

# Mind-Body Commerce: Occasional Causation and Mental Representation in Anton Wilhelm Amo

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## Abstract

This paper contributes to a growing body of literature focusing on Anton Wilhelm Amo's account of the mind-body relation. The first aim of this paper is to provide an overview of that literature, bringing together several interpretations of Amo's account of the mind-body relation and providing a comprehensive overview of where the debate stands so far. Doing so reveals that commentary is split between those who take Amo to adopt a Leibnizian account of pre-established harmony between mind and body and those who argue that Amo adopts a theory of occasional causation. Both views deny that the body is the efficient cause of the mind's ideas but while the Leibnizian account holds that ideas exist innately in the mind, the occasional causation account maintains that the body is their occasional cause. That is, on this reading of Amo, sensations in the body are the 'occasion' on which the mind efficiently causes its own ideas. The second aim of this paper – which promises to take this interpretative debate in a new direction – is to demonstrate that we should in fact attribute to Amo a specific version of occasional causation known as 'concurrentism'. Concurrentism is the view that, while the mind does efficiently cause its own ideas, it can only do so with the assistance (or 'concurrence') of God. In other words, on this view, God makes possible the efficient causal activity of the human mind in generating ideas, in response to 'occasions' in the body.

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## 1 | INTRODUCTION

This paper contributes to a growing body of literature focusing on Anton Wilhelm Amo's account of the mind-body relation. The first aim of this paper is to provide an overview of that literature, bringing together several interpretations of Amo's account of the mind-body relation and providing a comprehensive overview of where the debate stands so far. Doing so reveals that commentary is split between those who take Amo to adopt a Leibnizian account of pre-established harmony between mind and body (Emma-Adamah, 2015; Smith, 2015) and those who argue that Amo adopts a theory of occasional causation (Meyns, 2019; Walsh, 2019). Both views deny that the body is the efficient cause of the mind's ideas but while the Leibnizian account holds that ideas exist *innately* in the mind, the occasional causation account maintains that the body is their *occasional* cause. That is, on this latter reading, sensations in the body are the 'occasion' on which the mind efficiently causes its own ideas. The second aim of this paper – which promises to take this interpretative debate in a new direction – is to demonstrate that we should in fact attribute to Amo a specific version of occasional causation known as *concurrentism*. Concurrentism is the view that, while the mind *does* efficiently cause its own ideas, it can only do so with the assistance (or 'concurrence') of God. In other words, on this view, God *makes possible* the efficient causal activity of the human mind in generating ideas, in response to 'occasions' in the body.

Since Amo is still a relatively under-discussed figure, in section one, I begin with an outline of Amo's discussion of the mind-body relation and explain how an interpretative puzzle arises when we try to reconstruct his account of mental representation. I also say a little about the texts I am drawing on: Amo's *Inaugural Dissertation* and *Distinct Idea* from 1734 and his *Treatise* from 1738.<sup>1</sup> In section two, I provide an overview of the interpretative debate surrounding Amo's account of the mind-body relation so far and explain why commentators like Meyns and Walsh have argued that Amo is best understood as adopting a theory of occasional causation. In particular, I show that the occasional causal reading makes sense of what these commentators take to be one of Amo's bedrock commitments: the 'Peripatetic axiom' (the view that there is nothing in the intellect not first in the senses).

In sections three and four, I make the case for my own reading of Amo as a *concurrentist*. More specifically, I argue that Amo's account of how ideas in the mind are generated in response to sensations in the body is concurrentist.<sup>2</sup> In section three, I lay down the groundwork for my interpretation by providing a detailed account of Amo's theory of mental representation – understood as the process by which the mind generates ideas which represent bodily sensations. In section four, I show that if we read Amo as an occasional causation theorist, his account of mental representation faces what I call the 'Problem of Prior Knowledge'. To efficiently cause an idea that represents the bodily sensation that 'occasioned' it, it seems as though the mind must have some prior knowledge of that sensation. Yet, ideas are supposed to be the means by which the mind, *in the first instance*, gains knowledge of bodily sensations. Thus, it seems that either Amo's account is circular (the mind requires knowledge of the body before it can come to know about the body) or that it fails to adequately explain how the mind gains knowledge of the body – and instead simply introduces a distinction between two kinds of knowledge (knowledge of the body acquired *prior* to the generation of ideas and knowledge of the body acquired *via* ideas). With the principle of charitable interpretation (i.e., the historiographical claim that we should interpret historical views as charitably as possible) serving as a methodological constraint, I then argue that since concurrentism about the body-mind relation is the only version of occasional causation that can solve this problem while also staying true to Amo's own remarks, we should read Amo as a concurrentist.

