only wrote in an ‘elegant and accessible style’, but also made his doctrines available in the form of clearly written dialogues: the *Dialogues on Metaphysics and on Religion* (1688), for instance, covers all his major philosophical and theological positions in an accessible and enjoyable style (2000, p.262).

Producing works which were of interest to the public at large was, Alain Badiou argues, one of Malebranche's conscious aims (2019, pp.4-5). There was an ‘Encyclopedist avant la lettre side to him’ which led him to include, even in ostensibly serious works like the *Search After Truth*, but especially in his apologetic texts, ‘explorations of the discoveries of science, travel narratives, amusing experiences, juicy anecdotes, etc.’ (Badiou 2019, p.3). This approach, Badiou argues,

should remind us that Malebranche was, first and foremost, a priest and thus 'brought to bear the fact that he was responsible for souls right into his conception of philosophy' (2019, p.4). Malebranche, he maintains, saw it as necessary to 'maintain a certain connection with the masses in his philosophical message' (Badiou 2019, p.4). If such a stance sets him apart from the rationalist giants of his age, and has even damaged his philosophical reputation, it is with the compensation that those who study him today are treated to philosophical and theological works of both conceptual richness and bountiful, endearing personality.

§2.2 The Science of Man, Malebranchean Persons and Postlapsarian Nature

In the *Search After Truth* we are introduced to some of the key notions of Malebranche's philosophical worldview, notions that it will be critical to understand as a backdrop to the more specific claims I wish to make about Malebranche's place in the history of recognition. Presented as a work '*Wherein are Treated the Nature of Man's Mind and the Use He Must Make of It to Avoid Error in the Sciences*' (OCM I), Malebranche's expressed goal is to explicate the nature of the mind of man 'in its entirety', and thus to arm his reader with sufficient knowledge of the mind's nature and faculties to stem the production of the errors that arise from our senses, passions and imagination (OCM I 20/LO xxxix).

The *Search* takes for granted the reader's agreement with the view that postlapsarian individuals lack knowledge of themselves and the world around them. Postlapsarians are persistently subordinated to illusions, Malebranche argues, which do not even function to shield mankind from pain or sadness; most of us, he believes, merely 'toil and struggle only to eke out a miserable existence' (OCM I 12/LO xxxv). He is thus quick to offer his reader a motivation to enter into his

project of eliminating error: since error ‘is the cause of men’s misery ... we may hope for sound and genuine happiness only by seriously labouring to avoid it’ (OCM I 39/LO 1). By repairing our understanding of our nature, and reforming our behaviour, we prepare ourselves for the possible reception of a grace which may redeem us and provide everlasting happiness.

Whilst our state of misery may offer an immediate motivation for trying to overcome error, we may wonder why Malebranche considers us so prone to debilitating false opinions in the first place. An explanation of the state in which we find ourselves must make reference to Original Sin. Leaning heavily on Augustine, Malebranche reiterates that the Fall is the most significant event in all of human history in terms of its disastrous consequences for mankind. Ever since, human nature has been vitiated. Malebranche follows Augustine in holding that all postlapsarian infants are born guilty, bearing the stamp of original sin through their parents and, ultimately, their connection to the first Adam. As adults, we are subjected to persistent illusions about our very nature, and this foundational misunderstanding engenders a whole host of other illusory opinions which incline us towards error rather than knowledge.

In order to rectify this leaning, Malebranche sees it as essential to enlighten man as to his true nature; for ‘the most beautiful, the most pleasant, and the most necessary of all our knowledge is, undoubtedly, the knowledge of ourselves’ (OCM I 20/LO xxxix). But there is a formidable barrier to self-knowledge: one of the most problematic consequences of the Fall is that, as well as warping man's nature, it has made the discernment of this nature a nearly insurmountable task.

Michael Moriarty has put forward a dichotomous view of historical approaches to human nature as problematic or descriptive (2006, p.62). Whilst descriptive accounts outline human nature ‘on the basis of observed characteristics’, problematic accounts stress its ‘fundamental incomprehensibility’

(Moriarty 2006, p.62). Malebranche's approach, Moriarty suggests, falls squarely into the problematic camp. For Malebranche, we are not only dispiritedly lacking in self-knowledge, but 'the nature of our ignorance is such as to engender pseudo-knowledge' about ourselves and our relationship to the world around us (Moriarty 2003, p.151). As the Preface to the *Search* shows, however, Malebranche holds himself to have replaced his common pseudo-knowledge with incontrovertible metaphysical facts about mankind's nature:

> The mind of man is by its nature situated, as it were, between its Creator and corporeal creatures, for, according to St. Augustine, there is nothing but God above it and nothing but bodies below it. But as the mind's position above all material things does not prevent it from being joined to them, and even depending in a way on a part of matter, so the infinite distance between the sovereign Being and the mind of man does not prevent it from being immediately joined to it in a very intimate way (OCM I 9/LO xxxiii).

Like Descartes, Malebranche holds that mind and body are separate substances with different principal properties, though he denies that they are connected at the pineal gland (OCM II 128/LO 338). The human soul, as a thinking substance, has been joined to a material body by God, and through this body it is connected to other material things. Nevertheless, the mind's most important relationship is with God. In fact, 'it is more of the nature of the mind to be joined to God than to be joined to the body' (OCM I 11/LO xxxiv). Problematically, however, Original Sin's warping of the relationship between the mind and the body has rendered the true nature of the soul's intimate connection with God hard to ascertain. The laborious nature of our search for the truth about ourselves thus seems to be a punishment for Original Sin, which has obscured the truth from us in two interconnected ways. First, in punishment for Adam's turning away from God, God turned

away from man, weakening the mind's union with Him, such that this connection can 'be felt only by those whose heart is purified and whose mind is enlightened' (OCM I 11/LO xxxiv). Secondly, to the same extent that the soul's connection with God has been weakened, its relationship with the body has been strengthened, so much so that it seems to us 'that these two parts of us are but one and the same substance' (OCM I 11/LO xxxiv).

With the soul's most vital relationships in disarray, we not only fail to distinguish the soul from the body, but frequently fail to acknowledge that we even possess a soul, and these fundamental misjudgments about our very nature engender manifold illusions and errors (OCM I 11/LO xxxiv). Confusing themselves with their bodies, human beings search only for what is good in relation to the body, ignorant of the nourishment needed by the mind. Such errors cannot be put right unless one returns to their root cause. We need to understand both our fallen nature and our original nature, recognising that the most intimate connection should be between the soul and God, and that a true good is that which increases the perfection of the soul, not the pleasures of the body. This is why the science of man is so crucial for Malebranche: to search after truth without knowledge of our nature safely in-hand will always be fruitless. Human beings must acknowledge what they are before they can hope to overcome their misery.

§2.3 Malebranchean Persons and their Natural Inclinations

The 'great Malebranchean thesis of obscurity to ourselves', as Moriarty terms it, extends to more than just the relationship between our soul and body, and our soul and God (2006, p.250). Malebranche presses the profoundly Augustinian point that the mind is not light unto itself, thus putting himself at odds with his other guide, Descartes. Whilst he accepts the central tenets of

Cartesian mind-body dualism, and agrees that one can know the existence of the mind with certainty, Malebranche denies that the nature of the mind is better known than the body, as Descartes had maintained in the *Second Meditation*.

The soul, Malebranche concurs, is a simple and indivisible thinking substance in which we may distinguish the two faculties of understanding and willing. The functioning of these faculties renders the soul to some extent passive: insofar as the soul understands, it exhibits a passive capacity of receiving ideas; insofar as it wills, it receives inclinations (OCM I 41/LO 2). However, Malebranche explains, the will is also 'in a sense' active (OCM I 46/LO 5). Whilst the inclinations which God impresses upon the will carry us 'toward general and indeterminate good', the will is active because it possesses the power and the freedom to turn this inclination towards objects of its own choosing (OCM I 46/LO 5).

The soul is not better known than the body, Malebranche maintains, because introspection alone cannot reveal to the investigating self what is clearly in the soul's nature. When we look inwards, we only get a murky picture of the natural inclinations which the will has passively received from God. Malebranche's examination of these natural inclinations occupies the entirety of Book 4 of the *Search*. He begins by trying to render these psychological facets more intelligible through an analogy with bodies: it is because bodies are endowed with different motions that they are not simply one great homogenous mass, but are differentiated into portions (OCM I 41/LO 2, see also OCM II 10/LO 265). Whilst souls possess nothing like the kind of motion bodies do, their inclinations perform a similar role insofar as they produce variation, distinguishing different souls from each other. Through these natural inclinations, we might say, the mind is given sufficient reason to turn in one direction rather than another, to assent here but dissent there. Without the

momentum and telos provided by the natural inclinations, the will would be simply inert, or else Malebranche would have to accept that it moves in ways for which it lacks sufficient reason.

How, then, might one come to know the natural inclinations which give impulse to the human mind? Simple introspection, as we have said, will be inadequate. Like the trilateral relationship between our body, soul, and God, the natural inclinations have been disordered by sin, so that what we discover by introspection is but a vitiated version of their original form. This misalignment is a direct result of the warped relationship between soul and body. That is, God did not directly alter the natural inclinations after the Fall. Rather, their disordered functioning should be understood as a downstream effect of the soul's newfound dependency on its body and our tendency to identify ourselves with the body. Our postlapsarian corporeal bent ensures that the dispositions of the will engendered by our natural inclinations are (in the main) filtered through the prism of the body, rather than the soul. Where the natural inclinations push us to seek our good, for instance, we seek *the good of the body*, rather than that of the soul. The nature of our natural inclinations remains the same, but it is the way in which we direct them that is disordered. It is for this reason that, as Susan James puts it, 'our sinfulness is manifested in the quality of our wills', and not in our very nature[2] (1997, p.117). Nevertheless, by introspection we can discover *something* about our inclinations: that is, merely the state to which Original Sin has reduced them. But since we desire not merely an awareness of our degradation but also a guide as to how we might retrieve our better nature, such an awareness is not especially useful. A different, and more rationalistic approach, is needed.

To this end, Malebranche emphasises that one must begin from an awareness of our utter dependence on God for our mere existence. 'All things subsist only by His will' (OCM II 11/LO 266). Our very being is dependent upon the will of God, and our natural inclinations are the

[2] Augustine thought likewise, see Dixon (2003, p.57).

‘constant impressions of the Will of Him who has created and preserves them’ (OCM II 11-12/LO 266). Since God can act only for Himself, it must be the case that human beings subsist only in virtue of God’s love for them. Should we be displeasing to God, Malebranche claims, it is inconceivable that we should remain in existence (OCM II 11/LO 266). Consequently, in determining what natural inclinations God may have impressed upon our minds, we ought to recall that God, as ‘a good that contains all other goods within itself’, can have no other end than Himself (OCM II 16/LO 269). Malebranche thus deduces that human beings, too, must possess a general inclination towards this fundamental good.

§2.4 The Natural Inclinations

Malebranche posits the existence of three main natural inclinations, but they are not all on the same psychological footing. The impulse towards the good in general is primary and fundamental, ‘and we can love nothing except through this love’ (OCM II 12/LO 267). This fundamental inclination is the ‘source of all of our particular loves’ (OCM II 13/ LO 267)—our more specified natural inclinations—because we are only capable of loving things at all in virtue of our love for the good in general. The inclination towards the good in general is what establishes the will as the kind of thing it is: a free capacity for assenting or dissenting, where what qualifies something as a potential candidate for assent is that it appears to be a good (OCM II 12/ LO 267).

Insofar as it is a reflection of God’s love towards himself, our inclination towards the good in general is designed to direct us towards what is wholly good, and can only be fully satisfied when it is directed towards God. However, this fundamental inclination is not enough to preserve us. God therefore imprints upon the will ‘inclinations for particular goods’ (OCM II 13/LO 267). A second

natural inclination inclines us towards self-love, or 'the love of ourselves or our own preservation' (OCM II 45/LO 287). The natural inclination towards self-love in turn has two aspects: the love of grandeur and the love of pleasure, or 'the love of one's being … [and] the love of one's well-being' (OCM II 47/LO 288). Taking our love of well-being first, how does the will identify those particular goods which aid preservation? God, Malebranche explains, has instituted a clear system of natural signs, with pleasure and pain acting as 'the natural and indubitable characteristics of good and evil'[3] (OCM I 72/LO 21). Experiences of pleasure mobilise the will, directing it towards their apparent causes:

> Our mind becomes mobile, as it were, through pleasure, just as a ball does through roundness; and because it is never without an impression towards the good, it immediately sets itself in motion toward the object causing or seeming to cause this pleasure (OCM III 193/LO 653).

The love of pleasure is but a circumscribed form of the natural inclination towards the good in general. Whereas the more fundamental natural inclination seeks what is wholly good (that is, God), its derivative, narrower form seeks out what is good in a qualified way: it seeks those things which are good for the particular human being that one is (Moriarty 2006, p.254). In this fashion, God ensures that human beings seek out what is necessary for maintaining the existence of their embodied selves (OCM II 45/LO 287).

Even prior to the Fall, Adam utilised the natural signs of pleasure and pain to identify those sensible things he needed to survive without diverting his attention from God (OCM I 75/LO 22). As

[3] A fruit which is good for eating, for instance, is experienced as pleasurable, whereas the bitter and unpleasant taste of an inedible thing is painful. (Such a scheme is quite obviously imperfect: Descartes's case of the man with dropsy who desires water, despite it being harmful for him, is a problem case for Malebranche too).

postlapsarian beings, however, we fail to realise that felt experiences of pleasure and pain direct us towards objects that are good and evil merely with respect to our bodily self-preservation. The usefulness of this aspect of our experience lies in the fact that the bodily benefits and dangers of material objects cannot be determined through 'clear and evident knowledge', since we are dealing with things that are not good or bad in themselves, but merely so with respect to particular individual bodies (OCM I 73/LO 21). But the pleasure which accompanies bodily goods is persistently misinterpreted by postlapsarians, who take material objects to be the cause of their pleasure, and thus to be goods in themselves. Such reasoning rests upon a faulty premise, which reveals the postlapsarian blindness to the fact that God is the only true cause. Material objects cannot themselves act upon us, they merely present occasions upon which God acts in us. When we experience pleasure in the presence of material objects, then, we should not attribute the goodness to the object, but should rather reflect on the goodness of *God,* the true cause of our pleasure.

In failing to recognise the action of God behind the sensations that we feel in the presence of material objects, postlapsarians are led towards a further, moral error. When we take material objects to be the cause of our pleasure, we extend our love towards them in virtue of their (supposed) capacity to make us happy. Whilst God desires that we preserve our embodied selves by seeking out material objects that give us pleasure, any attempt to satisfy our love of happiness (part and parcel of our natural inclination towards self-love) through the accumulation of material goods is ineffective and morally misguided. Whilst our desire for happiness may be momentarily met by material goods, it is put at risk by the fact that such goods are inconstant and in short supply. Further, material "goods" cannot possibly satisfy our more fundamental natural inclination towards God, the good in general, generating a generalised anxiety. Our quest for the good in general imputes to the soul a kind of vitality, and obliges the understanding to constantly represent to the will different candidates for the good that it seeks. Presented with only material pseudo-goods, the

will is never satisfied, and so it is condemned to a never-ending restlessness, obliging the understanding to continually represent to it new objects which may bring its search to a conclusion (OCM II 16/LO 269).

It is not especially surprising that postlapsarians tend to err in this fashion, for the current arrangement of things makes loving God extremely tricky. The contemplation of God, Malebranche tell us, is no longer accompanied by pleasure, but often by 'pain and misery' (OCM II 162/LO 360). This dearth of pleasure distances us from God and only prolongs our mistaken belief that material objects are the real cause of the sensible pleasure and happiness we feel in their presence. We thus conclude that they are the goods truly deserving of love. Malebranche reminds us that this complex of inclinations is a punishment which will someday end. As things stand, however, we must await the reception of grace, which will reveal God's ultimate goodness and enable us to take pleasure in contemplating him.

Whilst our love of pleasure aims at well-being, our love of grandeur focuses on the 'power, excellence, independence and self-subsistence of our being' (OCM II 47/LO 288). Malebranche makes it clear that these two loves must be distinguished, but how ought we to distinguish them? How ought we to understand his claim that the pursuit of grandeur contributes to the preservation of our being in a way that is different from the benefits we derive from things that are simply pleasing? Put another way, is it not the case that power and excellence are simply, like other material goods, things that please us?

Malebranche demurs. Those things that we love in virtue of their ability to increase our sense of grandeur are distinguished from things that merely give us pleasure. As Malebranche explains, one may 'become miserable in proportion to the increase in one's grandeur' (OCM II 48/LO 288).

Despite this drawback, the prospect of grandeur retains an almost irresistible appeal in the eyes of the fallen, who 'always try to possess … advantages that raise them above other[s]' (OCM II 50/LO 290). Notwithstanding the risk that grandeur poses to our well-being, achieving a certain elevation over others can bring with it a different kind of satisfaction: that of occupying a superior position. Yet, whilst the enhancement of our grandeur is not perfectly correlated with increases in pleasure, the former does often enable the latter. When we possess power over others, Malebranche explains, 'those below us revere and fear us; they are always prepared to do what pleases us for our preservation, and they dare not harm us or resist our desires' (OCM II 50/LO 290). The possession of worldly grandeur can tend towards the preservation of our being in the sense that, given a sufficient level of grandeur, we are unlikely to lack the means to preserve the existence of our embodied self: 'men preserve their reputation', Malebranche tells us, 'as a good that they need in order to live comfortably in the world' (OCM II 51/LO 290).

Despite the pleasurable fripperies it secures, the achievement of a position of power brings with it its own anxieties, which may explain Malebranche's warning that one can become miserable in proportion to the increase in one's grandeur. Our grandeur, he explains, tends to consist 'only in the relations we have to the things around us' (OCM II 48/LO 288). To maintain it, we must work to sustain our position by continuously renewing the relations on which it depends. This locks us into a never-ending system of endeavours that don't themselves increase our contentment. Disordered as the value system that our love of grandeur engenders is, Malebranche is clear that we will not pursue greatness at all costs. Rather, when greatness is not accompanied by sufficient well-being, we may even be led to desire non-being.

The third inclination impressed upon the will by God disposes us towards 'friendship for other men', a disposition which functions so as to balance out self-love's tendency to focus myopically on

ourselves (OCM II 113/LO 330). To what extent this third inclination poses a truly countervailing weight to the hostile and competitive relationships engendered by self-love is debatable. Malebranche is certainly exceedingly concerned about the strength of our postlapsarian desire to enhance our own grandeur at the expense of others, suggesting that the two forces are not entirely equal. Indeed, in order to achieve a superior position, the grandiose do not need the friendship of equals, but the adulation of subordinates.

There are, however, some respects in which the inclination towards friendship may be said to effectively temper our self-centred dispositions. The inclination relies upon the ways in which God has united men to each other:

> … He has joined us in such a way with everything around us, and especially with beings of our own species, that their ills naturally afflict us, their joy pleases us, and their grandeur, their abasement, their decline, seem to augment or diminish our own being (OCM II 114/LO 330).

Because we are so closely united with other men, we are inclined to share in their passions, including their sense of grandeur, so that one person's greatness is enjoyed by others. The division between the powerful and those they rule over is thus tempered by sympathy, though the less fortunate seem more subdued than compensated for their less than covetable positions. Private vices, those inclinations 'most opposed to society', seem to become public virtues, Malebranche argues, when 'they are slightly moderated' (OCM II 118/LO 333). Indeed, he cites the way in which the desire for greatness gives rise not just to antagonisms, but also to emulation: 'we would not win so many victories if soldiers and especially officers did not aspire to glory and command … This

demonstrates that it is more advantageous for the public good that all men have a secret desire for greatness, provided it be moderated' (OCM II 118/LO 333).

Moreover, the human capacity to sympathetically share the passions of others aids their preservation. By a principle echoed in the work of Hume, passions involuntarily traverse the boundaries of different bodies, indifferent to distinctions in social status and origin, helping to secure the assistance of others when one's safety is threatened:

> At the sight of some evil that surprises us, or that seems insurmountable by our own power, we let out a great cry, for example. This cry, often uttered mechanically without thinking, unfailingly reaches the ears of those close enough to give the help we need. The cry penetrates them, and is heeded by people of whatever nation or rank; for this cry belongs to all languages and conditions, as indeed it should. It agitates the brain, instantly changes the entire bodily disposition of those struck by it, and even makes them run to help without thinking (OCM II 116/LO 332).

It might appear as if the inclination towards friendship with others is quite untainted by the Fall. In the case of the mimetic transfer of pain and sadness, this seems to be true. But it is important to remember that, in most cases, the capacity for feeling as others feel acts as a form of damage control, by keeping our self-interested concerns within manageable limits, or helping to sustain social hierarchies by enabling those who come lower down the rungs to find satisfaction in the scraps of greatness that fall to them from above.

§3 Conclusion

This chapter began by sketching the historical and intellectual background against which Malebranche's philosophy came into being, considering the negative treatments of self-love that are found in the work of a variety of early modern, neo-Augustinian writers. I then turned to focus on the central character of this thesis: Malebranche. As I have shown, Malebranche shares with these earlier writers a preoccupation with the detrimental effects wrought on human nature as a consequence of the Fall. My exploration of the Malebranchean natural inclinations has revealed his view of the abject psychology of postlapsarian man. Distanced from God and lacking knowledge of themselves, postlapsarians struggle lamely to satisfy the desires for happiness and grandeur to which their self-love gives rise.