## 2 | BACKGROUND: MINDS AND BODIES

Amo wrote four texts during his lifetime (that are known of). The first, *On the Rights of Moors in Europe* (written in 1729), was either lost or only ever existed in spoken form (Menn & Smith, 2020, p. 2). This leaves three remaining texts: the *Inaugural Dissertation on the Impassivity of the Human Mind*, the *Philosophical Disputation Containing*

*Distinct Idea of those Things that Pertain either to the Mind or to Our Living and Organic Body* (both written in 1734), and a *Treatise on the Art of Philosophising Soberly and Accurately*.<sup>3</sup> All three, broadly speaking, flesh out Amo's account of the human mind and his theory of knowledge.<sup>4</sup>

The *Inaugural Dissertation* and *Philosophical Disputation* share an aim, which is to identify and then solve a problem with Descartes' account of the mind-body relation. As Amo puts it, his aim is to establish that “[h]uman beings sense material things not with respect to their mind but with respect to their living and organic body” (ID, 179). This thesis, he writes, is “defended against Descartes” (ID, 179) who “confuses the act of understanding and the function of sensing” (ID, 181). It is worth noting that while Amo sets himself up as arguing against Descartes, he nonetheless takes the real distinction between immaterial minds and material bodies for granted and is, in that sense at least, still working in a Cartesian framework. Thus, as other scholars have noted, Amo is best understood not as *refuting* Descartes' account of the mind-body relation, but *fixing* it (Nwala, 1978, p. 163; Smith, 2015, p. 219). What Amo is fixing is an inconsistency that arises from what he takes to be Descartes' view that the mind can passively experience sensations with the body. Amo takes the following claim from Descartes' correspondence with Princess Elisabeth as evidence that Descartes holds this view:

For as there are two things in the human soul on which all the knowledge that we are able to have of its nature depends, one of which is that it thinks, the other that, united to a body, it is able to *act* and to *suffer* together with it.

(cited by Amo at ID, 179)

Amo take Descartes' remark that the mind is able to *suffer* with the body as evidence that Descartes believed that the mind passively experiences sensations.<sup>5</sup> Amo argues that this generates an inconsistency. The human mind, he argues, is a kind of spirit, and spirits are “purely active, immaterial substance[s]” (ID, 159). He later claims that a purely active substance is one that “does not admit any passion in itself” (ID, 161); i.e., one that does not ‘suffer’. Thus, given Amo's definition of a spirit, it is incompatible with the nature of a spirit, such as the human mind, to passively suffer sensations.

While this line of reasoning relies heavily on Amo's definition of the mind as “purely active”, he also develops an argument that is less obviously question begging (at least within a Cartesian framework that accepts the distinction between material bodies and immaterial minds).<sup>6</sup> He argues that there are only three ways a material thing can act upon something: through either communication, penetration, or contact (ID, 161). Communication is where the properties of one thing are transferred to another, such as the heat that is transferred to a poker when placed in a fire. Penetration is where a part (or parts) of one object enter the ‘pores’ or spaces between the parts of another, such as when a knife enters a body of a stab victim. Finally, contact is where the surfaces of two (or more) objects “mutually touch” (ID, p. 163) like when two billiard balls knock into one another. In a manner reminiscent of both Princess Elisabeth's response to Descartes (Walsh, 2019, p. 1) and Leibniz's arguments against physical influx theory (Menn & Smith, 2020, p. 106), Amo argues that only substances with *material properties* can act or be acted upon by one another in any of these ways. Thus, since minds do not have material properties – but are in fact “contrary opposites” of bodies (ID, p. 163) – Amo concludes that bodies cannot possibly act upon minds.

This thesis – which Amo calls the *impassivity of the human mind* – is central to his 1734 works. However, it generates a particular problem when it comes to understanding his account of mental representation. Amo is an adherent to what would come to be known as ‘the way of ideas’ (e.g., Reid, 1785, p. 26). That is, like many Early Moderns, Amo subscribes to the view that ‘ideas’, which exist in the mind (and are typically construed as mental states or acts),<sup>7</sup> are the means by we gain knowledge of the external world. Yet, it is unclear how, in Amo's system, ideas are generated and how they represent their objects. Amo's view that the body cannot act on the mind rules out the possibility that ideas are efficiently caused by material things. Amo's view that minds and bodies are “contrary opposites” also suggests that a *resemblance* theory of mental representation should be ruled out, since a resemblance between idea

and object would seem to require that they have something in common.<sup>8</sup> What's more, somewhat conspicuously for a thinker working in a Cartesian framework,<sup>9</sup> Amo is also committed to the 'Peripatetic axiom': the claim that there is nothing in the intellect not first in the senses (TAP, pp. 139, 141, 146). This commitment would appear to undermine attempts to attribute to Amo a theory of *innate* ideas. Had Amo (like Leibniz) believed that ideas were innate, that would alleviate concerns about how ideas are generated in response to the body's sensations of material objects – since they would not need to be generated at all. But the Peripatetic axiom seems to rule this out. This tangle of commitments makes it hard to understand *how* the mind represents bodily sensations and, in turn, the material world. As Chris Meyns suggests, this raises the concern that, in Amo's system, human minds are “epistemically isolated” from their bodies (2019, 2).

Amo's 1738 *Treatise* includes a more thorough discussion of the origin and nature of ideas, and I draw on this text when defending my own interpretation of Amo's account of mental representation in section three. However, before doing so, I provide an overview of the interpretative debate so far and show how commentators have gone from reading Amo as adopting a theory of pre-established harmony to reading him as adopting a theory of occasional causation.

### 3 | PRE-ESTABLISHED HARMONY OR OCCASIONAL CAUSATION?

In what is currently a small body of literature on Amo's account of the mind-body relation, there are two lines of interpretation. There are commentators who read Amo as a Leibnizian thinker whose answer to mind-body interaction problems is pre-established harmony and those who attribute to him a theory of occasional causation. In this section, I outline both readings and explain how the second line of interpretation makes sense of Amo's commitment to the Peripatetic axiom.

Justin Smith, in a chapter on Amo in *Nature, Human Nature, and Human Difference* (2015), argues that Amo's “principal concern [in the *Inaugural Dissertation*] is to remove the mind (*mens*), as a variety of spirit (*spiritus*), from the functioning of the body” (2015, 222). As we found in the previous section, Amo certainly does wish to separate out the operations of the mind and the body in contrast to Descartes who, he claims, “confuses the [mental] act of understanding and the [bodily] function of sensing” (ID, 181, my emphasis). Smith infers from Amo's separation of the mind and body that his account of “the relationship between them is broadly Leibnizian” (2015, 223). He later describes Amo's account as a “harmonist philosophy” (2015, 224) where “the true self, the soul, is held to unfold in its state entirely independently of the series of states in the body” (2015, 225). In light of Amo's view that the mind cannot (efficiently) causally interact with the body, Smith argues that “the separation of body and spirit must be total” (2015, 226).<sup>10</sup>