Going forward, I will delve deeper into the functioning of the Malebranchean natural inclinations, considering the role that they play in the formation of subjectivity. Focusing especially on the natural inclination towards self-love, I will argue, over the course of the next two chapters, that the two branches of this natural inclination give rise to two complementary aspects of postlapsarian subjectivity. First, a conception of oneself as embodied; second, an imaginary conception of oneself informed by the way in which one appears in the eyes of others. In explicating the formation of this second strand of subjectivity, I will draw heavily on the tendency to sympathise with others inculcated by the third natural inclination. By explicating the role of these natural inclinations in moulding subjectivity, Malebranche's relevance to the history of recognition theory will be brought to the fore.

Chapter 4 Descartes and Malebranche on Thinking and Bodily Selves

In Chapter 3, I identified the basic assumptions about human nature outlined in the *Search After Truth.* These lay the groundwork for the central claim of this thesis: that Malebranche's treatment of the nature of postlapsarian subjectivity falls within a broader, genealogical history of recognition. This chapter will provide the initial building blocks for the Malebranchean theory of recognition by considering his account of the bodily self. As Chapter 1 showed, contemporary recognition theorists advance an important connection between recognition and subjectivity, emphasising the 'fundamentally dialogical character' of personal identity (Taylor 1994, pp.33-34). The question, then, is whether Malebranche espouses a version of this view.

As one of the most famous of Descartes' disciples, Malebranche is sometimes assumed to cleave to what is regarded as Cartesian orthodoxy. Where issues of personal identity are concerned, many commentators have accused Descartes of being an *atomist* about the self—of presenting an impoverished account of the self as an atomistic, disembodied thinking thing. Whilst most historically-minded philosophers have cast off this over-simplification, this is not the case for some of the best-known contemporary theorists of recognition. Charles Taylor, for instance, appears to remain wedded to an interpretation of Cartesian subjectivity as regrettably atomistic.

Since my aim in this thesis is to show that Malebranche is and should be treated as a recognition theorist, Taylor's view is problematic. Descartes' purportedly atomistic approach to subjectivity appears to justify excluding him from the history of recognition theory, and if Malebranche is a Cartesian, he too should surely be excluded. Malebranche, it may be assumed, holds an equally

impoverished, atomistic conception of the self. To defuse such a conclusion, my aim in this chapter is to undermine Taylor's reading of Descartes, thereby justifying a re-examination of Malebranchean subjectivity.

I begin, in §1, by outlining the atomistic conception of the self which Taylor attributes to Descartes. Although this reading enjoys some textual support, I draw on recent work by Colin Chamberlain to underscore the textual complexities which point to a richer notion of the Cartesian self. Having dispelled the assumption of Cartesian atomism, §2 turns to Malebranche. Many commentators assume that Malebranche subscribes to an atomistic analysis of the self as a soul or thinking thing (Pyle (2003); Nolan and Whipple (2005)). If this assumption is correct, then Malebranche's denial that we possess a clear and distinct idea of the soul appears to render his view of subjectivity even more impoverished than the one traditionally attributed to Descartes. The prospect of including Malebranche in a history of recognition theory thus appears bleak: when it comes to knowledge of ourselves, he appears to suggest that we only have a limited and obscure access to the modifications of the soul.

In §3, I challenge this conclusion by arguing that Malebranche's work is an abundantly fertile source of notions of the self. The two branches of our natural inclination towards self-love generate two facets of postlapsarian subjectivity. Moreover, neither conception takes the self to be simply a soul or unembodied mind. First, self-love's love of pleasure begets a conception of the self as a body. Second, self-love's love of grandeur produces an additional conception of the self that is socially constituted, essentially relational, and takes the existence of the bodily self as a given. In this chapter, I examine the nature of the bodily self, reserving discussion of the relational self for Chapter 5. Malebranche's analysis of this second self, I shall argue, grounds his right to be considered as a theorist of recognition.

§1 The Traditional View: “Cartesian” Atomism

Alison Simmons has described Cartesian philosophy as constituted by two interconnected theses, one epistemological, one metaphysical (2011, p.53). The metaphysical thesis is that of mind-body dualism: ‘that mind and body are separate things that can exist apart from each other so that if the body dies the mind can go right on existing without it (perhaps rejoicing in its liberation), and if the mind were to retreat the body would continue to exist just as before’ (Simmons 2011, p.53). The second claim is epistemological: that ‘the mind can and should seek knowledge that is Objective … adopting … the “view from nowhere”’ (Simmons 2011, p.53). Simmons suggests that these interpretative claims are, broadly speaking, correct. Problematically, however, they are often taken to provide an exhaustive overview of the Cartesian project as a whole. Viewed in this light, Simmons argues, they become ‘de-humanizing’; they 'suggest a goal of disembodied minds seeking to understand the world from no particular point of view', so that 'Cartesian philosophy, it seems, is not a human philosophy' (Simmons 2011, p.53).

Together, these two theses also suggest a distinctly atomistic idea of the subject as an unembodied mind. The self-knowledge it accrues does not result from its position as a socially embedded, relational subject, but from its ability to occupy an entirely objective point of view. Many contemporary theorists have disparaged this conception of the self bequeathed to us by the father of modern philosophy, on the grounds that it is impoverished, atomistic, and individualistic; it is disembodied, autonomous, and perfectly self-sufficient. Let us call this interpretation of Cartesian

subjectivity the *Traditional View*[1]. By adopting this label, I aim to draw attention to the fact that this position is—in the main—a thing of the past. Most philosophers, especially historians of philosophy, no longer champion such a stark view of Cartesian subjectivity. Nonetheless, there continue to be research paradigms within which it plays a pivotal role. For example, Charles Taylor, who is, as we have seen, a leading contemporary recognition theorist, defends something closely akin to the Traditional View:

> Descartes was the most famous early spokesman of … disengaged reason … [He] took the step of supposing that we *are* essentially disengaged reason, we are pure mind, distinct from body, and our normal way of seeing ourselves is a regrettable confusion (Taylor 1991, p.102).

Taylor also underscores the long history of atomisation which Descartes inaugurated. In his intellectual wake, he argues, his conception of the self became culturally dominant in society at large:

> One can perhaps see why this picture appealed to him and to those who have followed. The ideal seems to gain force and authority when we suppose that it is how we *really are,* as against the objective of attempts at rather fragile and local achievement. So it is all too easy for us in our culture to think of ourselves as essentially disengaged reason. This explains why so many people find it quite unproblematic that we should conceive

[1] The Traditional View owes much to the pervasive influence of Gilbert Ryle's *The Concept of Mind* (1949). According to Ryle's interpretation of Descartes, whilst every human being consists of a mind and a body, self-knowledge is to be construed as knowledge of one's inner self, which takes the form of privileged access to one's mental states (1949, pp.154-198). For similar readings of Descartes on self-knowledge, see Foster (1991); Medina (2006); Cassam (1999); Dupré (1993); Evans (1982), and Rudder Baker (2011). For discussion of Ryle's view and its influence, see Lenz (2020).

> of human thinking on the model of the digital computer … so a lot, both institutionally and ideologically, is going for atomism and instrumentalism (Taylor 1991, pp.102-3).

Whether or not Descartes is committed to such an atomistic conception of the subject is important when it comes to extending the history of recognition theory. The adoption of the Traditional View by contemporary recognition theorists has led, I propose, not only to the acceptance that Descartes is not a theorist of recognition, but also to the exclusion of early modern Cartesians more generally —Malebranche included. Cartesianism, it is supposed, is marred by an obliviousness to the critical role that the views of others play in our conceptions of ourselves. The problem is that this view of Cartesian subjectivity is incomplete. The Traditional View, with its minimalist and disconcertingly empty conception of the self, has acted as a straw man for criticism of early modern accounts of subjectivity. In doing so, it has had detrimental effects on our historical understanding, specifically on the knowledge pertinent to an expansive, genealogical approach to the history of theories of recognition.

Given the inadequacies of the Traditional View, we might wonder how it rose to dominance. The explanation is, perhaps, that just as Simmons's two theses of Cartesianism possess a foothold in reality, so does the Traditional View. Before turning to consider the ways in which we need to supplement it, I will consider the extent to which the Traditional View finds support in key Cartesian texts. As we shall see, a selective reading which confines its focus to the insights of the *Meditiations* might well suggest that Cartesian subjectivity is marred by a thoroughgoing atomism.

The Meditator does not enter the *Meditations* with a conception of herself as an atomistic, disengaged mind. Rather, she begins the *First Meditation* with a nascent, pre-theoretical grasp of herself as a *human being*. This self-conception is not fully spelt out, but certainly includes the

possession of a body: ‘how could it be denied’, Descartes questions, ‘that these hands or this whole body are mine?’ (*M1,* AT 18/CSM II 13). The Meditator's conception of herself as an essentially embodied human being is attacked by the broad brushstrokes of the doubts Descartes attributes to her. The skeptical scenario of the malicious demon intent on deception, raised towards the end of the *First Meditation*, undermines not only the existence of ‘the sky, the air, the earth, colours, shapes, sounds and all external things’ as the products of vivid dreams, but the existence of the human body itself (*M1* AT 22/CSM II 15). Descartes makes this quite explicit: ‘I shall consider myself as not having hands or eyes, or flesh, or blood or senses, but as falsely believing that I have all these things’ (*M1* AT 22/CSM II 15).

The Meditator’s deep-seated, pre-theoretical understanding of herself is thus undermined. However, what exactly she originally believed herself to be is unclear. As Colin Chamberlain notes:

> … the meditator initially considers herself as *having* a body, and as *a human being.* Indeed, she regards these ways of considering herself as more or less interchangeable. But she is vague about the relevant sense of ‘having’ and what exactly a human being is (2020, p.3, emphasis in original).

What it is that *has* a body is unclear, but whatever a human being is, a body is at least part of it. As this self-conception is cast aside, another shifts into place. It is clear to the Meditator that she is not ‘so bound up with a body and with senses that I cannot exist without them’ (*M2* AT VII 25/CSM II 16). She concedes that she is something, that ‘*I am, I exist,* is necessarily true whenever it is put forward by me or conceived in my mind’ (Chamberlain 2020, p.3, citing *M2* AT VII 25/CSM II 17). The Meditator is now convinced '*that* she exists’, but does not know ‘*what* she is’ (Chamberlain 2020, p.3). As a result, this new *I* cannot certainly be said to possess a body, nor, as Descartes

explains, ‘the attributes which … belong to the nature of a body’ (*M2* AT VII 27/CSM II 18). Finally, the Meditator lands on a new conception of herself as a mind or thinking thing.

This is the self-conception that has aroused the disapproval of the detractors of “Cartesian” subjectivity. The Cartesian self, conceived of in this ‘strict sense’ as merely a thinking thing, certainly is empty. It is disconnected, not only from its own body, but from other human beings. In Taylor’s eyes, this view of the self becomes an ideal which grips the world ‘both institutionally and ideologically’ (1991, p.103).

Taylor is not the only commentator who proposes that the Cartesian self is not a human being, but only the part of it that thinks. According to Udo Thiel, for instance, ‘Descartes implicitly distinguishes between the notion of the human being or person which includes corporeity and the notion of the essential self, ‘I’, or soul, as something which is not necessarily linked to a body’ (2011, p.37). For Thiel, the characteristics that detractors of “Cartesian” subjectivity find problematic—atomism, disembodiment, self-sufficiency—are indeed features of the Cartesian subject. Whilst Thiel recognises that Descartes acknowledges the embodied aspects of existence, he holds that these aspects pertain not to the *self,* but to the distinct concept of the human being or person, consisting ‘of soul and body’ (Thiel 2011, p.37). Thiel’s interpretation thus draws a sharp line between the human being and the self: ‘the soul constitutes the essence of the self, whereas the body is something that the self merely ‘has’, to which it is ‘very closely joined’ (Thiel 2011, p.37).

If we take Descartes’ writings as a whole, there are good reasons to believe that his views on the nature of the self are more complex than this interpretation acknowledges. In the following section, I will argue that there is ample textual evidence to suggest that the Traditional View is mistaken. Consequently, it is a mistake to write off Descartes (and, by extension, Malebranche) as advocates

merely of an atomistic conception of the self, which pays no heed to the insight that the self is, in essence, an intersubjective work.

§2 Against the Traditional View

Since this thesis is concerned, not with Descartes, but with Malebranche, I will not advance and defend a comprehensive account of Cartesian subjectivity. Instead, I will draw attention to two areas of his work which give us particularly strong reasons to reject the Traditional View, and garner support for a richer account of Cartesian subjectivity. First, highlighting the later *Meditations*, as well as portions of the *Objections and Replies,* I will suggest that the Traditional View offers an incomplete account of Cartesian subjectivity. Second, I draw on additional texts, including the *Passions of the Soul*, for the idea that Descartes did not consider the account of the self that he gives in *Meditations 1* and *2* to be his final word on the matter. There are additional Cartesian subjectivities to be explored.

By the end of the *Second Meditation,* as we have seen, the Meditator has arrived at a new conception of herself as an unembodied thinking thing. This new self-conception is, as Chamberlain notes, 'clearly supposed to be correct, even if the Meditator cannot yet say whether it is complete' (2020, p.4). Our Meditator has not shown that her pre-theoretical view of the self is false*,* only that it is susceptible to doubt. The self is thus not proven to be only a thinking thing. The Meditator will come to reclaim a number of her old, sensory-based beliefs later in the *Meditations*, including her belief in the existence of an external world. Is the original conception of the self as a human being—as something which is at least in part bodily—also reclaimed?

In the *Sixth Meditation*, the Meditator considers which of her former beliefs should be salvaged. At first blush, she seems reluctant to concede that she is anything more than a thinking thing. 'Simply by knowing that I exist', she reasons, 'and seeing at the same time that absolutely nothing else belongs to my nature or essence except that I am a thinking thing, I can infer correctly that my essence consists solely in the fact that I am a thinking thing' (*M6* AT 78/CSM II 54). As Chamberlain notes, 'it looks like the meditator is telling us what she should now believe about herself: that she is a thinking, non-extended thing, really distinct from the body, and, *a fortiori,* not a human being' (2020, p.6). This is a natural interpretation, accepted, for example, by Thiel. We might therefore deduce that Descartes' considered view is that the self is characterised by thinking and essentially disembodied. The 'old' conception of the self as a human being should be cast aside.

Such a reading would, however, be mistaken. Despite appearances, it is incorrect to read the Meditator's use of 'I' in the phrase 'it is certain that I am really distinct from my body, and can exist without it' as referring to the self (M6 AT 78/CSM II 54). As the CSM translation reminds us, the French version of the *Meditations* adds a sub-clause to this statement:

> … it is certain that I, *that is, my soul, by which I am what I am*, am really distinct from my body, and can exist without it (M6 AT 78/CSM II 54, fn.3. Emphasis indicates the added clause).

The sub-clause makes it clear that the subject at hand here is not the self considered in its most general form, but rather the self when it is considered as the soul. Insofar as the self is considered as the soul, it is distinct from the body: this is Descartes's dualism. It is thus still an open question whether the self should be considered as anything more than the soul. There are good reasons to believe that Descartes thought it ought to be. Chamberlain argues that the second part of the *Sixth*

Meditation goes on to provide the Meditator with an additional conception of the self which exists alongside her conception of herself as soul: 'the self is correctly considered as a thinking thing or mind, but *also* as a human being' (2020, p.6).

Having professed certainty that she is really distinct from her body (*M6* AT 78/CSM II 54), the Meditator notes that the fact that she experiences some perceptions as agreeable or disagreeable 'makes it quite certain that my body, *or rather my whole self,* in so far as I am a combination of body and mind, can be affected by the various beneficial or harmful bodies which surround it' (*M6* AT 81/CSM II 56, emphasis mine). It is further suggested that this enlarged self-conception, with which the Meditator has been furnished by nature, is correct, for her verdict on it comes after she has defended the deliverances of the senses on the basis of God's nature as non-deceiving. If God created us with a natural propensity for falsely thinking of ourselves as consisting of a bodily component, then God would be a deceiver. But, 'since God is not a deceiver', the Meditator is justified in holding this understanding of her whole self as body and mind alongside her conception of herself as a mind (*M6* AT 79/CSM II 55). What underlies this conception of ourselves as human beings? The interlacing of the two substances which make up the whole self is complex. We do not, Descartes emphasises, feel that we are merely 'present' in our bodies, 'as a sailor is present in a ship' (M6 AT 81/CSM II 56). Instead, it is the intermingling of these two substances that leads us to believe that our soul and our body 'form a unit' (M6 AT 81/CSM II 56).

Descartes maintains that our sense of unity with the body is explained by our experience of affective bodily sensations, like pleasure, pain, thirst, hunger, or nausea, which we experience as good or bad (M6 AT VII 76/CSM II 52; see Chamberlain 2016, p.220). Such affective sensations underpin our sense that the body is a part of ourselves, because our well-being seems to us to turn on our success or failure in properly preserving the body. When bodily experiences are pleasurable

or painful we experience an increase or decrease in *our* well-being. We do not experience a pain in our foot in the same way that a sailor identifies a leak in their ship. Rather, when I step on a nail, it is indubitably clear to me that the pain—which I locate as in the foot—is *mine* (Chamberlain, 2016, p.227). This painful sensation grounds my sense of the foot as a part of myself 'because [it] represents damage to the foot as though it were damage *to me'* (Chamberlain 2016, p.227).

In his correspondence with Elizabeth, Descartes underlines this method for acquiring knowledge of the union between the soul and the body. The notion of their union cannot be grasped through the intellect but only through the senses, and:

> That is why people who never philosophize and use only their senses have no doubt that the soul moves the body and that the body acts on the soul. They regard both of them as a single thing, that is to say, they conceive their union (*Letter to Elizabeth, 28 June 1643*, AT III 692/CSMK III 227).

This tendency to identify the body as a part of ourselves, sustained by our experience of affective sensations, underlines the fact that our well-being, how we fare as *selves,* is bound up with the state of the body. We experience ourselves, as Chamberlain puts it, 'as having a-body-with-needs-to-be-satisfied' (2016, p.227). But these needs are not framed as the needs *of our body,* but as *our* needs: 'when the body needs drink the meditator feels like *she* needs to find a glass of water' (Chamberlain 2016, p.228). Consequently, we come to consider the body as a part of ourselves.

The Cartesian understanding of the phenomenology of embodiment is essential for recognising the existence of richer forms of subjectivity. Whilst such embodied subjectivity is not obviously germane to recognition theorists' contention that subjectivity is essentially relational, it nonetheless

plays an important dialectical role. If Descartes, the figurehead of self-sufficient atomism, in fact has a more complex understanding of subjectivity, the same may be true of other Cartesians. Such figures may yet reveal a sensitivity to the intersubjective conditions of identity.

Before moving on to examine other Cartesians, however, I will dwell briefly on an additional Cartesian conception of subjectivity that does greater justice to our embodied, relational existence. Whilst I will not defend this proposal in depth, it adds additional weight to my argument that we ought to reject the simplistic account of atomistic Cartesian subjectivity and reconsider the contributions of the early moderns to our understanding of the history of the need for recognition. So far, I have outlined Descartes' sensation-based account of the bodily self. I shall now suggest that we find the workings of a yet more expansive conception of the self rooted in his account of love.

In his correspondence with Chanut, Descartes writes:

> It is in the nature of love to make one consider oneself and the object loved as a single whole of which one is but a part; and to transfer the care that one previously took of oneself to the preservation of this whole (*Letter To Chanut, 1 February 1647*, AT III 611/CSMK III 311).

Love is a passion which makes us seek unity with the loved object. The *Passions of the Soul* restricts the scope of this thesis: we do not truly form a whole with the object of our love when we love only the *possession* of the object, as a miser loves money (*Article 82*, AT XI 389/CSM I 357). But whenever we love another object for itself, we form a whole with it. Depending on the nature of the loved object, the portion of the whole that it occupies varies, as does the care we show for it, which ‘is great or little in proportion to whether one thinks oneself a larger or smaller part of the

whole to which one has given one's affection' (*Letter to Chanut, 1 February 1647*, AT III 611-612/ CSMK III 311). When one loves 'a flower, a bird, [or] a horse', one considers these things as the smaller part of the whole, and is unwilling to risk much for them. But when the object of one's love occupies the larger part of the whole, things are different:

> …the love of a good father for his children is so pure that he desires to have nothing from them … He regards them, rather, as other parts of himself, and seeks their good as he does his own, or even more assiduously. For he imagines that he and they together form a whole of which he is not the better part, and so he often puts their interests before his own (*Passions of the Soul, Article 83,* AT XI 390/CSM I 357).