Smith's focus in this chapter is on racial difference and the treatment of race in Early Modern philosophy. Accordingly, his discussion of Amo draws connections between Amo's philosophy of mind and (speculatively, given the loss of his *On the Rights of Moors in Europe*) what might have been his views on race. This appears to be the principal motivation for Smith's conclusion that Amo must have adopted a Leibnizian account of the mind-body relation. As Smith emphasises, if the separation between body and spirit is “total” then “it follows... that for Amo a spirit cannot have a race” (2015, 226). Smith notes that “it would be simplistic to suppose that Amo adopted a broadly dualist and harmonist philosophy *because* he was African” (2015, 224). Yet, it nonetheless appears that Smith's reading of Amo's account of the mind is influenced by his reading of what he takes to be Amo's racial philosophy. What is especially telling is that Smith does not acknowledge Amo's commitment to the Peripatetic axiom. This claim, that there is nothing in the intellect not first in the senses, raises serious difficulties for any interpretation on which Amo is supposed to hold a theory of pre-established harmony; where innate ideas in the mind *correspond with*, but are not caused by, the material things they represent. But the implications of Amo's commitment to the Peripatetic axiom go unnoticed in Smith's discussion.

Victor U. Emma-Adamah also reads Amo as a Leibnizian thinker and repeatedly cites the “influences” of Leibniz and his follower Christian Wolff (2015, 183, 187). Emma-Adamah claims that, like these thinkers:

Amo affirms that the mind, like other spirits, determines its actions exclusively based on its internal resources – viz., the pre-knowledge of what should be, or its states of *self-consciousness*, which is logically prior to its representative acts of external reality. (2015, 187)

Like Smith (2015, p. 223), Emma-Adamah sees a parallel between Amo's claim that the mind always “operates from intention” (ID, 171) and Leibniz's view that the mind possesses “precognitive states” (2015, 197). Emma-Adamah maintains that, for Amo, these intentions are ‘triggered’ by “corresponding mental episodes of reminiscence” (2015, 197). But, he argues, this can only make sense if such (pre)cognitive states exist prior to any sensory experience in the body; i.e., are innate. Unlike Smith, Emma-Adamah does acknowledge Amo's commitment to the Peripatetic axiom which, he admits, “seems incompatible with a Leibnizian idea of perception” (2015, 194, my emphasis). To get around this potential objection, Emma-Adamah claims that by ‘intellect’ Amo means an *act* of mind and argues that ‘nothing in the intellect not first in the senses’ should be cashed out as the claim that the mind only *acts in response* to (i.e., when it is ‘triggered’ by) bodily sensations. For Emma-Adamah, this leaves room for ideas that are nonetheless in the mind itself prior to sensation (2015, 195). However, a worry with Emma-Adamah's reading is that it requires an unnecessary and implausible stretching of the claim that there is nothing in the intellect not first in the senses. Amo, who was well steeped in Scholastic literature, would have been aware of how the Peripatetic axiom was likely to have been read by contemporaries; namely, as the claim that the contents of the mind (it's ‘ideas’) are derived from the senses.<sup>11</sup>

However, as I have noted, two (slightly more recent) interpretations of Amo defend the view that he adopts a theory of *occasional causation* – and it is worth noting that they do so in order to make sense of Amo's commitment to the Peripatetic axiom. It is important to distinguish occasional causation from occasionalism per se. The latter is the view, most famously defended by Malebranche, that God is the efficient cause of all bodily and mental activity. Thinkers who adopt a theory of *occasional causation* understand things differently. Instances of occasional causation are, as Steven Nadler puts it, those where “one thing or state of affairs brings about an effect by inducing (but not through efficient causation...) another thing to exercise its own efficient causal power” (2011, 33). In the case of mental representation for example, in a theory of occasional causation, material things ‘occasion’ the mind itself (rather than God) to act and thus efficiently cause its own ideas. As Nadler notes, while Malebranchian occasionalism might be better known, occasional causation was a “standard notion among orthodox (i.e., non-occasionalist) Cartesians in the context of body-mind relations” (2011, 30) – a context in which Amo's work is quite clearly embedded.

Both Chris Meyns (2019) and Julie Walsh (2019) offer a negative case against the Leibnizian reading and a positive case for attributing to Amo a theory of occasional causation. Meyns claims that “any direct evidence for attributing a pre-established harmony theory to Amo is lacking” (2019, 7). In support of this claim, Meyns cites the fact that Amo does not use any terms typically associated with this way of understanding body to mind interaction, such as ‘harmony’ or ‘concord’. In fact, Meyns argues, Amo's preferred term for body-mind interaction, ‘exchange’ or ‘commerce’ (see, e.g., ID, 169), as well as his insistence that the mind uses the body as an instrument or medium (ID, 169), indicate that he is *not* committed to the “strict isolation of mind from body asserted in a typical harmony theory” (2019, 7). Similarly, Walsh maintains that, unlike Leibniz, Amo never claims that “minds are closed systems and contain something like innate blueprints for all their states” (2019, 12). Walsh also emphasises that though Amo cites several Cartesian and Scholastic writers, he never refers to Leibniz (Walsh, 2019, p. 12; see also Smith, 2015, p. 223). This is despite the fact that, as both Smith and Emma-Adamah are keen to emphasise, Amo was working in the same intellectual and geographical context as Leibniz and his follower Wolff. In this way, Amo's context works *against* the Leibnizian reading. For it seems likely that, had Amo been drawing on Leibniz (or Wolff), he would have cited them. The *textual* evidence for the Leibnizian reading is therefore thin. And, of course, there is Amo's commitment to the Peripatetic axiom to contend with.

In place of a Leibnizian theory of pre-established harmony, both Meyns and Walsh read Amo as adopting a theory of occasional causation.<sup>12</sup> On Meyns' reading, a sensation in the body 'occasions' the mind to generate an idea, by being set up as an "archetype"; a thing to be represented (2019, p. 9). This archetype, a bodily sensation, is something the mind "wholly spontaneously [i.e., actively] attends to" before generating an idea. Consequently, Meyns argues, "Amo hints at a principle of isomorphism as a basis for sensory representation" (2019, 9). In other words, because the mind *attends* to its sensations and then generates ideas, there is a structural similarity between the sensations in the body and the ideas in the mind of an individual human being. But this isomorphism is not a Leibnizian (pre-established) harmony, it is the product of the occasional causal relationship between the body and the mind. It would not exist – and mental representation would not take place – were it not for the fact that certain sensations 'occasion' the mind to generate certain ideas. Like Meyns, Walsh also asserts that, for Amo, "sensory experience provides the occasion for the mind to exert an efficient causal power to produce an idea" (2019, 13). Walsh's reading is premised on a rejection of the Leibnizian reading – again, in light of Amo's commitment to the Peripatetic axiom – as well as textual evidence; specifically, Amo's reference to a letter from Claude Clerselier to Louis de La Forge which discusses occasional causation (2019, 11).

The evidence suggests that this reading is to be preferred to the Leibnizian interpretation. It is true that Amo, like Leibniz, defends a version of Cartesian substance dualism where the body cannot be an efficient cause of what takes place in the mind. It is also true that Amo was working in an intellectual environment (eighteenth-century Germany) that was heavily influenced by Leibniz. Nonetheless, there are textual and philosophical reasons for rejecting the Leibnizian reading of Amo's account of body-mind interaction; principally, his commitment to the Peripatetic axiom. Given Amo's references to body-mind 'commerce', his rejection of innate ideas, and the fact that, as Nadler puts it, occasional causation was a "standard notion" amongst Cartesians, we have good reason to believe that this is the kind of body-mind relation Amo had in mind.

However, in the remainder of this paper, I will go further and argue that we should attribute a particular version of occasional causation to Amo, known as *concurrentism*. In the next section, I provide a detailed account of Amo's theory of mental representation – understood as the process by which the mind generates ideas which represent bodily sensations. Subsequently, in section four, I show that this account faces a problem unless Amo is read as a concurrentist.