The good father, Descartes tells us, considers his children as *other parts of himself,* hinting at the existence of a more expansive self-conception than the whole self of the *Meditations*. In the case above, the father's conception of himself is responsive to his embodied, relational existence, expanding to include other human beings and their needs. We might say the same thing even for cases in which the loved object makes up a lesser part of the whole. When a person loves a flower or a bird, it does not seem appropriate to consider them as other selves, and we may rarely put their interests before our own. Yet, as loved objects, we consider them as forming a whole with us and, as such, they may affect our self-conception and determine some of our actions. Companion animals and certain possessions are often very important to us, and it might be right to think of ourselves as forming a whole with them that comes to define how we think of ourselves.

The notion of the intersubjective self suggested by Descartes' account of love continues to underline the deficiencies of the Traditional View. Alongside the notion of the embodied self to which we attribute our sensations and perceptions, it lends further weight to the suggestion that we should

reexamine the notions of subjectivity at play in the supposedly barren landscape of the early modern period. Yet the long history of attributing the Traditional View to Descartes has had consequences for the way the history of recognition has been told. Not only has the possibility of a richer reading of Descartes' conceptions of subjectivity been overlooked, but the same fate has befallen other Cartesians, who are read as subscribing to the Traditional View. In addition, the Traditional View plays into wider narratives in the history of philosophy, casting a historical shadow which has painted the early modern period as one of increasing inwardness and individualism, of atomism and solipsism about the mind. Over time, these narratives have come to seem unquestionable, so that it is difficult to read the history of philosophy through any other lens. In other words, we have become susceptible to a form of confirmation bias.

This, I argue, has been the case with Malebranche. The Oratorian's status as the most famous French disciple of Descartes, alongside his categorisation as an early modern rationalist, has arguably fed assumptions about the nature of his account of the self. Recognition theorists who accept Taylor's characterisation of Cartesian subjectivity may be susceptible to preconceived notions about the Malebranchean subject. With this danger in mind, I turn afresh to the possibility of a Malebranchean account of subjectivity germane to the concerns of recognition theorists. As we shall see, not only is the Traditional View incapable of capturing the multiple notions of the subject at play in Descartes' work, it appears even more at odds with the richness of Malebranche's treatment of subjectivity. The Cartesian account of the embodied self already explored anticipates a similar treatment of bodily subjectivity in Malebranche. I shall argue, however, that Malebranche goes further, offering us an (as yet unacknowledged) account of the self dependent upon the opinions of others which is deeply intersubjective.

In the next section, I begin by examining the ways in which Malebranche's philosophy of mind deviates from that of Descartes: first, by rejecting the claim that God furnishes us with innate ideas; second, by denying that we have access to a clear and distinct idea of the soul. When it comes to the prospect of reading Malebranche as a theorist of recognition, these emendations appear to make his inclusion in this history less likely. This is because, if one assumes that Malebranche, qua Cartesian, holds an account of the self expressed by the Traditional View, then his minimal account of our knowledge of the soul appears to render his understanding of subjectivity even more limited and obscure than the Cartesian version of this account.

I have already argued that Cartesian subjectivity is not exhausted by the Traditional View. I will argue that such a view is even less fitting for Malebranche. Whilst he does, sometimes, equate the self with the soul, I shall argue that he presents us with further, richer notions of subjectivity. In this chapter, I shall be concerned with Malebranche's notion of embodied subjectivity. Malebranche, I shall argue, drawing heavily on Descartes, presents us with an account of the bodily self which is underpinned by the experience of affective sensations. Whilst this account is insufficient for grounding Malebranche's inclusion in recognition's history, it sets the stage for the further notion of subjectivity to which I will turn in the next chapter.

§3 Malebranche's Emendations to the Cartesian Theory of Ideas

Before showing that Malebranche is alive to the notion of embodied subjectivity, I will consider the idea that, as a Cartesian, he is committed to the Traditional View historically attributed to Descartes. If Malebranche is committed to such an understanding of the self, then his emendations to the Cartesian theory of ideas appear to render his account of subjectivity even more impoverished than the Cartesian Traditional View. I will begin by outlining the ways in which Malebranche departs

from the Cartesian theory of ideas. I will then consider the apparent effect of such revisions upon Malebranche's account of subjectivity. Ultimately, however, I argue that we must reject the idea that Malebranchean subjectivity is exhausted by anything like the Traditional View.

Although Malebranche is considered one of the most important Cartesian philosophers of the 17th century, he altered key facets of Cartesian orthodoxy. Whilst he takes over from Descartes the notion that the mind is a simple and indivisible substance which wills and understands, other aspects of the Cartesian picture undergo extensive alteration in light of Malebranche's acceptance of a distinctly non-Cartesian motif. Following Augustine, Malebranche contends that *the human mind is not a light unto itself* (see *Dialogue 3*, OCM XII 64/ JS 32). Consequently, he rejects the Cartesian claim that God has stocked it with its own native resources in the form of innate ideas. Rather, he argues, ideas exist only in the mind of God. He includes here not merely intellectual or abstract ideas, but also the ideas involved in sensory perception. When we perceive a material object, he advances, our perception consists of two things: '*sensation* and pure *idea*' (OCM I 445/ LO 234 emphasis in original, see also OCM III 143/LO 621). In perceiving a cat, for instance, God reveals to us his idea of a cat, whilst at the same time causing the appropriate sensory modifications in our souls, which lead us to believe that a cat is present (OCM I 445/LO 234). In thus maintaining that 'we see all things in God', Malebranche rejects Descartes' claim that ideas are modes of the mind. The only modes which properly pertain to the soul are sensations (OCM I 445/LO 234). Malebranche thus presents a more austere portrait than Descartes of the mind's resources.

Malebranche finds this explanation of the nature of ideas appealing for at least three reasons: for its economy; for the nature of the relationship between human beings and God, and for its fittingness with the phenomenology of ideas. First, because God created the world, Malebranche is convinced that he 'must have within Himself the ideas of all the beings He has created' (OCM I 437/LO 230).

Thus it is only economical that God should reveal these ideas to us. Second, the thesis of Vision in God is claimed to be 'most appropriate for exhibiting the dependence that minds have on God in all their thoughts' (OCM I 437/LO 230). This dependence does justice to Malebranche's contention that the mind is not a light unto itself. On the contrary, the mind alone is impotent and God 'is the true light that illumines everyone who comes into the world' (OCM I 440/LO 231). Third, the Vision in God is said to best explain the phenomenology of ideas. We have the power (loosely speaking) to call to mind any idea we wish; thus 'it is certain that all beings are present to our mind' (OCM I 440-1/LO 232). If this is so, it can only be through the power of God. Malebranche thus takes himself to have sufficiently motivated his rejection of the Cartesian theory of ideas in favour of an account which places all ideas in the mind of God.

With respect to Malebranche's stance on self-knowledge, the most pertinent aspect of his revision of Descartes' philosophy of mind concerns his denial that God reveals to us a clear and distinct idea of the soul. This claim does not follow simply from his understanding of the human mind as a *lumen illuminatum* to which God reveals ideas. The fact that the Malebranchean mind does not possess its own ideas in no way entails that 'we cannot have a clear idea of the mind in a Cartesian sense', since we might still have epistemic access to the idea of the soul in the mind of God (Jolley 2013, p.79). However, Malebranche denies that this is the case. He goes on to explain why we do not know the nature of the mind better than we know the nature of the body.

Malebranche begins by carving out a distinction between two kinds of knowledge that Descartes had run together: knowledge of things 'through their idea' and knowledge of things 'through consciousness' (OCM I 448/LO 236). When we know something through an idea of it, our knowledge can be perfected. This is because we see ideas in God, and 'ideas of things in God include all of their properties' such that 'whoever sees their ideas can also see all their properties

successively' (OCM I 450/LO 237). Geometrical ideas, like our idea of a triangle, are paradigmatic cases of things known through ideas. God shares with us his idea of a triangle, which enables us to deduce its properties. This does not mean that one actually *does* deduce all of a triangle's properties from the idea of it. Rather, it entails that gaps in our knowledge do not indicate any deficiency in the idea itself, only a weakness in the mind which considers it (OCM I 450/LO 237).

Since God does not reveal to us his idea of the soul, our knowledge of the soul cannot be like our knowledge of the triangle. We do not have access to an idea of the soul from which we can deduce certain axioms and the features which follow from them (OCM I 450-1/LO 237-8). We lack, as Andrew Pyle puts it, a 'spiritual geometry' (2003, p.188). As Malebranche explains:

> …surely we have no idea of our mind which is such that, by consulting it, we can discover the modifications of which the mind is capable. If we had never felt pleasure or pain we could not know whether or not the soul could feel them. If a man had never eaten a melon, or seen red or blue, he would consult this alleged idea of his soul in vain and would never discover distinctly whether or not it was capable of these sensations and modifications (OCM III 164/LO 634).

Given that God does not reveal to us his idea of the human soul, we cannot deduce the sensory modifications of which it is capable. Instead, knowledge of the soul can be acquired only through experience of its sensations in consciousness: only by experiencing the taste of melon, Malebranche tells us, can we come to know that the soul is capable of possessing this modification. But the experience of sensations is problematically misleading for postlapsarians. Whilst sensations like redness and the flavour of melon are modifications of the soul, our sensory experience tends to

present them to us as secondary qualities which inhere in material objects themselves. Further, we tend to take such presentations at face value.

In order to remedy such errors, we are unable draw on an idea of the soul and its modifications. Instead, Malebranche argues, we should redress these misconceptions about the location of sensory properties by consulting the clear and distinct idea of extension which God reveals to us. In doing so we see that sensations cannot be modifications of material objects, 'for extension can only have various figures and motion' (OCM III 165/LO 634). By process of elimination, we deduce that 'pain, heat, colour, and all other sensible qualities belong to the mind' (OCM III 165/LO 634). This style of reasoning itself constitutes an argument for the Malebranchean claim that the soul is not known better than the body: if it were, we would not have to utilise such a roundabout methodology to explain our knowledge of the soul's modifications (OCM III 165/LO 634).

I have considered two ways in which Malebranche departs from Cartesian orthodoxy. I turn now to the consequences these changes seem to engender for his account of self-knowledge. When it comes to Malebranche's account of the self, most commentators assume that he uses this term to refer to the little-known spiritual part of us: the soul. In other words, they charge him with something like the Traditional View, historically attributed to Descartes. Under the guise of examining Malebranche's account of 'the Soul and Self-Knowledge', for instance, Pyle examines Malebranche's arguments for his claim that we do not have a clear and distinct idea of the soul (2003, pp.186-209). Pyle offers no explicit argument for equating the extent of our knowledge of the soul with the extent of our self-knowledge—this is simply taken for granted. Lawrence Nolan and John Whipple make the same assumption (2005). If this assumption is correct, then it looks as if Malebranche might subscribe to something like the Traditional View.

There is evidence that Malebranche does—at least sometimes—equate the self with the soul. For instance, in the *Dialogues on Metaphysics and on Religion,* he tells us that, if I possessed an idea of my soul, then 'in contemplating myself I would certainly see that I am capable of being affected by certain sensations', whereas the reality is that 'I can only sense myself in myself', and 'it is only in Reason that I can discover what I am' (OCM XII-X111 38/JS 35). It is natural to take his use of 'myself' and 'I' in these passages as referring to the soul or mind.

When it comes to Malebranche's inclusion in the history of recognition theory, this is problematic. If it is correct to say that Malebranche subscribes to the Traditional View, which understands the self as identical with the immaterial soul, then his account of subjectivity cannot possess any relevance to recognition theory's history. Moreover, my discussion of the ways in which Malebranche alters key aspects of the Cartesian theory of ideas reveals the Malebranchean version of the Traditional View to be even more improvised than its Cartesian counterpart. This is because, whilst the formulation of the Traditional View ascribed to Descartes supposes that we possess a clear and distinct idea of the self as a thinking thing, Malebranche denies that we possess even this. Malebranche's notion of the self as soul is thus not merely problematically atomistic: a further problem is that we do not possess a clear and distinct idea of this disembodied spiritual thing. The prospect of Malebranche having any relevance to recognition theory therefore looks distinctly unpromising. In subscribing to an even more impoverished version of the Traditional View than the one historically attributed to Descartes, Malebranche not only fails to present an account of the self germane to recognition theory: it seems that he fails to present much of an account of the self at all.

I do not think that this should be our considered conclusion. Like Descartes, Malebranche is committed to an account of the self as an atomistic unembodied soul. However, as with Descartes, a closer reading of his work reveals a plurality of notions of subjectivity. Malebranche's sustained

interest in the psychology of postlapsarian self-love, in particular, suggests that he is working with multiple conceptions of the self. In fact, in order to make sense of much of the *Search After Truth*, we need to recognise that the self is a vague term which stands in for many different ideas. Some of these, I shall argue, justify the conclusion that Malebranche is a theorist of recognition, and should be included in recognition's history.

§4 The Two Selves of Self-Love

In the remainder of this chapter, I will outline one of these notions of subjectivity: Malebranche's conception of the bodily self. Embodied subjectivity, I argue, is the result of the first branch of the natural inclination towards self-love, the love of pleasure. This will lay the groundwork for chapter 5, where I shall argue that, in loving our own grandeur, we acquire an intersubjective conception of ourselves. Neither of these selves is captured by the Traditional View.

The idea that the love of pleasure, generated by self-love, leads postlapsarians to conceive of themselves as material, embodied beings might seem like a non-starter. How can our love of pleasure lead us to conceive of ourselves as bodies when, as Malebranche makes clear, the locus of pleasure is just the soul itself? That is, sensations, including those of pleasure and pain, cannot be modifications of bodies, only modifications of souls. As I explored in the previous section, Malebranche thinks that we can deduce this conclusion by consulting our clear and distinct idea of the body as extension. In doing so, we see that 'the body is only extension in height, breadth, and depth, and all its properties consist only in (a) motion and rest, and (b) an infinity of different figures' (OCM I 122/LO 49). Consequently:

> … one will never conceive [any relations among parts of extension] to be relations of joy, pleasure, pain, heat, taste, colour, or any of the other sensible qualities, although these qualities are sensed when a certain change occurs in the body (OCM I 123/LO 49).

To take a concrete example:

> I feel pain ... when a thorn pricks my finger; but the hole it makes is not the pain. The hole is in the finger—it is clearly conceived—and the pain is in the soul, for the soul senses it keenly and is modified by it (OCM I 123/LO 49).

If sensations can only be modifications of the soul, then surely our love of pleasure must incline us towards a love of ourselves as the kinds of things that can experience pleasure, that is to say, as souls. Far from generating a bodily conception of the self, our love of pleasure seems to lead us back to the Traditional View.

This is, however, an idealised picture, that fails to capture the reality of postlapsarian reasoning. Although sensations can only be modifications of the soul, Malebranche's object of analysis in the *Search* is not, for the most part, the beliefs of the kind of philosophically-minded individuals that he hopes his readers will become. Rather, he looks to diagnose the erroneous views of postlapsarian subjects. Since most postlapsarians do not consider whether it is possible to give an account of sensations that is consistent with the clear and distinct idea of extension, they do not believe that such sensations inhere in the soul. Instead, they rely on spontaneous phenomenological experience, which presents sensations as inhering in the body. This kind of error is wide-ranging: it is not only sensations of pleasure and pain that we assign to material objects, like our bodies. Rather,

postlapsarians believe that all secondary qualities reside in bodies. For instance, we almost all believe that heat 'is in the fire … that light is in the air, and that colours are on coloured objects (OCM I 131-2/LO 54). Malebranche introduces a general rule to cover errors of this nature:

> … *we ordinarily attribute our sensations to objects whenever they act on us through the motion of invisible particles* (OCM I 133/LO 55, emphasis in original).

We automatically attribute the whiteness and gingerness to the cat because we do not see the mechanism by which our sense organs are affected by the cat, or how the manipulation of our sense organs occasions sensations in our soul. In reality, the 'motion of imperceptible bodies' disturbs the fibres of the eyes, and this alteration in the motion of the fibres is communicated to the brain where, because of certain general laws which are instituted and sustained by God's causal power, it occasions sensations in the soul.

Malebranche's general rule suggests that whenever we cannot grasp how a sensation is produced in our soul, we will locate it in a material object. Though these judgements are erroneous, avoiding them is not within our control. As Malebranche explains:

> It should not be imagined that it is up to us to assign the sensation of whiteness to snow or to see it as white … All of this occurs in us independently of us and even in spite of us (OCM I 133/LO 55).

The point is reiterated in the *Dialogues on Metaphysics and Natural Religion,* this time utilising the still more pertinent example of pain sensations:

> For it seems to me that it is my finger which feels the pain of a prick, that it is my heart which desires, that it is my brain which reasons (OCM XII-XIII 33/JS 6).

Malebranche puts these words into the mouth of Aristes. A cookie-cutter postlapsarian, Aristes' views represent those of the layperson who reasons solely on the basis of sensory experience: Aristes is certain that pain is in his body. According to Malebranche, this view is in need of correction. We know (though Aristes does not) that our experience of the external world is misleading, because it is distorted by the soul's dependence on the body. But how can a remedy for these kinds of errors sit alongside Malebranche's contention that it is not up to us whether or not 'to assign the sensation of whiteness to snow or to see it as white', that these things '[occur] in us independently of us and even in spite of us' (OCM I 133/LO 55)?

When it comes to sensations, Malebranche's terminology is rather unhelpful, for it turns out that it is only qualifiedly true that we cannot help but assign the sensation of whiteness to snow. Malebranche distinguishes between two kinds of judgements that are part and parcel of our sensory experience. The first are natural judgements, which are not true judgements at all, but sensations (OCM I 130/LO 52). The natural judgements of the senses are to be understood simply as the phenomenological part of sensation: they constitute our sensory experience of the external world. They thus do not constitute free, conscious decisions that could be otherwise: we cannot alter how we perceive things. When Malebranche claims that it is not up to us to assign whiteness to snow, we should understand him as saying that our assignation of whiteness to snow is nothing more than a natural judgement, that is to say, it is nothing more than a feature of our experience of the world. This involuntary part of sensory experience is common to the postlapsarian and to Adam, and it is involuntary for good reason: perceiving objects as coloured plays a crucial adaptive function. It helps human beings to navigate the world, increasing their chances of survival (OCM I 133/LO 55).

Natural judgements are to be distinguished from free judgements, which tend to follow them closely and are often assimilated to them. Such judgements are not judgements in name only, but are decisions made freely by the soul. When it comes to free judgements, the postlapsarian tends to blindly follow the reports of natural judgements—that is, the phenomenological content of experience itself—judging sensations to really be in objects. Altering this *is* within our control: although we involuntarily experience secondary qualities and sensations as inhering in material things, we can and should restrain ourselves from forming free judgements on this basis.

I have considered the spontaneous, fallen understanding of sensations and secondary qualities, which we almost always ascribe to external objects, rather than to our own souls. Now I want to bring these strands of argument together to explain how the love of pleasure—the first branch of self-love—engenders embodied subjectivity. Our love of pleasure is concerned with a particular class of sensations: it inclines us to seek out pleasurable sensations and avoid painful ones. Such sensations are strong and lively and, as a result, we tend to locate them in our bodies. As Malebranche explains:

> Strong and lively sensations are those that startle and forcefully rouse the mind because they are either quite pleasant or else very unpleasant; such are pain, tickling sensations, extremes of heat or cold (OCM I 137-8/LO 57).

Because weaker sensations, like colours, affect us to a lesser extent, we locate them not only on our bodies, but often in other external objects. Strong and lively sensations, on the other hand, affect the soul so intensely that it cannot help recognising that they 'belong to it in some way' (OCM I 139/ LO 58). But, Malebranche laments:

> …the soul is so closely joined to its body and has even become carnal since the Fall and consequently so incapable of concentration that it attributes to the body many things that belong only to itself, and hardly distinguishes itself from the body anymore (OCM I 136-7/LO 57).

The fallen soul attributes many things to its body, including affective sensations. Natural judgements structure our affective experience such that we cannot help but feel as if the burning pain of a flame or the pleasant warmth of the fire is in our hands, and not a modification of our soul. As with our involuntary tendency to experience external objects as coloured, for instance, our involuntary tendency to experience affective sensations as *in* the body aids self-preservation (OCM I 142/LO 60). When we experience the pain of the flame as in our hands, we know immediately how we must change our body in order to stem its pain. This might not be the case if we instead experienced only an intellectual apprehension of this pain without any accompanying bodily phenomenology. Despite these advantages, we regrettably allow affective experience to inform our free judgements, so that we come to believe that pleasurable and painful sensations really inhere in the body (OCM I 138-9/LO 58). As Malebranche's postlapsarian spokesperson, Aristes, confirms: 'it seems to me that it is my finger which feels the pain of a prick' (OCM XII-XIII 33/JS 6).

How do we move from locating affective sensations in the body to considering the body as part of our being? Malebranche is clear that it is our experience of sensations that undergirds embodied subjectivity. 'Through the instinct of sensation', he argues:

> I am persuaded that my soul is joined to my body, or that my body is part of my being; I have no evidence for this. I do not know it through the light of reason, but

> only through the pain or pleasure I sense when objects strike me (OCM II 172/LO 365-6).

Both his identification of pleasure and pain as in the body, and his claim that such strong and lively sensations ground our sense of ourselves as bodily beings, are distinctly Cartesian in origin. As Chamberlain puts it in the context of Descartes' account of the embodied self, feeling painful or pleasurable sensations as *in* the body grounds my sense of my body as part of myself 'because [it] represents damage to the foot as though it were damage *to me'* (2016, p.227). That is, we understand *our* well-being as determined by the state of the body.