## 4 | MENTAL REPRESENTATION

The aim of this section is to provide a detailed reconstruction of Amo's account of how mental representation works. The section is divided into two parts outlining the roles that the body and mind, respectively, play in mental representation. In providing this reconstruction of Amo's account of mental representation, this section lays the groundwork for section four, where I identify a problem Amo's account seems to face. Ultimately, I will argue that this problem can only be solved if we read Amo as a concurrentist.

### 4.1 | The function of the body in mental representation

Amo claims that mental representation requires a body and that only spirits that have bodies (i.e., human minds (ID, p. 171)) represent things to themselves via ideas. In other words, mental representation is, for Amo, a uniquely *human* activity.<sup>13</sup> His justification for this claim is that for representation to take place there must be an *absence*. As he puts it, "representation supposes the absence of the thing to be represented" (ID, p. 167). That is, there is something that the mind intends to know but cannot know without reference to its body. Such absences in knowledge do not occur in other spirits that do not have bodies, such as God and angels,<sup>14</sup> meaning that such spirits do not need to

represent things to themselves by ideas. That is, they have no idea need for “archetypes” drawn from bodily sensations, to be represented (TAP, p. 137). For instance, Amo writes:

in his [i.e., God's] cognition all things are present, and thus in him there is no representation, since representation supposes the absence of the thing to be represented. Therefore it follows from this that God and other spirits understand themselves, their operations, and other things without any ideality or ideas and recollected sensations, whereas our mind both understands and operates through ideas on account of its very tight bond and commerce with the body

(ID, pp. 165–167)

Only human minds “understand themselves” through “ideas and recollected sensations” since only human minds share a “tight bond and commerce” with a body. Amo's view is that human minds' unique status as spirits *with bodies* generates an absence in our knowledge – an absence that does not befall other spirits “beyond matter” (ID, p. 165). This absence can only be filled by the process of mental representation where ideas serve as “recollected sensations”. In other words, since a human is *a mind plus a body*, knowing ourselves requires gaining knowledge of both our mental lives *and* our bodily sensations. Whereas, for other spirits, self-knowledge does not require any knowledge that goes beyond the spirit itself (and stretches out into the material world). Ideas fill the absence in our knowledge by informing us, somehow, of what is going on in the body; i.e., what it is sensing. It should be noted, however, that this does not just apply to how human minds know *themselves*. Amo argues that in order for intellectual activity to take place *at all*, the human mind must first receive information from the senses. As he puts it: “there is no intellection or ideas without an archetype perceptible to the senses” (TAP, p. 141). This is consistent with his commitment to the Peripatetic axiom.

Given that Amo thinks that, for human minds, knowing ourselves requires gaining knowledge of *both* the mind and the body, it is not surprising that his comments on mental representation can be separated into an account of (a) what takes place in the body, and (b) what takes place in the mind. In fact, in the *Treatise*, Amo claims that mental representation can only take place when the body and the mind work in tandem, each serving a specific *function*. He outlines these functions like so:

The representative act of the mind is of course a function of the mind, but the represented and representable sensation is a function of the body: the former in the sense that the intellect is a faculty of the mind, the latter in the sense that the faculty of sensing is a faculty only of the body.

(TAP, p. 138)

When these two functions – one of the mind, one of the body – are served in tandem, *that* is when mental representation occurs. Only then can the mind generate an idea (TAP, pp. 139, 143) which “sets up as present to itself a sensation that has pre-existed in the body” (ID, p. 183).

What exactly is taking place in the body when mental representation occurs? As we have seen, Amo's claim is that, alongside the mind's function of performing a “representative act”, the body must serve the function of providing a “represented and representable sensation” (TAP, p. 138). But this is a fairly opaque claim. What does the body do to provide a “representable sensation” (i.e., *a thing to be represented*)? In the remainder of this subsection, I reconstruct Amo's answer to this question. Doing so reveals that Amo's account of the body's role in mental representation is, perhaps surprisingly, similar to Thomas Hobbes' account of the memory and imagination.<sup>15</sup> Of course, an account of mental representation, on the hand, is not the same as an account of imagination and memory, on the other, but the point I wish to make here is that for Amo, as with Hobbes, the brain and sense organs play an important role in ‘storing’ sensations to be represented at a later point.

In *Leviathan*, Hobbes explains that “after the object is removed, or the eye shut, we still retain an image of the thing seen, though more obscure than when we see it” (1651, 2.2). His point is that we are able to remember things we have previously perceived (and, in turn, use them to construct the things we imagine) because our sense-organs hold on to a ‘decaying’ version of the original sensation (in the case of a visual experience that sensation is a ‘decaying’ *image*) (see , Duncan 2021, p. 2.1 for discussion). The textual evidence suggests that – although he is a Cartesian dualist and not a materialist about the mind like Hobbes – Amo is thinking in similar terms when it comes to understanding how the body serves its role of providing the mind with “representable” sensations (TAP, p. 139). Two claims that Amo makes in the *Treatise* showcase this. First, he explains that “Synonyms for ideas are: notion, concept, cognition, logical consciousness, intellection”. He then writes: “Logical consciousness is remanent sensation itself, i.e. that which left in the sense-organs and the memory” (TAP, p. 141).<sup>16</sup> Given that ‘logical consciousness’ means the same thing as ‘idea’, and logical consciousness is a remanent sensation “left in the sense-organs and memory”, it follows that *ideas* are sensations left in the sense-organs and memory.

At first glance, this looks a little confusing since ideas are meant to exist in the mind, not the body. So in what sense can it be said that an idea is a sensation in the sense-organs and memory? Amo's view is that the term ‘idea’ can be used equivocally: sometimes to refer to the (bodily) sensation itself and sometimes to the sensation represented or set up “as present” in the mind (ID, 183). In the *Inaugural Dissertation*, he explains that: “An idea is a composite entity, for it exists when the mind sets up as present to itself a sensation that has pre-existed in the body, and it is a represented sensation” (ID, p. 183). Moreover, later, in the *Treatise*, he writes: “Every idea pertains to the mind, as regards representation, to the body, as regards sensation” (TAP, p. 146). Echoing Descartes' distinction between the objective and formal reality of an idea (2003, pp. 28, 29),<sup>17</sup> Amo's point is that there is both a sense in which an ‘idea’ (i.e., the thing it is about) is a bodily sensation and a sense in which an ‘idea’ (i.e., in terms of what it actually is) is in the mind.<sup>18</sup> This explains why Amo claims that an idea, or “logical consciousness” (which is a synonym for ‘idea’), is a sensation in the sense-organs; for, in part, it is. But it is also a “represented sensation” in the mind.

Amo's comments on the role of the sense-organs and memory indicate that, like Hobbes, Amo thinks of the sense-organs as ‘storing’ sensations for future use – i.e., when we remember past experiences.<sup>19</sup> This reading is supported by a later passage where Amo explains that:

Mental memory is that momentary act of the mind by the frequent intentional repetition of which the mind succeeds in fixing the oft-repeated ideas in the disposition of the brain for future use. This act of the mind is calling memorizing.

(TAP, pp. 159, 160).<sup>20</sup>

Amo's point here is that by a process of repeatedly deliberating on an idea we can ensure that we remember it (perhaps via a process of rote learning).<sup>21</sup> What is important for our purposes is Amo's claim that this process of “memorizing” works by fixing “ideas in the disposition of the brain for future use” (TAP, pp. 159, 160, my emphasis). The implication of this claim is that for a thing to be remembered is for it to be ‘fixed’ in the brain – which is, of course, part of the body, not the mind.

So Amo seems to think that the mind can remember past experiences because sensations are stored (or ‘fixed’) in the brain – and perhaps also the sense-organs. But there is also evidence that this applies not only to specific instances of *remembering*, but to *any* act of mental representation. In a section ‘On Representation’, Amo writes:

Representation, memory, reminiscence are synonyms, unless one would prefer to use the expression ‘representation’ for something representable with ease, and memory or reminiscence for something representable with difficulty.