When I feel the pleasant warmth of the fire on my hands, or the sharp pain of a nail in my foot, these experiences feel pleasurable or painful not simply for my body, but *for me.* Affective sensations thus ground our experience of ourselves as embodied by leading us to experience what is good or bad for the preservation of the physical body as good or bad for *ourselves*. Part of this is unavoidable: Malebranche claims that our experience of pleasure and pain as inhering in the body is a natural judgement. That is, it is part of our involuntary sensory experience of the world (OCM I 133/LO 55). However, we also go on to freely judge on the basis of such sensory experiences that we are bodily beings. This self-conception informs what we think of as *good*: understanding ourselves as bodies, postlapsarians come to understand their welfare as dependant on securing bodily goods, that is, things that are pleasurable for the body. In reality, Malebranche complains, our status as beings 'composed of a mind and a body' means that we should pursue two kinds of goods —'those of the mind and those of the body' (OCM I 72/LO 20). Unless our embodied subjectivity is complemented by a conception of ourselves as souls, however, one of these categories will be overlooked.

I have suggested that this bodily self is the result of the love of pleasure produced by the natural inclination toward self-love. How are we to understand this connection? The natural inclination towards self-love is not explicitly introduced as playing a role in the production of the idea of the bodily self. Malebranche's explanation of the soul's tendency to locate sensations of pleasure and pain in the body, and thus to take the body for itself, appears in Book 1, far in advance of Book 4's account of the natural inclinations. It might therefore seem as if Malebranche does not intend to draw any connection between the love of pleasure and the postlapsarian experience of bodily subjectivity. However, this conclusion is mistaken: our love of pleasure plays a crucial role. It does so by vivifying the sensations of pleasure and pain that postlapsarians experience in the presence of material objects. Whilst the weak character of sensory experiences of colours or smells prevents us from recognising that they are really modifications of our soul, the strong and lively character of affective sensations means that we cannot help recognising that such sensations belong to us in some way.

Malebranche is not forthright as to why our experience of sensations varies, but his account of our natural inclinations holds the key. The first branch of the natural inclination towards self-love generates a powerful desire for pleasure and gives us an inclination for 'all things that make us happier and more content' (OCM II 76/LO 307). Malebranche explicitly equates pleasure and happiness: 'every pleasure is a good and in fact makes him who enjoys it happy at the instant he enjoys it and for as long as he enjoys it' (OCM II 80/LO 309). We desire happiness, and pleasure is the cause of happiness. This ensures that our attention is focused on sensations of pleasure and pain, and that we experience these affectations in an especially strong and lively manner. It is only because we experience affective sensations in this way that we come to understand ourselves as embodied. Insofar as the love of pleasure is responsible for strengthening and vivifying these affective sensations, this branch of self-love is necessary for embodied subjectivity. By vivifying

such sensations, the love of pleasure enables us to realise that they belong to ourselves in some way. In locating such sensations in the body, our sense of ourselves as embodied is put front-and-centre. What is more, the impulses of self-love are relentless. Because we so strongly desire to be happy, we pursue our body's pleasure and avoid pain ceaselessly, thus continually entrenching our conception of ourselves as bodies.

Finally, I want to consider a question raised by Malebranche's claim that affective sensations 'persuad[e] me that my soul is joined to my body, or that my body is part of my being' (OCM II 172/ LO 365). Does Malebranche mean to suggest that, as a result of the sensory experiences just outlined, we experience the body as a part, rather than the whole, of ourselves, developing a dualistic subjectivity? I think it would be a mistake to interpret him in this way. When he states that affective sensations teach us that our bodies are (just) *part* of our being, we need not take him as suggesting that postlapsarians thereby also recognise another part of their being in the form of the immaterial soul. Whilst Malebranche argues that 'men are not altogether unaware that they have a soul', he laments their tendency to identify this spiritual part of them with material things. When the postlapsarian soul 'wishes to represent to itself its own nature', he argues, 'it tries to form a corporeal image ... it takes itself now for one, now for another, now for air, now for fire, now for the harmony of its body's parts (OCM I 146/LO 62-63, see also OCM I 11/LO xxxiv; OCM I 136-6/LO 57; OCM II 370/LO 480). Postlapsarians are thereby led to the consideration that the body just *is* the self. Our experience of strong and lively sensations generates a distinctive kind of subjectivity: an understanding of ourselves as bodies.

§4 Conclusion: More Selves

I have argued that, adopting and expanding upon Descartes's account, Malebranche advances an understanding of embodied subjectivity which is underpinned by the tendency to experience painful and pleasurable sensations as in the material body. I have thus shown that the Traditional View, according to which the self is understood as identical with the unembodied soul, is just as extraneous to Malebranche as it is to Descartes.

However, I have also drawn attention to textual evidence that suggests that Malebranche does—at least sometimes—equate the self with the soul. He thus appears to recognise two different notions of subjectivity: an unembodied thinking mind and a material body. If this interpretation of Malebranchean subjectivity is complete, then there does not appear to be anything which distinguishes his account from that of Descartes, who also recognises both a thinking self and a conception of the self as a human being which includes a body. Further, whilst neither of these accounts of subjectivity are accurately captured by the limiting Traditional View, it would also seem true to say that neither is capable of contributing anything substantial to the history of recognition theory, which is centrally concerned with the ways in which our conceptions of ourselves are *intersubjective*, deeply dependent upon the views of others.

Malebranche's place in the history of recognition theory thus depends on the possibility of locating in his work a further notion of subjectivity which includes a sensitivity to the inherently social nature of the self. In the next chapter, I shall argue that we find just such a notion of the self in the *Search After Truth,* thereby grounding Malebranche's inclusion in recognition theory's history[2].

[2] Denis Kambouchner (2017) has argued that there is also a good case to be made for including Descartes in a broader history of recognition theory.

Chapter 5 The Love of Grandeur and the Intersubjective Self

In the previous chapter, I argued that the postlapsarian love of pleasure, the first branch of self-love, engenders embodied subjectivity. In this chapter, I will show that Malebranche's account of the love of grandeur—the second branch of self-love—maps a further aspect of our subjectivity, one that is deeply intersubjective. We have a keen desire to receive esteem and avoid contempt, and are extremely sensitive to the way that other people's opinions sustain our sense of self. This strand of Malebranche's philosophy has received little attention in the secondary literature. My aim is both to clarify it, and to argue that we should regard it as a theory of recognition.

This chapter will unfold as follows. §1 addresses the love of grandeur: I begin by outlining Malebranche's account of the enlightened love of grandeur, using this as a foil against which to clarify the nature of its postlapsarian form. §2 explores the relationship between the desire for grandeur and the desire for esteem, noting esteem's roots in the passion of wonder. In §3, I introduce a case study: the faux savants. In order to satisfy their desires for grandeur, faux savants utilise two mechanisms: first, they associate themselves with great things; second, they dissimulate the possession of valued qualities and advantages in order to elicit the esteem of those around them. As objects of esteem or contempt, I argue, we are immersed in multi-layered passionate exchanges with other subjects.

This uncovers a problem: how can a faux savant satisfy their desire for grandeur when they know that the esteem they receive is based on a carefully cultivated illusion? It is in his solution to this problem that the intersubjective nature of Malebranche's account of postlapsarian subjectivity

becomes clear. As §§4-5 explore, we postlapsarian individuals are epistemically vulnerable to the opinions of others. When others esteem us, we tend to accept the pleasing view of ourselves that underpins their esteem, thereby engaging in a process of self-forgetting. We thus come to believe that we truly possess qualities that we had henceforth only consciously dissimulated, acquiring a false, deeply intersubjective understanding of ourselves. This account of the intersubjectivity of postlapsarian identity justifies Malebranche's inclusion in the history of recognition theory.

§1 Self-Love and the Love of Grandeur

Whilst the first branch of our self-love inclines us to pursue pleasure, the second branch takes the form of a love of grandeur, through which 'we affect [the] power, excellence, independence and self-subsistence of our being' (OCM II 47/LO 288). Whilst this natural inclination may sound destructive, Malebranche's considered view is that this aspect of self-love is neither essentially virtuous nor essentially vicious. This distinction between virtue and vice, as Moriarty notes, is mapped 'onto that between the state of human kind before and after the Fall' (2006, p.185). Whilst the vicious self-love of the postlapsarian will be the focus of this chapter, it is worth pausing to consider the virtuous form, which serves as a foil for the inflamed variety.

In the *Treatise on Ethics*, Malebranche advances an account of enlightened self-love which was attained by prelapsarians. Regulated appropriately, self-love makes possible 'the greatest perfection of which we are capable' (OCM XI 45/CW 64). An enlightened self-love is regulated in accordance with Order, where 'Order' is the name that Malebranche gives to the set of practical truths, or 'relations of perfection', which are consubstantial with God. When we esteem things in conformity with Order, we offer them a degree of love which is proportionate to the amount of perfection they possess or are capable of possessing. In doing so, we love them to the same degree that God loves

them, thus conforming ourselves to God as a model. We thereby actually attain those qualities—happiness, pleasure, perfection, glory—that our self-love was made to seek. A laudable outlet is found even for the postlapsarian desire to be considered as a God. Anyone ‘who works at his own perfection’ by conforming his will to Order, Malebranche explains, ‘makes himself to resemble God' and those who take 'part in the perfection of God, will also take part in His Happiness, His glory and His dignity’ (OCM XI 23/CW 48-9).

However, regulating one's esteem in accordance with Order is impossible for the average postlapsarian. Only prelapsarian Adam and, to a certain degree, those postlapsarians who have received the saving power of grace, are capable of attaining such an enlightened self-love. Postlapsarian self-love, Malebranche laments, 'is almost always disordered' (OCM XI 45/CW 64). Rather than loving things in conformity with Order, postlapsarians regulate their love in accordance with the disordered hierarchy created by their self-love, which values things only in accordance with how much pleasure they bring us or how much grandeur they possess (OCM XI 21-22/CW 48). The love of grandeur gives rise to desires for power, excellence, and independence. Postlapsarians attempt to satisfy their desires for these attributes in ephemeral ways, by cultivating transitory relations to things around them—especially other postlapsarian subjects. As Malebranche explains, 'grandeur and independence most often are not in us at all, and they normally consist only in the relations we have to the things around us’ (OCM II 48/LO 288).

Whilst Malebranche does not explicitly clarify the relationship between the desired attributes of power, excellence, and independence, they do not appear to operate at the same level. The love of grandeur, he states, gives postlapsarians an inclination 'towards everything that raises us above others' (OCM II 50/LO 290). Positions of elevation or authority are grounded, he argues, in the possession of excellences of different kinds, which we believe make us more perfect than others, for

instance, the superior possession of certain qualities (knowledge, virtue, beauty) or social and material advantages (honours, riches, possessions) (OCM II 50/LO 290). When our relative perfection enables us to enjoy a position of elevation and authority, we attain—in a disordered manner—the apex of our love of grandeur: a (misguided) sense of God-like independence. That is, whilst Malebranche fails to make this point explicit, I take him as suggesting that independence is the crowning jewel in the attainment of grandeur. As Moriarty puts it, the postlapsarian desire for grandeur is in fact a desire for 'the kind of self-sufficiency that actually pertains to God' (2006, p.255). The perfection and independence that postlapsarians believe themselves to possess through their occupation of positions of authority is, however, entirely illusory. As my discussion of enlightened self-love highlighted, perfection consists only in the conformity of our will to Order, and power belongs only to the will of God. Rather than imagining themselves to be independent, Malebranche stresses, 'men should distinctly know that they are capable of nothing without God' (OCM I 440/LO 231).

Why, then, do postlapsarians continuously attempt to satisfy their love of grandeur in such disordered ways? It is only because of the vast gulf between appearance and reality that it appears judicious to look to secure grandeur through attaining rank 'in the imagination of other men as feeble and miserable as [our]selves' (OCM II 50-51/LO 290). That is, it is only because we postlapsarians fail to acknowledge the metaphysical and theological truths which lie behind the appearances of things that it makes sense to us to try to achieve perfection, power, and independence.

We saw in Chapter 4 that material objects appear to possess secondary qualities, despite the fact that these modifications pertain only to souls. Similarly, when it comes to satisfying the love of grandeur, our spontaneous experience of the world suggests to us that it is possible to attain real

perfection, authority, and power by outdoing those around us. It seems incontestable to the postlapsarian that she does possess causal power. She is certain, for instance, that she has the power to call to mind any idea of her choosing, and to direct her body as she wishes (OCM I 427/LO 225, OCM II 315/LO 449). It is hardly possible to experience the world behind this veil of appearances, because the natural judgements which structure our experience are involuntary. Postlapsarians erroneously take such appearances to reveal the fundamental nature of reality, when what they really present is but a 'stage-set' (Moriarty 2003, p.245). 'Our experience', as Moriarty puts it, 'contains and screens a gigantic hole, which is the locus of God's activity' (2003, p.245). Oblivious to the true extent of God's action, postlapsarians attempt to achieve perfection, power, and independence in disordered ways. In our efforts to achieve greatness by out-doing other actors with respect to the possession of valued qualities and advantages, we rely on an understanding of the world and the nature of grandeur which has its basis solely in the way things appear[1].

Malebranchean postlapsarians, I have argued, work continuously to attain positions of worldly power which bring them feelings of independence. In order to occupy such authoritative positions, they desires to possess those qualities and advantages which appear to render them more perfect than those around them—'toward virtue, knowledge, honours and riches' (OCM II 50-51/LO 290-1). Here, Malebranche makes another important distinction between appearance and reality. In order to compare favourably with others with respect to some quality or advantage, Malebranche stresses, it is not enough merely to possess them. Rather:

[1] There is a restricted sense in which we can achieve worldly approximations of these qualities. Occupying a position of authority gives us power over others in the sense that 'all those below us revere and fear us; they are always prepared to do what pleases us for our preservation, and they dare not harm us or resist our desires' (OCM II 50/LO 290). Though such an individual may not possess any true power, the fact that other social actors esteem them is sufficient for securing them the trappings of prestige and a significant sphere of influence.

> …men not only desire actually to possess knowledge and virtue, honors and riches, they exert all their efforts so that people will at least believe they truly possess them (OCM II 51/LO 290).

Appearing to possess such qualities, or having a reputation for possessing them, tends to prove more important than genuinely possessing them. As Malebranche emphasises, we 'take fewer pains to be virtuous than to appear so' (OCM II 51/LO 290). The tendency of social actors to focus on the cultivation of appearances takes us one step further from reality. Not only do postlapsarians form confused conceptions of their own qualities, thinking, for instance, that they can enhance their perfection by outdoing others. Further, in their dealings with others, they look to obfuscate even this mistaken self-understanding, by feigning and exaggerating socially desirable qualities and advantages.

Those who succeed in appearing more perfect, Malebranche has suggested, feel themselves to attain positions of authority. But how do they know when they have succeeded? It is only by receiving esteem from others that postlapsarians are convinced of their relative perfection. I therefore turn to consider the passion of esteem in more detail.

§2 Malebranchean Passions: The Need for Esteem

Malebranche inherits from Descartes a view of the passions as functional tools for preserving the body (OCM II 128/LO 338). In their original role, the passions conferred important survival tactics upon us without imposing undue handicaps. Adam, for example, had passions by which he was fittingly informed of the goods and evils of the body (OCM II 130/LO 339). The notion of passions as unruly and distracting forces which we must learn to control or subdue—a common view in 17th

century France—only arises as a result of Original Sin, which destructively addles the relationship between the soul and the body. After the Fall, human beings became subjugated to their material nature, and a dependence on the body became a dependence on its passionate responses and goods, at the expense of reason and the goods of the mind. The postlapsarian calls the sensible things that appear to cause pleasure *goods*, and draws no distinction between the true goods of the mind and the pseudo-goods of the body. Whilst we could not survive without the passions, Malebranche's considered view is that they underpin an obsession with the 'material and terrestrial' that engenders 'a thousand disorders' (OCM II 130/LO 339).

The passion of esteem, and its opposite, contempt, have their basis in the preliminary passion of wonder. Wonder is thus of particular interest in the context of the postlapsarian need for esteem. It is, Malebranche explains, 'an imperfect passion … that precedes all the others' (OCM II 188/LO 375). Its imperfection stems from its failure to manifest the standard 7-step process which constitutes our other passions—it is not, for instance, excited in us by 'either the idea or the sensation of the good' (OCM II 188/LO 375)[2]. Physiologically-speaking, wonder is our response to the peculiar way in which novel perceptions stimulate the surface of the brain. When one perceives something novel, the animal spirits (normally distributed equally throughout the body) are driven in great quantities towards the brain. Once there, they trace a 'lively and distinct' image of the thing,

[2] According to Malebranche's account of the passions, seven steps can be found in each of our passions. Each begins with 'the mind's judgement about an object', i.e. whether it is good or bad for us (OCM II 142/LO 347). Second is the 'determination of the will's impulse towards this object', or away from it, depending on whether it is considered good or bad (OCM II 142/LO 347). This impulse occasions 'a sensation of love, aversion, desire, joy, or sadness', dependent upon the specific representational content of the initial perception (OCM II 144/LO 348).

These three steps, Malebranche stresses, could occur even in beings that lack bodies. However, since for human beings the passions are designed to aid the preservation of the body, there follow further steps in which the body plays a role. The fourth step in the sequence is: 'a new determination of the flow of the spirits and the blood towards the external and internal parts of the body' (OCM II 144/LO 348). This change in the body is mirrored in step 5, which is a 'sensible emotion of the soul' (OCM II 145/LO 349). Step 6 is another sensation, mirroring step 2 in a stronger and livelier form (OCM II 145/LO 349). Finally, the passion terminates in 'a certain sensation of joy, or rather inner delight' (OCM II 145/LO 349).

carving out traces in parts of the brain which have never been struck before (OCM II 189/LO 376). Such lively images attract our attention and make us inquisitive as to the nature of the object.

But wonder is only a preliminary passion and is always followed by a train of other passions:

> Should the objects of our wonder appear great, our wonder is always followed by esteem and sometimes veneration. When they appear small ... it is always accompanied by scorn and sometimes disdain (OCM II 189/LO 376).

Wonder's objects appear great only when they generate a great deal of motion in the animal spirits, which is 'always accompanied by an idea of greatness' (OCM II 198/LO 381, see also OCM II 189/ LO 376). From this:

> … the conclusion is easily drawn that the things that produce a great deal of motion in our spirits must naturally appear greater to us, i.e., stronger, more real, and more perfect than other things, for by greatness I mean all these things and several others (OCM II 198/LO 381).

In this passage, Malebranche makes explicit the comparative angle that is built into wondrous esteem. Whatever causes the greatest motion in the spirits elicits a feeling of esteem, and thereby appears to us more perfect than other things. This sets a standard for greatness which is responsible for generating serious misconceptions about what is of value. First, material objects 'always [produce] much greater traces in the brain and [excite] more violent motion in the spirits' than spiritual or imagined things (OCM II 136/LO 343). Consequently:

> … sensible goods must appear to us greater and more solid than those that are not sensed. A great house, a magnificent retinue, fine furniture, offices, honors, riches, all appear greater and more real than virtue and justice … [when] things are judged only according to the disturbance they excite in our spirits, riches are preferred without fail to virtue (OCM II 198/LO 381)[3].

By contrast, ideas like 'the love of truth, justice, [and] virtue' make so little impact on the animal spirits that our responses to material objects almost entirely obscure their presence (OCM II 139/LO 345). As a result, we come to believe that 'things that are spiritual, or that are not sensed, are practically nothing' (OCM II 199/LO 381). The passionate response elicited by material things explains why esteem-hungry postlapsarians focus on the cultivation of appearances (OCM II 51/LO 290). The insensible possession of spiritual knowledge, for instance, holds no social currency in a fallen world where perfection and greatness attach only to perceptible things. Unless our qualities and advantages are made sensible, they can do nothing to elicit the wonder and esteem of others.

It would be a mistake, however, to think that everything material is capable of generating great motion in the animal spirits. Over the course of the *Search*, Malebranche repeatedly states that it is *rare and extraordinary* things that 'produce greater and more perceptible motion in the spirits' (OCM II 200/LO 382). Our esteem for the rare and extraordinary, he proposes, explains our obsession with both 'what remains to us of antiquity', and 'with what comes from far off' (OCM II 200/LO 382). Postlapsarian subjects, Malebranche laments, are inordinately preoccupied with such objects as 'the medals, arms, and apparel of ancient people' or 'map[s] of ancient Rome' (OCM II

[3] There are obvious resonances here between Malebranche and Hume, who discusses the importance of 'the beauty or deformity of our person, houses, equipage, or furniture, by which we are render'd either vain or humble' in the *Treatise* (T 2.1.5.2, SBN 285). Such objects or qualities, he suggests, are 'either parts of ourselves, or something nearly related to us' (T 2.1.5.2, SBN 285). In a reading that expresses similarities with the Malebranchean account, Pauline Chazan argues that, for Hume, the passions 'disclose the self as possessor of certain qualities and attributes … the self of experience' (1992, p.45).

200/LO 382). What comes from far off, such as the possessions of the Chinese, or maps of 'the roads of Tonking to Nanking', he argues, are equally compelling to us (OCM II 200/LO 382). To generate esteem, objects like these must be extraordinary and relatively rare. The 'worm-eaten slipper of some ancient' (OCM I 282/LO 139), for instance, will only enliven the animal spirits when such an object is also uncommon. The more slippers are unearthed, the less rare and extraordinary they become, and the faster their 'esteem utility' diminishes.

Objects which are marked by the infinite in some way present an interesting sub-category of the rare and extraordinary, and they too elicit our esteem. We are prone to esteeming rare and extraordinary things in virtue of their large size, which makes us associate them with the infinite. This is Malebranche's explanation for postlapsarian astrologers who spend their lives 'hanging on to a telescope' (OCM I 21/LO xl). These individuals are seduced by the magnitude of the celestial bodies, which they associate with the infinite (OCM II 199/LO 382, OCM II 114/LO 331). When it comes to making judgements about scale, postlapsarians rely on the reports of the senses, despite the fact that the senses only tell us 'about the relations our body has with all the bodies surrounding it', and not 'what these bodies are in themselves' (OCM I 186/LO 85). Using ourselves *qua* bodies as 'an absolute standard against which one should measure other things', we take what is larger than ourselves to be absolutely large and to contain the infinite in some way (OCM I 91/LO 31, see also OCM II 114/LO 331). We consider such objects to be rare and extraordinary; they generate great motion in the animal spirits, eliciting wonder, riveting the attention (OCM II 16-17/LO 269-70), and generating a 'great respect and eagerness' for such 'great things' (OCM II 322/453-4).

§3 Acquiring Grandeur

Whilst the passionate make-up of fallen human beings makes them prone to wonder and esteem things around them, this cannot fulfil their desires for grandeur. Postlapsarians desire to possess grandeur themselves. In this section, I consider two, interconnected ways in which they attempt to satisfy this desire. First, they associate themselves with objects that possess grandeur. Second, they utilise these associations to attract the esteem of other people.

To illustrate these mechanisms, I will turn to a group of subjects referred to by Malebranche as faux savants, or ‘counterfeit scholars’ (OCM II 58/LO 295). The faux savants are Malebranche's favourite object of animosity, and they are characterised by their desire to win the esteem of others in virtue of their apparent erudition. To achieve this aim, they present themselves as erudite in ways that cause great motions in the animal spirits of those around them. When it comes to the topics they hold forth upon, the rare and extraordinary is their stock-in-trade. Useful knowledge, made accessible to others in a shared language, is shunned (OCM II 62/LO 297, OCM II 323/LO 454). Instead, faux savants favour the 'vain and exotic sciences', like astronomy or alchemy (OCM II 58/ LO 295). When they apply themselves to philosophy, it is always to the greats of antiquity like Aristotle and Plato, figures whom we are already inclined to esteem because of their great age and their artistic representation as remarkable men (OCM II 202/LO 383). As the faux savants know, apparent knowledge of any uncommon topic is capable of 'elevat[ing] those who possess it’ in the minds of those who are ignorant of it (OCM II 58/LO 295), for in order to be esteemed as learned 'it is sufficient ... to know what others do not know' (OCM II 63/LO 298).

The faux savants take pains to present their knowledge in ways that exploit others' hardwired passionate reactions to the rare and extraordinary. In their books and speech, 'they couch all their explanations in rare and extraordinary terms, and quote only rare and extraordinary authors' (OCM II 69/LO 302). They utilise paradoxes, obscure words, and impressive terms, quoting excessively,

often in languages that neither they nor their listeners understand (OCM II 43/LO 285). Neither do they overlook the power of 'vocal cadence, gesticulation, pleasant mien, and general deportment' (OCM I 178/LO 80), for they know that 'those who listen to them are more affected by the cadence of their speech and by their facial expressions than by the arguments they hear' (OCM II 259-60/LO 417).

We can use the faux savants to illustrate the two ways in which I have suggested that postlapsarians strive to achieve grandeur. I will focus first on the tendency to associate with great things. Central to the possibility of achieving a false grandeur by association is the fact that this quality is slippery and easily transmissible: onlookers can catch grandeur simply by considering an object that possesses it. Using the soul as a mouth piece, Malebranche presents a monologue which illustrates the transient nature of grandeur:

> Now the object of my wonder contains a sensible idea of greatness; I must therefore judge it according to this idea, for greatness must arouse my esteem and love ... Indeed, the pleasure I feel upon viewing the idea representing this object is a natural proof that it is to my benefit to think about it; for, in short, *I seem to become greater myself when I think about it,* and my mind seems to have greater scope when it embraces so great an idea ... *The preservation of this great idea, therefore, involves the preservation of the greatness and perfection of my being*; therefore, my wonder is justified. Indeed, if I were to receive my due, I should cause wonder in others. *Through the relation I have with great things, I am something great*; I possess them to a certain extent through my wonder at them, and I enjoy them as a result of my hope of further possessing them (OCM II 208/LO 387, emphases mine).

The grandeur that attaches to an object of wonder is infectious. When someone wonders at it, its grandeur mushrooms, expanding to include the wonderer themselves. The relationship between the wonderer and the great object, Malebranche suggests, should be understood as a kind of possession. The kind of possession at play here, I want to propose, is of a self-constitutive nature. When we wonder at and esteem something, its grandeur becomes our grandeur. We feel that we possess it in such a way that its qualities become our qualities. What we see here is a fusing of subject and object, so that what we wonder at becomes, in a sense, part of ourselves.

The self-constitutive nature of this process is reinforced by Malebranche's discussion of the faux savants and their favoured authors. These false scholars:

> …imagine that their authors deserve universal admiration. *They regard them as making a single person with themselves*, and from this point of view self-love admirably plays its role. They adroitly and profusely praise their authors, they surround them with halos and light, they fill them with glory, knowing full well that this glory reflects on themselves ... the commentator would not have wrought this apotheosis of his author had he not imagined himself enveloped in the same glory (OCM I 295/LO 147, emphasis mine).

Faux savant and author become fused together in such a way that the author's perceived greatness becomes attached to the commentator too. Their unification thus enables the faux savant to satisfy some of the demands of their love of grandeur by mere association.

We might wonder how Malebranche explains our tendency to acquire the qualities which pertain to other things through association with them. Its basis, he suggests, lies in God's unification of all his

works, such that human beings are linked to everything around them, and are sensitive to every aspect of their surroundings (LO 330). Whilst the theological aspects of this explanation might today strike us as objectionable, the idea that our sense of self-worth is affected by the grandeur or petitesse of the objects with which we are strongly associated is perceptive and plausible. Postlapsarians do not always realise that they are connected to things around them. The strong and lively passionate connections that we have to certain objects often obscure the comparatively weaker connections that we have to others, rendering the majority of these bonds imperceptible. The process is analogous to the way in which we are convinced that our selves are material. Whilst our soul is united to every part of our body, the fact that we rarely feel sensations in some parts of it means that we can forget that we are united to them. Since we often feel strong sensations in our skin and muscles, for example, we never overlook the fact that these things are part of us. But such strong sensations obscure the much weaker connections the soul experiences as a result of its unity with other parts of the body, like the heart and the brain. As a result, Malebranche thinks, we often overlook the fact that we are united to them (OCM II 115/LO 331).

Similarly, in the case of our unity with all God's works, our strong passions for certain aspects of the world—especially other human beings—render our connections with them evident. However, these few powerful passions consume our attention, so that we often fail to realise that, as with the soul's ties to the parts of the body, our connections to the material world are universal. We are linked even to the stars and the moon, Malebranche argues, and if we were to turn our attention to them, we should experience pleasure in the occurrence of eclipses (OCM II 115/LO 331).

While God has joined us to everything around us, he has made our sensitivity to other people particularly acute. As a result:

> ... their ills naturally afflict us, their joy pleases us, their grandeur, their abasement, their decline, seem to augment or diminish our own being. New honours for our friends and relatives, new acquisitions by those most closely related to us, the conquests and victories of our prince, and even the recent discoveries of the New World, seem to add something to our substance (OCM II 114/LO 330).

Whether we flourish or languish, this all suggests, does not depend only on ourselves. Instead, Malebranche's contention that we are *joined* to everything around us reveals that how we fare depends on the flourishing or languishing of things outside ourselves, too.

We are most powerfully affected by what we have strong passions for. In such cases, the state of that thing so strongly affects how we ourselves prosper that we consider such a thing to be a part of ourselves, as the faux savant regards their author as making a single person with them (OCM I 295/ LO 147). We should not take Malebranche too literally here. A faux savant does not lose their grip on reality, believing themselves to have actually *become,* for instance, Plato or Aristotle. Nor does the awe-struck astronomer consider themselves to have become part-planet in any literal sense. Rather, we should interpret Malebranche as advancing the more plausible thesis that our self-conception is highly dependent on the company that we keep and the social value of those things with which we are strongly connected. The falsely erudite faux savant does not believe that he is Aristotle, but he is aware that his standing in society and the esteem that he attracts will closely track Aristotle's cultural cachet.

Although our sense of grandeur is augmented by what we are closely associated with, Malebranche's fixation on the postlapsarian pursuit of esteem drives home the point that association with great things is not sufficient for satisfying the love of grandeur. Rather, this fixation should

lead us to recognise that he also proposes a second, distinctly *social*, way in which postlapsarians strive to enhance their sense of greatness: in order to satisfy their love of grandeur, postlapsarians require esteem from other subjects. This is because the love of grandeur, as my initial discussion of this inclination emphasised, encompasses a desire for independence associated with positions of authority or elevation over others. We consider ourselves as occupying such positions only when others' esteem confirms our relative perfection. This need for the affirmation of others is underlined towards the end of the soul's monologue. The soul's attention is not captured by the great object it considers, nor by the greatness it accrues via association with it. Instead, the soul's attention shifts to consider how its association with great things modifies the way others perceive it: 'if I were to receive my due', it muses, 'I should cause wonder in others' (OCM II 208/LO 387). Malebranche thus reveals the inherently social nature of the love of grandeur generated by self-love. By cultivating relationships with great things, we seek not only to share in their grandeur, but to augment the way in which we appear to others in order to attract their esteem.

In order to understand how the faux savants acquire a sense of grandeur by eliciting the esteem of others, we must acknowledge the contagious nature of the passions. As objects of esteem or contempt, we are immersed in multi-layered passionate exchanges with other subjects. Like grandeur, the passions are contagious states which traverse the boundaries between persons, and because we are so closely bound to other subjects, we are especially porous to their emotional condition (OCM II 114/LO 330). Malebranche's view of these interactions has seen a variety of different interpretations (see Schmitter (2012); Walsh and McIntyre (2022), James (2005, 1996)). Following James (2005), I understand Malebranche to present 'two separate patterns of sympathy': one in which 'the passion expressed by one person arouses the same passion in someone else', another in which 'an initial passion is answered by a different one' (2005, p.113). These patterns of passionate transference play an important role in satisfying the postlapsarian desire for esteem.

First, postlapsarian subjects demonstrate a susceptibility for "like-for-like" passionate contagion. 'We cannot see a man moved by some passion', Malebranche states, 'without receiving an impression of that passion'—that is, without to some extent experiencing this passion ourselves (OCM II 192/LO 378). Malebranche makes it evident that this is a mechanical—and thus *involuntary*—process (OCM II 191/LO 377)[4]. Passionate contagion bypasses a number of the standard stages present in the average passion. When one involuntarily catches a passion, the experience does not begin with a judgement, but with a communicated motion of the spirits. Whereas the mind is, at least in theory, sometimes able to refrain from making the judgements which generate passions, the body cannot refrain from catching the motions mechanically communicated to it by another. The sensible appearance of another's passionate joy mechanically arranges the motions of onlookers' spirits in the same fashion, so that they put on similar expressions (OCM II 191/LO 377). These motions then occasion a sensible emotion in the soul, in this case one of joy[5].

When a faux savant observes the esteem that others feel for them, they cannot help but surrender to this passion themselves. The esteeming demeanours of their admirers generate similar motions in the faux savant's animal spirits, arranging their bodies and faces in a similar fashion, so that they

[4] As such, this process is clearly intended to be understood as distinct from what Malebranche refers to as our knowledge of other minds 'through conjecture' in Book 3 (OCM I 454/LO 239). We can only know other minds by conjecture, he explains, because it is only our own mind that we know through consciousness. It is mere conjecture that the souls of others are broadly speaking the same as our own: that they have access to the same truths, that they 'love pleasure and good' and 'abhor pain and evil' (OCM I 454/LO 239). Conjecture about others—for instance, when we assume that others experience pleasure in the same things, or tastes in the same way—is 'liable to error' and often mistaken (OCM I 455/LO 239). However, Malebranche's description of the involuntary way in which we are affected by the passions of others, through the mimicking of the animal spirits, does not appear to leave room for the same degree of error (OCM II 191/LO 377).

[5] Thus outlined, Malebranche's account of the transmission of passions from one individual to another via the involuntary communication of the motions of the animal spirits functions as a form of contagion. Contagion models, as Lenz has argued in the context of Hume's account of sympathy, are more tenable than inferential models, which suppose that, in adopting the passions of another, we first draw an inference as to the passion by which they are affected, and only then come to feel the passion itself (2020, p. 184). This is because they avoid avoid 'implausible form[s] of intellectualism that would seem to require (conscious) access to the ideas that are to be turned into emotions' (Lenz 2020, p. 184). Intellectual inference models struggle to account for the transmission of emotions in infants and children, as well as the tendency for adults to share in emotions against their will.

‘assume a dominant and decisive bearing’ (OCM II 193/LO 378). Such motions of the spirits generate the passion itself, so that our faux savants come to feel an enhanced self-esteem. This passion, in turn, is liable to spread esteem to others. Crucially, like-for-like passionate contagion means that the admirer catches the esteem of the faux savant, so that the economy of esteem is never a completely zero sum game. The relationship between a faux savant and an admirer enhances the latter's ability to attract esteem in a further way, too. Through mere association with a great person, an admirer feels themselves great (see OCM II 208/LO 387). In virtue of their relationship with a faux savant, they become worthy of the esteem of those beneath them on the social ladder, where similarly patterned passionate exchanges are duplicated in kind.

The postlapsarian tendency towards comparison generates a second kind of passionate exchange. Whilst an admirer benefits from a faux savant's self-esteem, the latter's haughty and dominant bearing also effects a comparison between the faux savant and admirer which highlights the admirer's inadequacies. This ‘naturally produces humility’ in the admirer (OCM II 190/LO 376). Contrary-wise, the faux savant’s (or other superior's) esteem is further bolstered by such a comparison (James 2005, p. 113). Thus, whilst like-for-like passionate contagion mechanisms work towards a more equal division of desirable passions between superiors and inferiors, somewhat stabilising these unequal relationships, the opposing passions produced by comparison pull in the opposite direction. Such relationships, although perhaps relatively stable, thus always remain highly charged.

I have moved from examining the postlapsarian tendency for wondering at and esteeming grandiose objects, to considering how subjects elicit the esteem of those around them. In order to satisfy their love of grandeur, I have argued, postlapsarians seek confirmation of their greatness in the form of esteem. The reception of this passion confirms for us our relative perfection, thus satisfying the

inclination all postlapsarians experience 'towards everything that raises us above others' (OCM II 50/LO 290). In turn, this sense of relative perfection enables us to feel authoritative in relation to, and independent of, subjects who possess less grandeur than we do. It thus seems to satisfy the desire for greatness which is central to the love of grandeur.

But here, a problem arises. It is not clear that receiving esteem from others, and esteeming oneself, is sufficient to satisfy our desire for grandeur. Malebranche suggests a high degree of motivational transparency when he tells us that the faux savants speak simply ‘in order to be admired’ or ‘esteemed as learned’ (OCM II 69/LO 302). These false scholars covet only that people ‘at least believe they truly possess’ knowledge (OCM II 50/LO 290) and ‘only want to appear to have read a great deal’ (OCM II 70/LO 303). That is, in Malebranche's opinion, as I have already argued, the appearance of erudition cultivated by faux savants is a self-conscious ploy. Can a faux savant truly believe in their own greatness when they are conscious of having elicited esteem on the basis of a carefully cultivated illusion? These characters, it seems, remain problematically aware of their dissimulation and thus the hollowness of their grandeur[6]. Given this, how can the esteem of others go any way towards affording them a sense of their own greatness?

§4 From Contagious Passions to Contagious Opinions

It is the way in which Malebranche circumvents this problem that enables us to see him as a theorist of recognition. His solution brings to the fore his conception of postlapsarian subjects as profoundly porous, not only to the passions of others, but to the opinions lying behind these passions. In sympathising with others' opinions of themselves, postlapsarians come to understand themselves through the eyes of other subjects. They thereby engage in a process of *self-forgetting* that conceals

[6] This may not be a problem in all cases. The rich postlapsarian who attracts esteem by manifesting their wealth in opulent clothing and jewels does not engage in dissimulation. But Malebranche speaks of the tendency to cultivate an appearance of greatness, not as something limited to the faux savants, but as a widespread feature of postlapsarian life.

—even from themselves—the deceptive means through which they have secured esteem. In the process, they acquire a self-conception which is throughly intersubjective.

Our tendency to share in the opinions of others is the result of three distinct mechanisms. The first is the self-justification of the passions. Malebranche's contention that the passions always justify themselves adds an epistemic angle to passionate contagion, and creates subjects who are alike both affectively and doxastically[7]. This epistemic dimension of the passionate exchanges to which postlapsarian subjects are prone has received little scholarly attention. Two further mechanisms—the tendency to adopt the views of those with contagious imaginations, and the postlapsarian proclivity for accepting any views that flatter self-love—function so as to convey additional opinions between subjects. Before outlining how these mechanisms enable our faux savants to engage in a process of self-forgetting, this section outlines these three mechanisms in turn.

I will begin by considering the epistemic effects of passionate interactions. In Book 5, Malebranche proposes that 'all the passions seek their own justification' (OCM II 228/LO 399). Whenever we experience a passion, he believes, we are prone to make judgements which justify it (OCM II 179-80/LO 370-1, see also OCM III 124/LO 610). 'When we are moved by a passionate love for someone', for instance, 'we judge that everything about him deserves to be loved' (OCM II 180/LO 370). When combined with our susceptibility to like-for-like passionate contagion, the self-justification of the passions has significant epistemic consequences. It means that we are prone, not only to catching the affective states of others, but also to adopting their justifications: our susceptibility to passionate contagion is a susceptibility to doxastic contagion.

Consider, by way of an example, the faux savant who passionately conveys his deep esteem for the opinions of Aristotle to those around him. This esteem is highly contagious. When other subjects catch it, their passionate make-up becomes akin to the faux savant's: they too feel a deep esteem for Aristotle and his philosophy. Because the passions justify themselves, those who have caught this esteem for Aristotle look to justify it by forming judgements which legitimate the passion. That is, the passions ‘unceasingly represent to the soul the object agitating it in the way most likely to maintain and increase its agitation’ (OCM II 225/LO 397; see also OCM III 124/LO 610). A caught esteem for Aristotle leads one to form justificatory judgements which prolong the esteem: that Aristotle possesses greatness, for instance, or unparalleled erudition.

These justificatory judgements will be similar in content to those held by the subject from whom we caught the passion. As a result, they function so as to assimilate subjects: when we are affected by the 'contagion' of another's imagination, Malebranche explains, we are made ‘to some extent like them’ (OCM III 124/LO 610). As Moriarty puts it, we adopt the passions and justifying judgements of others as ‘part of ourselves’ (2003, p.199). This is born out in a reluctance to criticise the other person involved, because to do so would be to also ‘condemn ourselves’ (OCM III 124/LO 610).

The result of this assimilation of others' passions and reasons, as Moriarty draws out, is the merging of self and other. A new identity is formed which is fundamentally intersubjective:

> ... a new self has been created by the infection of [another’s] passion, and we belatedly give voice and legitimacy to this new self—we accept it as our self—by upholding [another’s] vision, now ours, and resisting criticism of the [other] as aggression against ourselves. Again, the imagination is the channel of a restructuring of identity, a blurring of the boundaries between ourselves and the other. Through it,

> we become other than ourselves, or to ourselves. But it could also be said that we become other selves (2003, p.199).

The extent to which our identity is restructured by our acceptance of the passions and opinions of others is often marked and extensive. As Malebranche has stressed, we tend to involuntarily sympathise with any passion that we observe. The passions and opinions of others do not occupy a meagre portion of our mental landscape. Rather, they come to dominate it. A huge proportion of our affective make up and beliefs are to be explained, not by reference to our own autonomous activity, but by our disposition to yield to the passions and opinions of those around us. The extent of this assimilation is revealed more clearly when we recognise that it is not just the self-justification of the passions that makes opinions contagious. There are two further mechanisms at work which also help to explain the postlapsarian tendency to adopt the opinions of others.

The second mechanism is the effect of strong and contagious imaginations. Malebranche presents us with a physiological explanation as to why some individuals' imaginations are especially strong and contagious. Certain individuals possess brains of such a quality that the animal spirits form 'very deep vestiges and traces' in them, leading the soul to focus myopically only on the ideas represented by these traces (OCM I 323/LO 162). When such traces are created by disordered animal spirits, individuals become mad; but when they are the result of a particular quality of brain substance, subjects exhibit a milder form of madness which makes them 'visionaries' (OCM I 326/ LO 164). The physiology of visionaries is unsuited to the discovery of truth. When a few objects carve very deep traces in their brains, their attention is entirely occupied by them, so that 'they are not free to think of many things at once' and are 'incapable of making sound judgments' (OCM I 325/LO 164). Instead, such minds are awash with overblown wonder, vehement passions, and biased opinions (OCM I 327-8/LO 165). Unhelpfully, the vivacity of their ideas is equally matched

by the vivacity with which they express them. The deep traces in their brains are followed by a turbulence in the spirits which engages the whole body in communication. They present their ideas in such a lively manner that they become 'very persuasive' and extremely contagious (OCM I 328/ LO 165), spreading 'to the majority of minds with great ease' (OCM I 330/LO 166).

It is this quality of mind, Malebranche proposes, that accounts for the transference of ideas from superiors to their inferiors, parents to children, masters to servants, and kings to courtiers. Indeed, the possession of a lively imagination helps to explain how certain individuals attain positions of authority: they possess the ability to convince others of their views, including their belief that they have a claim to a superior position. The visionary minds of these individuals 'cause the minds of those who hear what [they say] to believe strongly without understanding what they believe' (OCM I 339/LO 171). According to Malebranche, Tertullian is an irritating case-in-point: the 'charm and flair' of his strong imagination 'dazzles the minds of most people', so that his ideas 'enter … penetrate … and dominate the soul in a manner so imperious that they are obeyed without being understood' (OCM I 341/LO 173). The outsized influence that such visionaries wield enables them to populate the minds of those around them with whatever opinions they currently hold. The result is widespread epistemic uniformity—a razing of the intellectual landscape.

The tendency to adopt the opinions proclaimed by those with strong and contagious imaginations mirrors, in a sense, the process of the self-justification of the passions. The action of the latter, as I have described it, functions so as to render subjects epistemically alike by inclining them to justify their caught passions in similar ways to those with whom the passions originate. The action of strong imaginations merely reverses the order of this process. Subjects begin by catching the opinions articulated by those with strong and contagious imaginations. But the content of these caught opinions is never considered dispassionately. Like other beliefs, caught opinions will trigger

emotional responses relevant to their content, thus making subjects passionately alike. The caught belief that Aristotle is great, for instance, will generate the passion of esteem, in a process which mirrors that of the self-justification of the passions.

The third and final mechanism which encourages the imitation of opinion is grounded in the soul's love of grandeur. Our ineradicable longing for greatness 'excite[s] us to speak, walk, dress and comport ourselves with the air of people of quality', in the hope of acquiring the qualities that confer upon them their grandeur (OCM I 322/LO 162). Through this secret weakness for imitation, postlapsarians take grandiose individuals as models, not only as to their appearance and manners, but also as to their beliefs.

Sometimes, this is a conscious strategy. Malebranche is not blind to the fact that many individuals possess little epistemic integrity and make sport with the truth by simply adopting the views of those who are well-placed enough to reward them for it. When we stand to gain something from someone, postlapsarians reason, we would be 'an ingrate and a fool' to 'fail to applaud' their views (OCM II 122/LO 335). Similarly, inferiors calculate, the emulation of their superiors offers them the chance to 'share in their greatness' (OCM I 333/LO 168). 'The great', they believe, 'know everything by nature; they are always right, even if they decide questions about which they know nothing' (OCM I 333/LO 168). But the persuasive influence of grandiose superiors does not only rely on the tendency of inferiors to engage in conscious emulation. As I noted above, such superiors also tend to possess strong and contagious imaginations. This gives them such extensive power over the minds of those beneath them that they can 'change vices into virtues, and virtues into vices' (OCM I 336/LO 170).

I have explored three Malebranchean mechanisms which account for our postlapsarian tendency to adopt the opinions of others. By justifying our caught passions, blindly accepting the views of the grandiose, and being swayed by the opinions of those with strong and contagious imaginations, postlapsarians are rendered highly porous to the opinions of others, thinning and blurring the boundaries between subjects. In fact, postlapsarian opinions are so strongly dependent on the views of authoritative and imaginative people that it is 'as if Circe transforms them into different men' (OCM I 336/LO 169). Malebranche's preoccupation with these dispositions reveals his concern to paint a picture of the postlapsarian mind as deeply intersubjective. Far from being individualistic, atomistic, or essentially disembodied, the minds of postlapsarian subjects are social through and through. In order to explain the origin of the mind's ideas, Malebranche is clear, we must look to the ideas that preoccupy influential others.

§5 Self-Forgetting: The Intersubjectivity of Postlapsarian Identity

I have already argued for an understanding of the Malebranchean mind as intersubjective. I now want to show that this is particularly true of our ideas about ourselves. Postlapsarian identity, I shall argue, is deeply dependent on our passionate relationships with other subjects, from whom we absorb opinions about our own qualities.

To further elucidate the formation of postlapsarian subjectivity, I will return to the relationship between a faux savant and their admirers. The self-conceptions of both parties to this relationship are modified by the way they imagine themselves to be perceived by the other. As I showed in §3, interactions between superiors and inferiors are shot through with contagious passions. First, we see like-for-like passionate contagion: the esteem in which the admirer holds the faux savant is transmitted to the faux savant themselves, enhancing their self-esteem. Next, because the passions

seek their own justification, the communication of passions goes along with the communication of opinions. In light of his caught self-esteem, the faux savant automatically begins to form judgements about the object of esteem (that is, himself) which justify and prolong it. Thus, our faux savant judges *that they possess true grandeur*, *that they are superior*, *that they have authority over others*. These judgements resemble those that their admirers hold about them—they 'uphold another's vision', as Moriarty puts it (2003, p.199). This communication of opinions not only engenders a merging between subjects, it also encourages our faux savant to understand himself, not through the autonomously formed ideas of an individual and atomistic mind, but through socially acquired ideas which are the product of involuntary mechanisms.

In the first place, the flattering, other-originating beliefs which are acquired through the self-justification of the passions erase the faux savants' awareness of having engaged in dissimulation in order to elicit the esteem of others. At the same time, other mechanisms produce the same effect. Consider this passage from the *Treatise on Ethics*:

> When he speaks, because he speaks well, everyone listens with pleasure; since he advances only certain sense truths, which are in reality falsehoods … everyone applauds him. But a man who knows, or rather, who feels, by the way people look at him, that they admire, love, honour and revere him, can he then distrust these thoughts, persuade himself that he is mistaken, and not tie himself, not merely to his own enchanting visions, but to this world which applauds him, these friends who caress him, these disciples who adore him (OCM XI 141/CW 131)?

In the passage above, Malebranche suggests that the faux savants enjoy a far-reaching influence over the opinions of other subjects. Furthermore, one of the consequences of this influence is that it

comes to change how such superiors think of themselves. Whilst a faux savant might in principle aim to present an erudite appearance by intentionally disseminating falsehoods, the way others respond to them changes the way they conceptualise their pseudo-knowledge (OCM XI 141/CW 131). The obsequious demeanour of their admirers, their tendency to 'indifferently and loosely approve all their thoughts', are flattering to the faux savant's self-love (OCM II 122/LO 335, see also OCM I 287/LO 141). Consequently, the faux savant becomes convinced that the falsehoods from which they began are in fact truths; that they are infallible and 'more intelligent than others' (OCM II 122/LO 335). Like the self-constitutive opinions acquired via the self-justification of the passions, the faux savant's belief in their intellectual abilities and knowledge has its origin outside themselves.

The intersubjective nature of a faux savant's subjectivity resolves their problematic awareness of engaging in dissimulation. Through the concerted action of the three mechanisms for opinion transfer, our superiors are furnished with intersubjectively-derived notions of their own identity. Because they acquire an understanding of their own qualities by mimicking the way others see them, and allow flattery to persuade them of the truth of all their opinions, the way in which such postlapsarians conceive of themselves undergoes a transformation. They find themselves engaged in a process of *self-forgetting*.

When it comes to their conception of their own qualities, the faux savant takes the views of others as authoritative. When a faux savant justifies his caught passions by forming beliefs about his grandeur, perfection, and superiority, these beliefs act as a powerful cloak for his original conception of his own qualities. His awareness of the strategic dissimulation through which he elicited the esteem of others is replaced by a conception of himself as really possessing these qualities. At the same time, intoxicated by flattery, he becomes convinced that his knowingly

peddled falsehoods are important truths that all should learn. Our faux savant is no longer, in their own eyes, masquerading as a scholar: they are a scholar, and they really do possess more knowledge than others. As a result, they consider themselves to truly possess grandeur.

This new, intersubjective self is, of course, illusory. As Malebranche makes clear, it is constructed by the imagination:

> ...when [a person] spreads himself out to the world, seeks status, makes friends, acquires a reputation, then his idea of himself expands and inflates his imagination (OCM XI 145/CW 133).

If one does not continue to maintain one's superior status amongst admirers by effectively courting their esteem, it is not just the trappings of social success that are at risk. Rather, because our self-conceptions are so deeply rooted in the opinions that others hold of us, our very selves are threatened.

§6 Conclusion

I have argued for a reading of Malebranche's treatment of the nature of the self which puts him at odds with those who suppose that the early modern period was exhausted by individualistic and atomistic conceptions of subjectivity. I began, in Chapter 4, by arguing that the love of pleasure generates an understanding of oneself as a bodily subject. In this chapter, I have argued that the love of grandeur generates a further aspect of Malebranchean subjectivity: a deeply social and intersubjective postlapsarian conception of the self.

Over the course of this chapter, I have outlined aspects of Malebranche's treatment of postlapsarian identity that are crucial to his relevance as a theorist of recognition: his acknowledgement of our deep-seated desires for esteem; his account of the mechanisms which underpin our tendency to accept the opinions of other subjects; and lastly the processes through which we allow others' opinions to mould the way we understand ourselves. Malebranche's preoccupation with the postlapsarian need for esteem should immediately alert us to the potentiality for his relevance to the history of recognition theory. As I discussed in Chapter 1, contemporary recognition theorists understand the reception of sufficient esteem from others to be crucial for undistorted identity formation. Whilst Malebranche recognises subjects' deep-seated need for esteem, he reverses this normative claim. It is not only that, in his eyes, the desire for esteem warps postlapsarian values and activities, encouraging a focus on the appearance of valued qualities at the expense of truly possessing them. It is also that the beliefs acquired through the self-justification of caught esteem form the basis of a new, illusory, and distorted intersubjective conception of the self.

In the next chapter, I will draw out in more detail the affinities and disparities between the Malebranchean approach to intersubjectivity and that of contemporary recognition theory, underlining Malebranche's claim to inclusion in the concept's history.

Chapter 6 Malebranchean Misrecognition and Contemporary Recognition Theory

I have outlined two Malebranchean conceptions of the self which give the lie to the assumption that he subscribed to the caricatured version of Cartesianism that informs the Traditional View. Malebranchean subjectivity, I have argued, is not limited to an idea of the self as an autonomous and disembodied mind. Rather, as I have sought to show in the previous two chapters, the *Search After Truth* outlines multiple conceptions of the self, including an intersubjective conception. This chapter will bring my argument to its conclusion by further clarifying the ways in which Malebranche's treatment of fallen subjectivity sits within recognition's history.

In Chapter 5, I argued that the postlapsarian desire for esteem, alongside our overdetermined tendency for uncritically accepting the opinions of others, engenders the production of false and illusory self-conceptions. I begin this chapter, in §1, by addressing a question that is prompted by talk of false selves: if our self-conceptions are erroneous, then what constitutes true self-knowledge? In response, I outline an account of the nature of Malebranchean self-knowledge, and how it can be acquired.

In the remainder of the chapter, I look to clarify and develop the nature of Malebranche's place in the history of recognition theory by broadening the basis upon which his inclusion is premised. Whilst his appreciation of the postlapsarian need for esteem and his account of fallen subjectivity are sufficient grounds for his inclusion, I argue that he also proposes a complex understanding of the nature of *misrecognition,* which further justifies his place in a genealogical history of theories of recognition.

This concluding section of my argument proceeds as follows. In §2, I draw attention to the positivity of Honneth's theory of recognition, and underline some of the oversimplifications implicit in his conception of misrecognition. In §3, I propose that Malebranche's account of recognition offers us ways of overcoming this deficiency. I outline four ways in which Malebranchean misrecognition throws doubt on the Honnethian claim that experiences of misrecognition lead individuals to struggle for more appropriate forms of recognition, and thus onto the idea that misrecognition can act as a catalyst for moral progress.

In sum, my examination of Malebranchean misrecognition not only strengthens the argument for his inclusion in recognition's history. It also exemplifies the way in which genealogies can act as a type of denaturalising critique. In this case, Malebranchean misrecognition reveals the contingent and contestable nature of Honneth's positive theory of recognition.

§1 Self-Knowledge

In Chapter 3, I drew on Michael Moriarty's characterisation of Malebranchean self-knowledge as 'problematic' (2006, p.95). In this characterisation, Moriarty draws attention to the fact that postlapsarian Malebranchean subjects experience real difficulty in identifying their own fundamental nature (2006, p.95). As Malebranche confirms in the tenth *Elucidation*: 'we do not know ourselves … We are but shadows to ourselves' (OCM III 150/LO 626). The self-conceptions that we acquire from our pursuit of pleasure and worldly status clearly leave much to be desired.

Malebranche regards the acquisition of self-knowledge as an unqualified good. 'The most beautiful, the most pleasant, and the most necessary of all our knowledge', he admonishes us, 'is, undoubtably,

the knowledge of ourselves' (OCM I 20/LO xxxix). Whilst it is hard to attain, Malebranche constantly emphasises its value:

> …we must understand ourselves and the other men with whom we must live as well as we can. Then we shall know how to guide and preserve ourselves in the happiest and most perfect state we can attain, according to the order of nature and the rules of the gospel. And we shall be able to live with other men, knowing precisely both how to use them for our needs, and how to help them in their miseries (OCM I 214-215/ LO 101).

Malebranchean self-knowledge appears to fall into the category that Ursula Renz has termed 'Socratic self-knowledge' (2017, p.257). Such approaches understand knowledge of the self as 'anthropological knowledge or knowledge of the human condition', the realisation of which is a personal achievement attainable only through the application of real effort (Renz 2017, p.257). With its attainment, Renz argues, comes knowledge 'of the condition of morality' (2017, p.257). Correspondingly, as Malebranche emphasises above, only when we understand ourselves correctly can we attain true happiness and perfection, and learn to co-exist in harmony with others.

Malebranchean self-knowledge has two strands. The first is constituted by metaphysical facts about the self, and its relations with the world and God. The second concerns morality: an account of what constitutes perfection and happiness. I will explore each in turn, beginning with the metaphysical picture.

For Malebranche, metaphysical self-knowledge must begin with an acknowledgment of the Fall and its consequences. In punishment for Original Sin, the soul's relationship with God has been

weakened and its reliance on the body has been correspondingly strengthened. The consequences of this separation were discussed in Chapter 4. A picture of the world informed by the reports of the senses eclipses God's ubiquitous activity, obscuring even the soul's weak relationship with him. In acknowledging the Fall, we thereby acknowledge our tendency to reason on the basis of the misleading testimony of the senses, and see that we must learn to dismiss their fallacious reports. Metaphysical self-knowledge must begin, not from the senses, but from clear and distinct ideas.

When it comes to the acquisition of such self-knowledge, the *Dialogues on Metaphysics and on Religion* is particularly instructive. It is clear from the first dialogue that the path to knowledge, including knowledge of oneself, involves an inward turn (OCM XII 32/JS 5). Malebranche's spokesman, Theodore, guides his postlapsarian student, Aristes, away from the misleading testimony of the senses, admonishing him to forget that he even has a body (OCM XII 32/JS 5). With Aristes' attention secured, Theodore begins with 'the foundation of the principal tenets of philosophy': the distinction between the soul and the body (OCM XII 32-3/JS 6-8). Having acquired an understanding of body as mere extension in three dimensions, Aristes can begin to replace his experiential, sense-based understanding of the world with a veridical one.

First, our clear and distinct understanding of body must lead us to acknowledge that, despite the reports of the senses, secondary qualities cannot really be modifications of material objects. Rather, they can only be modifications of our souls. Second, it reveals to us that bodies themselves possess no power of their own. We must rectify our understanding of the nature of secondary causes by recognising that 'all natural causes are not *true* causes but only *occasional* causes' (OCM II 312/LO 448). Although his activity is imperceptible to the senses, it is God who is responsible for the changes that we observe. Self-understanding demands an awareness of our (almost) complete causal

impotence[1]. A fundamental aspect of self-knowledge is founded on the development of a sensitivity to two things: our deep dependence upon our own bodies and upon God. Once we acknowledge the fact of Original Sin and its consequences, we will appreciate and understand the soul's lamentable dependency on the body, the senses, and the imagination at the expense of reason. Whilst we might comprehend the falsity of the testimony of the senses, attaining self-knowledge requires the acknowledgement that we retain an on-going susceptibility to their reports (OCM II 78-79/LO 308). Second, self-knowledge must also include an awareness of our almost complete dependency upon God.

An awareness of these deep dependencies, combined with an appreciation of the metaphysical reality which underlies misleading appearances, enables us to realise the second aspect of self-knowledge: the nature and demands of morality. In the previous two chapters, I have examined how the love of pleasure and the love of grandeur function in disordered ways. The postlapsarian's attempts to satisfy their desire for happiness by accumulating and enjoying material goods is doomed to failure: material goods are inconstant, and our relentless search for them fills us with restlessness and anxiety. The postlapsarian's disordered attempts to satisfy their desire for grandeur is similarly bedevilled. As Chapter 5 explained, the postlapsarian's pursuit of grandeur leads to a focus on cultivating the mere appearance of worldly perfections. Desperate to outdo others, the competitive pursuit of esteem takes on the aspect of a rat-race. As a result, the attainment of pleasure and the attainment of (false) grandeur are often discordant: 'it often happens', Malebranche explains, 'that one becomes miserable in proportion to the increase in one's grandeur' (OCM II 48/ LO 288).

[1] *Almost*, because we still retain, Malebranche believes, the freedom of the will (see OCM I 46/LO 5).

But self-love, when it is enlightened, is also the root of virtue. A veridical understanding of metaphysical truths, including our utter dependence on God in all things, enables us to enlighten our self-love, reforming the way we seek happiness and grandeur. Let us take the pursuit of happiness first. Once we have acknowledged the truth of Occasionalism, we see that God is the cause of the sensations of pleasure and pain that we feel in the presence of material objects. God alone, therefore, is capable of making us happy. This, Malebranche argues, must have consequences for the way in which we direct our love. A 'brutal man', he explains, 'loves the object of his passion with love *as union* because, regarding this object as the cause of his happiness, he wishes to be united with it in order that that object might act in him and make him happy' (OCM XI 42/CW 62). To direct our love as union towards material objects (or, indeed, other human beings) is a postlapsarian moral error which is corrected by metaphysical knowledge. Since only God can act in us and make us happy, 'all love *as union* must strive towards God' (OCM XI 42/CW 62). The pleasant taste of wine, for instance, must lead us towards a love, not of wine itself, but of God, for causing such pleasure in us.

Whilst correctly orienting our love as union towards God marks an improvement, it does not entirely solve the problem. A truly enlightened love of pleasure also sacrifices momentary pleasures —like the taste of wine—in the service of seeking a solid happiness. How is this to be achieved? The desire for happiness which flows from self-love, Malebranche argues, must 'make us conform to Order' (OCM XI 91/CW 98). Only God is capable of generating a solid, lasting happiness in us, and he is moved to do this when a human being conforms their will to Order and thereby 'works at his own perfection and makes himself to resemble God' (OCM XI 23/CW 48).

It is therefore essential to know how we should work towards perfection. Malebranche is clear that 'virtue, or man's perfection consists in submission to the immutable Order' (OCM XI 17/CW 45).

Order is constituted, in part, by *relations of perfection*, which quantify the amount of perfection a thing possesses in comparison with other things. To submit to Order is to see that these relations of perfection must entirely govern one's esteem. It should thus become evident to the postlapsarian that they have hitherto misunderstood this passion. We should not seek to satisfy our desire for grandeur (or perfection) by attracting the esteem of others, but rather by properly governing the esteem that we show to other parts of God's creation, esteeming them in line with the perfection they possess. 'What makes a man moral', Malebranche confirms, 'is that he loves order and conforms his will to it in all things' (OCM III 137/LO 618). Whilst this might sound rather esoteric, Malebranche maintains that 'this Order is not unknown to us': everyone knows, for instance, that a friend is to be valued more than a dog (OCM III 129/LO 613). However, whilst everyone has some grasp of the truths contained in Order, postlapsarians do not understand the role that Order plays in the attainment of perfection. They do not know that their perfection is dependent upon the extent to which they ensure their esteem is regulated by Order.

We can now bring the love of pleasure and love of grandeur together. Only God, we have said, is capable of furnishing us with a solid and lasting happiness. He is moved to do so, Malebranche argues, when a subject 'works at their perfection' in the manner just outlined, and in doing so 'makes himself to resemble God' (OCM XI 23/CW 48). The happiness that God confers upon a subject depends upon the extent to which they succeed in resembling him. 'God loves beings in proportion as they are lovable, and since the most perfect are the most lovable, the most perfect will be the most powerful, the most happy and the most content' (OCM XI 23/CW 48). By making happiness proportionate to perfection in this way, the relationship between these two strands of self-love is corrected. Whereas the disordered postlapsarian often trades a position of superiority, which they mistake for greatness, for a decrease in happiness, when self-love is enlightened, perfection and happiness are appropriately intertwined once again.

The final piece of the puzzle of self-knowledge concerns harmonious social co-existence. When we come to understand ourselves, Malebranche says, 'we shall [also] be able to live with other men' (OCM I 214-215/LO 101). Self-knowledge, it is suggested, reforms the way in which we relate to others. Disordered self-love encourages interpersonal relationships which are necessarily antagonistic: in the search for pleasure and perfection, others are primarily seen as competitors in our pursuit of material goods and esteem, both of which are in limited supply. But an enlightened self-love seeks *true goods*, so-called because 'we [can] possess them without dividing them up' (OCM XI 41/CW 61). Consequently, our attitude towards other subjects is reformed. By attaining self-knowledge and transforming self-love, our relationship with others ceases to be antagonistic and can instead become collaborative (OCM XI 195/CW 169). It becomes possible to 'love [other] men as co-heirs of the true goods' (OCM XI 41/CW 61).

This account of self-knowledge shows just how far postlapsarians err when they attempt to satisfy their self-love through the attainment of the positional good of relative perfection. Whilst fully reforming one's approach to happiness and perfection is impossible in this life—at least without grace—Malebranche is adamant that working towards self-knowledge is central to human happiness.

Malebranche's account of self-knowledge points to further ways in which his philosophy might contribute to the history of recognition theory. There is more to be said, for instance, about the role that recognition plays for the subject in possession of enlightened self-love. We might argue that Malebranche presents a *positive* account of the need for esteem when he proposes that all beings should receive esteem in proportion with the perfection they possess. Further, recognition from God of our degree of perfection, and his provision of the happiness appropriate to it, appears to be a

crucial aspect of the Malebranchean picture of enlightened self-love. I will leave the exploration of these questions to later work.

In the next section, I return to Malebranche's postlapsarian theory of recognition. My aim will be to explore its pertinence to recognition theory in more detail, underlining Malebranche's contribution to our understanding of this concept. I have already argued for Malebranche's inclusion in the history of recognition theory on the basis of his treatment of the postlapsarian need for esteem and his intersubjective understanding of postlapsarian identity. These aspects of Malebranche's philosophy align with the central tenets of contemporary recognition theory, including the claims that we must acknowledge the recognition of others as a vital human need, and that subjectivity is an intersubjective, dialogical construction. In the following sections, I develop and clarify the sense in which Malebranche ought to be considered as a theorist of recognition by focusing on his contribution to our understanding of the nature of misrecognition.

§2 Malebranche and Contemporary Recognition Theory

Malebranche's characterisation of misrecognition, I will argue, provides an insightful critique of Honneth's and Taylor's positive accounts of the concept. I begin by recalling Chapter 1's account of positive theories of recognition and outlining their understanding of the nature and role of misrecognition. Drawing on contemporary critics, I highlight some of the flaws of the positive approach. In §3, I outline Malebranche's account of misrecognition. His treatment of this concept, I shall argue, forms an important critique of one of the central claims of contemporary recognition theory: the notion that experiences of misrecognition lead the misrecognised to struggle for more appropriate forms of recognition. I outline four ways in which Malebranchean misrecognition

throws doubt upon this claim, suggesting instead that misrecognition often serves to preserve existing social relations and structures.

§2.1 Positive Theories of Recognition

To characterise Axel Honneth and Charles Taylor as proponents of positive theories of recognition is uncontroversial. As Kristina Lepold notes, although the valence of the English term 'recognition' is ambiguous, for Honneth it is 'synonymous with "approval" or "affirmation"' (2019, p.2). Thus, according to Honneth, when A recognises B, we should understand A as approving of, or affirming B, in a positive manner: A recognises the properties ('the "who" or "what"') of B, where these are perceived as valuable (Lepold 2019, p.2). Honneth understands this recognitive attitude as necessarily expressed in action: recognitive attitudes that are not manifested in appropriate positive actions are incomplete, or 'half-baked' (Herrmann 2021, p.59, cited in Lepold 2019, p.3). Honneth's characterisation of recognition as positive is also informed by the fact that he sees the consequences of recognition as psychologically beneficial for the recognised. The three forms of recognition—love, respect, and esteem—develop three different relations-to-self, each of which is crucial for the undistorted formation of personal identity and self-understanding.

Recognition, then, is regarded as positive in its valence and its consequences. Experiences of misrecognition, on the other hand, are stipulated to be negative. Lepold argues that Honneth's theory of recognition leads to just two conceivable types of cases of misrecognition. First, there is *nonrecognition*: the failure of an individual to receive the recognition to which they have a claim by virtue of their possession of a valuable characteristic. It concerns an absence of recognition where recognition is due (e.g. the refusal to recognise a woman as a legal person). The second kind of

misrecognition concerns the demonstration of 'deficient, insufficient or inadequate recognition' (Lepold 2019, p. 4). For instance, A might demonstrate an attitude of recognition towards B, but fail to exemplify this attitude in all her actions (Lepold 2019, p. 4). Because such recognition is, to use Herrman's term, 'half-baked', it is understood as misrecognition (2021, p.59).

According to positive theories of recognition, both misrecognition as non-recognition and as inadequate recognition are negative in valence. The misrecognised individual, it is argued, experiences their treatment as disrespectful and suffers accordingly. In the *Struggle for Recognition,* Honneth equates misrecognition with disrespect. The three categories of misrecognition/disrespect that he outlines (‘abuse and rape'; the 'denial of rights, [and] exclusion’, and 'denigration, [and] insult’) are seen as the negative reflections of their equivalent positive relations (Honneth 1996, p.129). Not only are these forms of misrecognition experienced as painful instances of disrespect, but, contrary to positive recognitive experiences, their immediate consequences are negative. The denial of rights or denigration, Honneth claims, 'jeopardise[s] the freedom of individuals' and injures 'them with regard to the positive understanding of themselves that they have acquired intersubjectively’ (Honneth 1996, p.131, cited in Lepold 2019, p. 4).

Despite the negative valence of misrecognition, and the harmful nature of its immediate consequences, Lepold argues that Honneth sees 'the *practice of recognition as a whole* ... in a very positive light' (2019, p.3). Recognition as a comprehensive practice is ‘positive’ not only because the experience of recognition is good for the subject, but also because the long-term consequences of misrecognition are beneficial. This reading is based on Honneth's commitment to two claims. First, Honneth argues that experiences of misrecognition, whilst unpleasant, generate struggles for improved recognition relations. Second, he is committed to the idea that 'such struggles for

recognition will also lead in the medium term to real improvements in the collective life of a society' (Lepold 2019, p.4)[2]. Let us consider the complications which attach to each claim in turn.

According to the first claim, disrespectful experiences of misrecognition are ultimately positive because they motivate individuals to 'engage in struggles for recognition' (Lepold 2019, p.5). I touched on the connection between experiences of misrecognition and struggles for recognition in Chapter 1. According to Honneth, it is because experiences of misrecognition are felt as disrespectful, and elicit negative emotions, that they lead subjects to struggle for a more just distribution of recognition relations. The cognitive content of negative emotions (like shame, fear, or indignation) is held to reveal to the disrespected the fact that they are being denied recognition to which they have a rightful claim (Honneth 1996, p.136). Such content, Honneth argues, almost inevitably gives way to action, in the form of a struggle for recognition. The reason for this is that it is only by taking such action that subjects can dispel the 'emotional tension' generated by the negative emotions that misrecognition elicits (Honneth 1996, p.138). Lepold questions Honneth's proposed link between negative emotional experiences and struggles for recognition. It is far from inevitable, she objects, that subjects of disrespect will possess the psychological resources necessary to challenge their oppressors and engage in struggles for greater recognition (Lepold 2019, p.9). Instead of generating resistance, Lepold queries, might disrespect not function to keep its subjects 'in vulnerable positions' (2019, p.9)? As I will argue shortly, Malebranche raises a similar concern.

Honneth's second argument for the positive role of misrecognition builds on the first. The struggles for recognition generated by experiences of misrecognition are valuable insofar are they are a condition of social progress (understood as the expansion of recognition relations). It is through 'morally motivated struggles', Honneth explains, 'that the normatively directional change of

[2] See Honneth (1996, p.5) for discussion of this claim.

societies proceeds' (Honneth 1996, p.93, cited in Lepold 2019, p.4). This aspect is crucial insofar as Honneth wishes to put forward a *critical* theory of recognition. Critical theories must not only diagnose societal injustices; they must also explain how to bring about emancipatory social change.

Do struggles for recognition in fact succeed in realising societal change? Lepold queries this second claim, too. She draws our attention to Honneth's claim that parties to a struggle 'always already treat each other as normative co-authorities' (Lepold 2019, p.10). Certain situations seem to present problems for such an idea. In cases of misrecognition as nonrecognition—where A does not recognise B as possessing certain valuable features and thus as having a right to recognition—it is unclear why B's protests against their treatment would hold any normative weight for A, who, in virtue of not seeing that B is due recognition, does not consider B as possessing any authority to demand it (Lepold 2019, p.10). Although we can imagine circumstances in which B convinces A to reevaluate her position, there is no reason to believe that such debates will always be successful. Consequently, struggles for recognition will not always lead to improved recognition relations.

There are further ways in which positive theories of recognition overlook the practice's negative features. Timo Jütten has argued that another unwelcome consequence of the positive theory of recognition is that 'the person who misrecognises another cannot intend to *mis*recognise them' (2022, p.15). Whilst Jütten does not set out his justification for this claim in detail, it appears to follow from Honneth's binary understanding of misrecognition as nonrecognition or inadequate recognition. If the positive theory of recognition takes misrecognition to be exhaustively explained by these two kinds of cases, then we can see why Jütten supposes that misrecognition is always unintentional. Misrecognition as nonrecognition conceptually excludes the possibility of intentional misrecognition: if A does not see B as possessing a valuable characteristic that demands recognition, then it cannot be right to say that A *intends* to misrecognise B, for A does not even

realise that an attitude of recognition is required. Where misrecognition is understood as inadequate recognition, A is said to adopt the correct recognitive attitude towards B, but, ‘for one reason or another’, she fails to ensure that this attitude is always reflected in her actions (Lepold 2019, p.4). Whilst instances of inadequate recognition are importantly incomplete, this incompleteness only attaches to the recogniser’s failure to manifest her recognitive attitude in appropriate actions. That is, whilst the failure to act appropriately may or may not be intentional, the intentional withholding of the recognitive attitude itself is not considered as a possibility. The claim, then, is that there is no form of misrecognition in which A sees that B deserves recognition, and yet intentionally withholds the appropriate recognitive attitude.

Does the positive theory of recognition in fact rule out intentional cases of misrecognition? Honneth's contention that individuals always already take each other as normative co-authorities appears to suggest this. If B is always already a normative co-authority for A, then A's realisation that B possesses a certain property will ineluctably lead to A's recognitive attitude: A cannot intend to misrecognise B when she knows that B possesses a quality or capacity deserving of recognition. But the idea that misrecognition cannot be intentional is surely mistaken. Positive recognition theory's failure to acknowledge this is an important omission, as a result of which:

> ...it leaves out of the picture many social practices, which intentionally disrespect individuals or groups in order to establish or maintain social hierarchies, including classist, sexist, and racist ones, or economic orders that require the systematic misrecognition of some groups' productive contributions (Jütten 2022, p.15).

The fact that, as Lepold has argued, some experiences of misrecognition are so damaging to the misrecognised that they do not have the necessary resources to struggle for greater recognition quite clearly signals that misrecognition can be, and has surely been used as, a tool for oppression.

I have highlighted some contentious aspects of the positive theory of recognition associated with Honneth. In the following sections, I will consider the concept of misrecognition through the lens of Malebranche's analysis of postlapsarian subjects. Whilst resistance to positive theories of recognition might appear fairly recent, examination of Malebranche's treatment of misrecognition reminds us that such concerns have a long history.

§3 Malebranchean Misrecognition: Critiques of the Motivation to Struggle

Malebranche's analysis of recognition in the *Search After Truth* lends weight to contemporary critiques of positive theories of recognition. It does so by analysing forms of misrecognition that such theories overlook. I will argue that Malebranche shows an awareness of the ways in which misrecognition can be wielded intentionally in order to uphold unequal recognition relations that favour some and oppress others. As I will then go on to suggest, intentional misrecognition can also be strategic, masked behind falsely respectful or esteeming attitudes that keep subjects subdued, not by psychologically harming them, but by making them think they are being recognised. As such, Malebranche goes beyond contemporary analyses by questioning a part of the picture which is normally left untouched: he queries the assumption that experiences of misrecognition are necessarily negative in valence and experienced as forms of disrespect.

I will consider four distinct cases in turn. Each focuses on a different way in which Malebranche accounts for the failure of experiences of misrecognition to generate struggles for greater

recognition. First, I consider the case of agreeable, unintentional misrecognition which is ardently desired by the misrecognised. Second, I explore Malebranche's appreciation of the psychological harms of misrecognition. Third, I focus on Malebranche's account of intentional strategic misrecognition. Last, I explore the role of the contagious nature of esteem.

§3.1 Agreeable Misrecognition

By focusing on intentionally disrespectful experiences of misrecognition and highlighting their psychologically damaging nature, contemporary critiques provide a much-needed corrective to positive recognition theories. But this focus has led critics to overlook the dangers posed by explicitly pleasing and desired misrecognition. Malebranche, however, is sharply attuned to the existence of such a form of misrecognition, which can have the same effect as painful misrecognition: it may prevent the misrecognised from struggling for greater recognition. Malebranchean agreeable misrecognition comes in two forms: the unintentional and the intentional. In this section, I will be concerned with the first form. Misrecognition of this nature lacks any air of disrespect, and therefore lacks the negative emotions which accompany the standard conception of misrecognition. As a result, it often fails to generate struggles for more adequate forms of recognition.

Let us return to the faux savants. I argued in Chapter 5 that, when superiors are esteemed by their inferiors, as faux savants are esteemed by their admirers, they adopt the opinions which provide reasons for their admirers' esteem. As a result, they come to understand themselves intersubjectively, through the eyes of other subjects. The basis upon which admirers offer their esteem, however, is deceptive: Malebranche's faux savants, for instance, do not really possess

erudition, they have merely cultivated the appearance of it. When admirers esteem the faux savants for their erudite qualities, then, they esteem them for a quality they do not truly possess. Such esteem-recognition is, properly speaking, *misrecognition*. Unintentional agreeable misrecognition, on Malebranche's approach, is misrecognition which purports to recognise in us qualities that we do not possess, though we desire (often strongly) to possess them.

This misrecognition is unlike the intentionally oppressive instances of misrecognition highlighted by Jütten and Lepold in two ways. First, the admirer does not intend to misrecognise the faux savant. Rather, their show of esteem is sincere: they really do take the faux savant to possess the qualities they esteem them for. Second, this form of misrecognition is not experienced by the faux savant as disrespectful. Indeed, in their purposeful attempts at dissimulation, they actively court, and enjoy, this form of misrecognition. Nevertheless, such misrecognition has negative consequences. Far from enabling a subject to achieve an undistorted self-understanding, agreeable misrecognition impairs an individual's relation with themselves by encouraging them to accept a self-conception which is false and illusory.

Moreover, this form of agreeable misrecognition acts as a rejoinder to the idea, central to positive recognition theory, that experiences of misrecognition lead the misrecognised to engage in struggles for adequate recognition. Agreeable misrecognition, because it misrecognises its recipients as already being the way they strongly desire to be, is beguiling. It is because Malebranche understands the deep-seated human need for esteem-recognition through the prism of self-love that he is particularly well-placed to appreciate the dangers that stem from the reception of this kind of misrecognition. In Malebranche's eyes, the desire for grandeur which flows from self-love constantly imposes itself on our experience. It leads us to accept false, yet pleasing, views of

ourselves that flatter our desire for grandeur over those self-reflections which accurately acknowledge our limited talents and human faults (see OCM II 192-3/LO 378).

The postlapsarian disposition to concur with the ways in which we are agreeably misrecognised therefore poses a problem; but the problem is not limited to Malebranche's view of the effects of self-love. As Honneth stipulates, recognition from others is a vital human need; a lack of recognition, or an experience of painful misrecognition, is a real harm. In fact, Honneth goes so far as to endorse Rousseau's 'anthropological realism', which conceives of human subjects as plagued by 'a constant craving to be recognised as an especially esteemed member of [their] social community' (Honneth 2016, p.203). Given the sheer importance of recognition, it would not be surprising if some individuals were happy to accept agreeable misrecognition in lieu of genuine recognition, so long they feel that their recognition needs are met, and that their qualities (real or imagined) are valued. The dangers of this phenomenon, the threat it poses to self-understanding, are pertinent to the context of contemporary recognition theory, too.

§3.2 The Psychological Harm of Misrecognition

The second way in which Malebranche throws doubt on the idea that experiences of misrecognition lead the misrecognised to struggle for more adequate recognition concerns the debilitating and immobilising effects of the psychological harm caused by misrecognition. Consider the following passage from the *Search After Truth*:

> ... it is a most grievous fault against civility to speak of oneself frequently, especially in a flattering way, even though one has all sorts of good qualities, because it is not

> permissible to speak to those with whom one is conversing as if one regarded them as beneath oneself ... For in the end, contempt is the ultimate insult; it is the one most capable of rupturing society; and naturally we should not hope that a man whom we have made aware that we consider him beneath us can ever be joined to us, because men can never stand to be the meanest part of the body they compose (OCM II 119-20/LO 334, see also OCM XI 201/CW 173).

There are two potential readings of this passage. The first will occupy me here, whilst the second reading will be considered in the next section. In different ways, both express skepticism towards the idea that experiences of misrecognition function as catalysts in generating struggles for greater recognition. The first reading I will consider highlights Malebranche's sensitivity to the fact that experiences of misrecognition are often deeply painful. Many individuals, far from experiencing contempt as a spur to fighting for equal recognition, experience it simply as the 'ultimate insult' (OCM II 120/LO 334) and the 'greatest of hurts' (OCM XI 201/CW 173). The harm is so great that they no longer even attempt to form a society, let alone attain healthy relations of recognition, with those who show such contempt for them (OCM II 119-20/LO 334).

In emphasising this phenomenon, Malebranche anticipates a similar point raised by Lepold. As we saw her worry earlier, might disrespect not function so as to keep its subjects in vulnerable positions, or even lead individuals to revise downwards the degree of recognition to which they believe themselves entitled (2019, p.9)? This issue is important. It suggests that Honneth needs to say more about just what kinds of misrecognition *do* bring about moral progress.

There is good reason to believe that Malebranche and Lepold are right about the stultifying effects of contemptuous misrecognition. Disrespectful interpersonal relations between individuals often

utilise humiliation in order to create a sense of inferiority which prevents the misrecognised from standing up for themselves. Think of the relations between school ground bullies and their victims, who rarely possess the self-esteem necessary for demanding that their tormentors show them the respect they deserve. As Daniel Rothbart has argued, some institutions utilise a politics of humiliation in order to 'instil in certain people a sense of inferiority as a strategy for population control' (2018, p.2). This method, he suggests, 'relies on the cunning of getting in the heads of targeted group members, invading their consciousness, distorting their sense of themselves, and diminishing their self-esteem, all for the purpose of rendering the group members compliant and possibly complicit in the prevailing social-political order' (Rothbart 2018, p.2).

This problem also has roots in the double bind created by the fact that recognition is crucial to self-realisation. Honneth's perception-based understanding of recognition maintains that 'recognitional attitudes ... respond appropriately to evaluative qualities that ... human subjects already possess', rather than functioning to create such qualities (Honneth 2002, p.510). This means, Honneth acknowledges, that subjects can 'only identify with [their evaluative qualities] as a result of experiencing recognition of these qualities' (2002, p.510). This is problematic, since it entails that subjects who experience either an absence of recognition or humiliating misrecognition cannot identify with a conception of themselves as possessing evaluative qualities which are deserving of recognition. If a subject cannot even *conceive* of themselves as possessing certain evaluative qualities, then it is hard to see how misrecognition can prompt them to demand appropriate recognition from others.

§3.3 Strategic Misrecognition

Returning to Malebranche and the passage at OCM II 119-20/LO 334, I turn now to the second interpretation to which this passage lends itself. Contempt, we are reminded, is the ultimate insult to postlapsarian self-love, which longs ardently for the esteem of others. Subjects of contempt feel so insulted by their disrespectful treatment, Malebranche suggests, that they can no longer co-exist peacefully in society with those who demean them. Far from motivating struggles for adequate recognition, this kind of misrecognition entirely destroys social bonds (see OCM XI 204/CW 175). This is not so much because the contemned individuals are insulted by the refusal of their acquaintances to treat them as having equal standing. Rather, Malebranche proposes, postlapsarian beings cannot stand to be made to feel beneath *anyone*, even if there are others who rank even lower. Postlapsarian subjects, he explains, always want 'to be the principal part of the body they compose' (OCM II 118/LO 333), and 'can never stand to be the meanest part' of it (OCM II 120/LO 334).

To express contempt for others, then, is a risky enterprise: it is liable to seed civil unrest and to dissolve a society in which one may have managed to secure a superior position. Malebranche thus postulates the existence of a secret inclination which deters those who occupy superior positions from openly expressing contempt for their inferiors, and instead encourages them to engage in emotional deceitfulness:

> ...it was necessary for those who are most intelligent and most fitted to become the noble parts of this body and to command others, to be naturally civil, i.e., to be led by a secret inclination to show others, through their manners, their courteous and honourable speech, that they think themselves unworthy of consideration, that they believe those to whom they speak are deserving of all sorts of honors, and that they have great esteem and veneration for them ... to have the art of deceiving them by an

> imaginary abasement that consists only in civilities and speech, in order that they might enjoy without being envied, that preeminence which is necessary in all bodies. For in this way all men possess in some way the greatness that they desire—the great really possess it, and the insignificant and weak possess it only through imagination, being persuaded to some extent by the compliments of others that they are not regarded as what they are, namely the least among men (OCM II 119/LO 333).

Openly expressing contempt for others is a tactical mistake by those who occupy superior positions. Since all postlapsarians are afflicted by an intense self-love, Malebranche sees its manipulation as justifiable in pursuit of social stability. The most intelligent superiors, he proposes, express false esteem and respect for their inferiors, thereby mollifying their socially divisive desires for greatness. Social hypocrisy on the part of superiors thus acts as a stabilising glue in unequal societies, enabling the perpetuation of a hierarchical status quo. Furthermore, this tendency to demonstrate false esteem functions as yet another rejoinder to Honneth's claim that experiences of misrecognition are catalysts for engaging in struggles for greater recognition. The esteem that calculating superiors show their social inferiors is a form of misrecognition: their affective attitudes are feigned, designed to mislead their inferiors as to their social worth. In this way, superiors fulfil inferiors' pressing psychological needs for the satisfaction of their self-love, and in doing so suppress any struggles for recognition that might otherwise threaten the unequal social order from which the superior benefits.

Such ersatz esteem falls short of true recognition, both insofar as it is insincere, and insofar as it (surely) lacks the corresponding actions which reflect the value they supposedly recognise. The superiors do not try to change the material circumstances of the inferiors whom they pretend to hold in esteem. They do not offer them any ‘real services’, which Malebranche considers ‘the surest and

most convincing marks of esteem and friendship' (OCM XI 256/CW 211). The case is similar, in some ways, to that of agreeable misrecognition. Both agreeable misrecognition and strategic misrecognition possess a positive valence, begetting positive emotions in their objects. Because all individuals desire to be esteemed, inferiors are flattered by superiors' insincere displays of admiration and happily acquiesce in the view of themselves that it encourages. Whilst strategic misrecognition differs from agreeable misrecognition insofar as it is intentionally deployed, their effects are similar. Strategic misrecognition possesses a positive valence that is pacifying to its receiver. Its failure to generate negative emotions means that the misrecognised subject does not realise that they are being denied authentic recognition, inhibiting any motivation to struggle for adequate recognition.

Malebranchean strategic misrecognition shares some features in common with Honneth's characterisation of ideological recognition. In *Recognition as Ideology* (2007), Honneth notes that 'the act of praising certain characteristics or abilities seems to have become a political instrument whose unspoken function consists in inserting individuals or social groups into existing structures of dominance by encouraging a positive self-image' (2007, pg. 323). For instance:

> The pride that “Uncle Tom” feels as a reaction to the repeated praise of his submissive virtues makes him into a compliant servant in a slave owning society. The emotional appeals to the “good” mother and housewife made by churches, parliaments, or the mass media over the centuries caused women to remain trapped within a self-image that most effectively accommodated the gender-specific division of labor. The public esteem enjoyed by heroic soldiers continuously engendered a sufficiently large class of men who willingly went to war in pursuit of glory and adventure. As trivial as these examples may be, they do make strikingly clear that

> social recognition can always also operate as conformist ideology (Honneth 2007, p.325-6).

In these cases, their apparent reception of recognition leads individuals to willingly accept subordinate social positions, thereby reproducing unjust social relations. We can determine which recognition relations qualify as ideological, Honneth argues, by identifying when symbolic or linguistic expressions of the value of an individual (or group) are not accounted for in 'material terms' (2007, p.346). Honneth considers the good mother and housewife to be a recipient of ideological recognition because, whilst she might receive what feels like positive recognition for her work, she is not offered adequate financial compensation for it.

Malebranchean strategic misrecognition—in the form of the spurious esteem that superiors show their inferiors—seems to qualify as ideological. Whilst superiors show their inferiors a symbolic esteem, a gap opens up between 'evaluative promise and material fulfilment' (Honneth 2007, p.346). However, there are aspects of Malebranchean strategic misrecognition that do not seem to be fully captured by Honneth's account. It is true that, in acknowledging the existence of ideological—and thus negative—forms of recognition, Honneth is making an important concession. Yet it is unclear to what extent he acknowledges the *intentional* aspects of ideological recognition emphasised in Malebranche's account. The superiors' show of false esteem is an intentional act, motivated by their awareness of the fact that all individuals, no matter where they are placed on the social scale, have a psychological need for esteem. Honneth's examples, on the other hand, do not obviously involve an intention to misrecognise: the 'emotional appeals to the "good" mother and housewife made by churches, parliaments, or the mass media', and the 'public esteem enjoyed by heroic soldiers' are often exhibited in good faith (Honneth 2007, p.325-6). Malebranche's distinctly pessimistic account

of intentional strategic misrecognition has not, to my knowledge, received sustained attention in the contemporary literature on recognition.

§3.4 The Contagious Nature of Esteem

The final way in which Malebranche enhances our understanding of how misrecognition can prevent individuals from engaging in struggles for greater recognition draws on the contagious nature of the passions. As I explored in detail in Chapter 5, postlapsarian subjects experience an involuntary tendency to assimilate themselves to others' passionate states. This is the case for the whole spectrum of passions by which we are affected, including esteem.

Whilst a faux savant's self-esteem is enhanced by the contagious esteem that their admirers show them, I have argued that the postlapsarian susceptibility to like-for-like passionate contagion functions so as to allow admirers to participate in the faux savant's esteem. As a result of the contagious nature of the passions, then, it is possible for every member of society to enjoy at least some degree of esteem vicariously. Whilst this caught esteem does not always reflect a subject's possession of valuable qualities, it goes some way towards meeting their need for esteem. As a result, it is likely to dampen the compulsion to struggle for greater recognition.

Malebranche also suggests a further way in which such ersatz esteem can prove stultifying. We tend to believe, he has argued, that we deserve (and often succeed in eliciting) esteem from others in virtue of our mere *association* with great things (OCM II 208/LO 387). As he frequently reminds his reader, we tend to judge others in an expansive sense, considering those things with which they are closely associated as part of themselves. We 'associate all the gold and marble' which embellishes a house 'with the person living there', for instance, and we determine the esteem we

owe to someone 'by their entourage, [and] the magnificence and splendor which surrounds them' (OCM XI 242/CW 201). The awe-struck individual who sits next to a famous footballer on a plane, for example, not only receives a boost to their esteem contagiously, by witnessing the esteem the footballer has for herself, but also goes on to elicit esteem from others by virtue of their brief and tenuous association with the footballer. Whilst this esteem is directed at them, it is still essentially *about* the valuable qualities that someone else possesses (in this case, the skill and fame of the footballer). The fact that esteem is available to us in these ersatz forms, Malebranche suggests, plays a stabilising role in society. It makes the search for direct esteem less pressing, even though individuals who enjoy esteem in these vicarious ways receive no truly meaningful recognition.

Whilst Malebranche's account of the contagious communication of the passions and the vicarious nature of grandeur are a function of his particular understanding of postlapsarian natural inclinations and passions more generally, there are still lessons for the contemporary recognition theorist here. We need not be fully onboard with Malebranche's postlapsarian philosophy in order to accept that human beings are affected by the passions of others (significant contemporary research into the emotions suggests that emotional contagion is a widespread phenomenon[3]), or that individuals can derive self-worth from mere association. Recent research into the nature of parasocial relationships—one-sided relationships between media personalities and their followers in which there is no reciprocal interaction—suggests that individuals with low self-esteem experience 'self-enhancing benefits ... that they do not receive in real relationships', like the ability to bask in the reflected glory of another, through their parasocial relations (Derrick et al. 2008, p.276). The ability to enjoy esteem vicariously, as well as the tendency people exhibit for esteeming others, not for their own merits, but for their mere association with great people or things, is a phenomenon

[3] See, e.g.: Ferrari (2018); de Vignemont & Singer (2006), and Preston & de Waal (2002).

which may be pertinent to contemporary recognition theory. When individuals possess the possibility of deriving esteem in these ersatz ways, they do not experience the disrespect and concomitant negative emotions that the positive recognition theorist sees as part and parcel of misrecognition. As a result, the subjects of such esteem may not be motivated to struggle for more adequate forms of recognition.

§4 Conclusion

Positive theories of recognition are committed to the truth of two claims. First, they stipulate that experiences of misrecognition generate struggles for recognition. Second, they argue that such struggles are effective in generating real improvements in a society's recognition relations. For these reasons, positive recognition theorists consider misrecognition to play a positive role in the practice of recognition as a whole.

I have argued that Malebranche's 17th century treatment of misrecognition gives us good reason to doubt the first of these claims. I have drawn on Malebranche's postlapsarian theory of recognition in order to propose four ways in which misrecognition can fail to generate struggles for greater recognition. Three of these challenge the contention that misrecognition is a negative experience marked by suffering. Instead, I have argued, Malebranche helps us to see that misrecognition can also be beguiling and agreeable. In such cases, it fails to generate struggles for greater recognition. The fourth conception of misrecognition which I draw from Malebranche takes another tack, emphasising instead the harm that such experiences can cause. Instead of motivating misrecognised subjects to struggle for greater recognition, he suggests, victims of the contempt of others are simply no longer able to form a society with them. By throwing doubt upon the first claim of positive recognition theorists, Malebranche thereby throws doubt upon the second: if

misrecognition does not lead to struggles for greater recognition, it is difficult to see how it can bring about social change.

In drawing on Malebranche, my analysis shows that a critical approach to the positivity of recognition theory should not sideline historical approaches to recognition. Rather, an examination of the history of the ways in which philosophers have understood the nature of the human need for the approval of others can itself act as a form of critique. As I argued in Chapter 2, this is one upshot of taking a broadly genealogical approach to recognition's history. Contemporary recognition theory is dominated by positive understandings of the concept. As a result, this can come to seem like the only way in which the practice of recognition can, or should be, understood. But a genealogical approach which uncovers the diverse ways in which recognition has been conceptualised historically highlights the contingent and contestable nature of this privileged interpretation, and thereby acts as a form of denaturalising critique.

What I have produced is far from a genealogy of recognition. This would be the work of many books, not a single thesis. But my examination of Malebranche contributes to the formation of such a history. Whilst the contemporary philosophical landscape might be dominated by positive understandings of recognition, Malebranche's negative characterisation of a postlapsarian theory of recognition acts as a counterweight. Further, it plays a critical role in alerting us to the existence of rich, multifaceted treatments of the human need for recognition which predate Hegel—should we only look for them.

Conclusion Malebranche through the Lens of Recognition Theory; Recognition Theory through Lens of Malebranche

This thesis has put forward a case for Malebranche's inclusion in the history of recognition theory. The rewards of examining his 17th century treatment of postlapsarian subjects in tandem with the claims of contemporary recognition theory have, I contend, been two-sided.

In the first instance, considering Malebranche's analysis of postlapsarian self-love and subjectivity from the perspective of contemporary recognition theory has brought about a Gestalt shift in our perception of Malebranche's work. The early modern period is often assumed to be awash with problematically individualistic accounts of the self. Such readings understand human subjects as autonomous individuals who can develop the capacities constitutive of subject-hood prior to—or outside of—life with others. As I argued in Chapter 1, we find such interpretations both in Honneth's characterisation of the philosophical atomism that precedes Hegel's groundbreaking appreciation of the intersubjectivity of identity, and in Charles Taylor's narrative of inwardness in *Sources of the Self*. Such individualist interpretations of early modern subjectivity have only been strengthened by the historically prevailing Traditional View, which, as I argued in Chapter 4, takes the Cartesian subject to be a disembodied, atomistic thinking thing. Importantly, Taylor still promulgates such a view. When we read early modern philosophers from the perspective of this dominant narrative, we approach historical texts *expecting* to find autonomous and individualistic conceptions of the self. These preconceived expectations have a priming effect. We go on to read

early modern authors in-line with these pre-existing narratives, which thereby come to seem unchallengeable[1].

From within the accepted narrative of early modern individualism, it is easy to focus—as much of Malebranche studies do—on the ways in which he meets the expectations this narrative sets. When it comes to personal identity, for instance, scholars have equated his account of the self with arguments for our lack of a clear and distinct idea of the soul (Pyle 2003, Nolan and Whipple 2005). For Malebranchean subjects, knowledge of such things is only possible from the kind of disengaged stance which fits well within the narrative of inwardness and atomism. That is, as Malebranche himself acknowledges, in order to acquire a veridical understanding of the distinction between the body and the soul, and the little known nature of the latter, we must remove ourselves from the ordinary, spontaneous way in which we perceive the world. We must, to use Taylor's terminology, assume a stance of radical reflexivity, making our own experience the object of our attention.

Yet, as I have demonstrated in this thesis, a Gestalt shift in our approach to early modern philosophy can reveal new and surprising concerns. When we read Malebranche from the perspective of contemporary recognition theory, we are able to break out of the limiting—and erroneous—narrative of early modern individualism. As a result, our attention is newly drawn to aspects and emphases which have previously been obscured. So much of the *Search After Truth,* we come to see, is written from the perspective of the postlapsarian subject who fully submits to, and embraces, the vision of the world presented in their spontaneous experience, and who does not possess the ability to successfully "disengage", or even attempt to do so.

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[1] Martin Lenz makes a similar point, utilising Wittgenstein's duck-rabbit as an example of such a Gestalt shift (2020, p.2). 'Historical texts are not a given', he argues, because 'we receive them within so-called narratives' (2020, p.2). Lenz maintains (as do I) that dominant narratives have led us to 'overlook certain features of the historical material', namely, the attention that some early modern philosophers paid to the importance of intersubjectivity (2020, p.2).

From this perspective, we also see the emphasis that Malebranche places, not on our autonomy, but on our dependence on other subjects. As postlapsarians, Malebranche argues, we experience an indelible porousness to others' passions and opinions, a tendency to always measure ourselves in comparison with them, and a deep-rooted need for their approving esteem. Finally, it is from this perspective that we can come to appreciate the deeply intersubjective account of postlapsarian subjectivity that is part and parcel of the Malebranchean account of self-love. To overlook these parts of the *Search* is to overlook something which is philosophically rich in ways that the traditional narrative of early modern individualism is unable to appreciate. Not only does our examination of these aspects of Malebranche's philosophy broaden our understanding of his philosophical concerns, but they reveal aspects of his treatment of postlapsarian subjects that, this thesis has argued, qualify him as a theorist of recognition.

Second, re-considering contemporary recognition theory in light of Malebranche's critical account of the deep-seated postlapsarian desire for the recognition of others has helped bring into focus the contestability of some of the theory's central tenets. In order to set the stage for Malebranche's inclusion in recognition theory's history, I began this project by offering a critique of the historical story with which contemporary recognition theory has, for so long, come hand-in-hand. Honneth's and Taylor's seminal articulations of recognition theory are in broad agreement on the concept's history: not until Hegel, they argue, do we find the thematisation of the human need for the recognition of others. In challenging this narrative, I began by drawing on Neuhouser's interpretation of Rousseauian amour propre. Neuhouser claims that Rousseau is the originator of Hegelian recognition theory on the grounds that he advances a positive account of amour propre as a necessary condition of 'rationality, morality, and freedom—subjectivity itself' (Neuhouser 2008, p.2). The notion that Rousseau advances such an account is contested, and Neuhouser's attempt to

predicate his inclusion on its basis reveals his commitment to a teleological history of recognition that requires that we find in Rousseau a philosophical treatment of the conception that is a recognisable antecedent of the Hegelian account.

Honneth, in rejecting Neuhouser's argument for Rousseau's inclusion, reveals his own teleological leanings: Honneth denies Rousseau the status of originator on the basis that he was never entirely convinced of the desirability of the human need for the recognition of others. I have argued that we should take a different tack. In place of Honneth's and Neuhouser's teleological propensities, I have proposed that we take an approach to the history of recognition which is broadly speaking genealogical in nature. A genealogical history of recognition need not limit itself to those theorists who thematise recognition in a recognisably Hegelian manner, nor to those who conceive of the need for recognition in wholly positive terms. Rather, an approach which is genealogical in sentiment acknowledges the fact that this long standing concept has taken on a variety of meanings and normative tones, allowing us to trace the diverse and messy historical pathways that recognition has taken. Rousseau, on this approach, is deserving of inclusion in recognition history's on the basis of his negative treatment of inflamed amour propre, which highlights the danger that our deep-seated need for the recognition of others poses.

Malebranche's treatment of the postlapsarian need for esteem and his intersubjective account of postlapsarian identity—that is, his *theory of recognition*—enhances our understanding of contemporary recognition theory by further highlighting the erroneous nature of any historical narrative for recognition which begins only with Hegel. Whilst Malebranche's account does not singlehandedly dismantle this narrative, my examination of the grounds for his inclusion adds weight to pre-existing arguments for a more expansive history of recognition which includes such figures as the French moralists, Hobbes, and Rousseau.

Further, Malebranche's sensitivity to the pernicious consequences of the need for recognition offers us a deeper understanding of the various and complex forms that misrecognition can take. As I argued in Chapter 6, the contemporary paradigm of recognition studies is dominated by positive theories of recognition. Whilst the phenomenon of misrecognition is acknowledged, contemporary recognition theorists tend to understand the practice of recognition as a whole in a positive light. This is because inherently painful experiences of misrecognition are understood as crucial for generating the kind of struggles that improve a society's recognition relations. But Malebranche's multifaceted understanding of misrecognition should, I have argued, give us pause. In claiming that experiences of misrecognition can be beguiling, or simply stultifying, to their recipients, he challenges the assumption that they lead individuals to struggle for greater recognition. Given the important role that contemporary theorists assign to these struggles as a means of bringing about social change, these complexities should serve as a reminder that the history of recognition theory contains resources capable of enriching contemporary debates.

In sum, my examination of Malebranche's place in the history of recognition theory has aimed to be a mutually enlightening project. By pushing back against two limiting historical narratives, it has enhanced our understanding of early modern philosophers' sensitivities to the human dependence on the recognition of others, whilst at the same time drawing attention to the unacknowledged roots of contemporary recognition theory. In doing so, I hope to have opened up space, and raised fruitful questions, which may be explored in future research. In turning our attention to additional early modern figures, we may find it possible to expand the roots of recognition theory further. In doing so, we may continue to uncover rich historical explorations which have been masked by the powerful assumptions we hold about the history of philosophy.

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Abbreviations

AT (followed by page number) = Descartes, René (1996). *Oeuvres de Descartes*, Edited by: Adam, Charles and Tannery, Paul. 12 vols, Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin.

CSM (followed by I and page number) = Descartes, René.(1985). *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes* (J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff, & D. Murdoch, Trans.). Vol. 1, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

CSM (followed by II and page number) = Descartes, René (1985). *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes* (J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff, & D. Murdoch, Trans.). Vol. 2, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

CSMK (followed by II, and page number) = Descartes, René (1985–91). *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, Edited by: Cottingham, R. S. J., Murdoch, D. and Kenny, A. Vol. 3, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

T (followed by book, part, section, paragraph) = Hume, David (1739-40). *The Treatise of Human Nature*, L.A. Selby-Bigge, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon 1978).

LO (followed by page number) = Malebranche, Nicholas. (1980). *The Search after truth and Elucidations of the Search after truth* (trans: Lennon, T. M. & Olscamp, P. J.). Columbus: Ohio State University Press.

JS (followed by page number) = Malebranche, Nicholas. (1997). In N. Jolley (Ed.), *Dialogues on metaphysics and on religion*. (trans: Scott, D.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

CW (followed by page number) = Malebranche, Nicholas. 1993. *Treatise on Ethics*, Edited by: Walton, Craig. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

OCM (followed by volume and page number) = Malebranche, Nicholas (1958-67). *Oeuvres complètes de Malebranche*. Directed by Robinet, 20 vols. Paris: J.Vrin,

DI (followed by page number) = Rousseau, Jean-Jacques (2018). *Discourse on the Origin and the Foundations of Inequality Among Men or Second Discourse*. In V. Gourevitch (Ed.), *Rousseau: The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings* (Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought, pp. 113-239). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/9781316584804.003.

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