(TAP, p. 137)



His point here is that *if* there is a difference between 'representation' and 'memory' (or 'reminiscence') then it is simply a difference in terms of the difficulty with which the act can be performed, *not* a difference between two different acts. To 'remember' something (if one wishes to make the terminological distinction) is to represent something with difficulty. Further, since the difference lies in the difficulty of the *mental act*, it is reasonable to assume that Amo thinks the same *bodily* activity is taking place in both scenarios. We have seen already that in cases of remembering, the body – specifically the brain or sense-organs – 'fixes' a sensation which can later be represented by (i.e., serve as an archetype for) the mind. Thus, we can conclude that, for Amo, in *any* cases of mental representation, the mind is responding to a "remanent" sensation that has been 'fixed' in the brain or sense-organs. Amo's view thus looks something like this: cases of *immediate* mental representation (where the mind represents to itself what the body is *currently* sensing) feel different to (i.e., less difficult than) cases of remembering because the sensations stored in the brain/sense-organs are *less* remanent – perhaps, in Hobbesian terminology, they are not yet 'decayed'.

In this subsection, I have shown that Amo thinks of mental representation generally (including memory, but also immediate perceptual experience) in similar terms to Hobbes' account of memory and imagination. The point being that the brain and sense organs play an important role of 'storing' sensations for the mind to attend to. For Hobbes, this is restricted to cases of memory and imagination. But, as I showed above, for Amo, this applies to any instance of mental representation. Going forward, this will be important since it will become clear that the mind can only serve its function in mental representation if the body serves this function of 'storing' or 'fixing' sensations.

## 4.2 | The function of the mind in mental representation

In the previous subsection, I established that the function of the body, when mental representation occurs, is to 'fix' a sensation in the brain or the sense-organs which can then be represented by the mind. However, it remains to be spelled out what the mind's function of performing a "representative act" involves (TAP, p. 138).

As I noted in section two, a standard account of mental representation where a sensation in the body is an *efficient cause* of an idea is not open to Amo, given his commitment to the 'impassivity' of the mind. I also explained why recent commentators have argued that Amo is best understood as adopting a model of occasional causation; one where a sensation is the 'occasion' on which the mind generates its own ideas. This reading is consistent with Amo's remarks on the generation of ideas in the *Treatise*, where he claims that "The efficient cause of ideas is the mind" (TAP, p. 139) and "The cause of real ideas is the mind" (TAP, p. 143). Nonetheless, important questions remain. For example, in what manner does an idea represent its object (a sensation) in a theory of occasional causation? And what, in Amo's words, does the "representative act" of the mind that generates ideas involve (TAP, p. 138)? In the remainder of this section, I address both questions by reconstructing Amo's account of what takes place in the mind in mental representation.

In their own discussion of Amo's account of mental representation – or, as they put it, how the mind "notice[s] things in the body" (2020, 138) – Stephen Menn and Justin Smith emphasise the role of Amo's theory of *intentions*. Across the *Inaugural Dissertation* and the *Treatise*, Amo reserves an important role for 'intentions' which he describes as an "operation of the spirit by which it becomes conscious of something such that if it is carried out an end would follow" (ID, p. 161). Further, Amo maintains that all spirits, including the human mind, necessarily operate "from intention toward a determinate end that is known to it" (ID, p. 171). Menn and Smith argue that Amo's references to intentions are crucial when it comes to interpreting his account of how the mind comes to "notice" the sensations felt by the body. On their view, a human mind, thanks to its 'commerce' with a body, has certain things it intends to know. This knowledge concerns external objects: the kinds of things that the human body perceives via the sense-organs. The human mind can only come to know about external objects through its body, which it uses as an "instrument or medium" for knowledge (ID, p. 169). Amo himself explains that the "nearest object" of our knowledge is "the representable or remanent sensation" (TAP, p. 139). Menn and Smith's reading, where the human mind knows external objects *indirectly* via bodily sensations, seems consistent with this remark.

However, I think the implications of Menn and Smith's reading raise concerns about whether it is in keeping with Amo's remarks on human knowledge – and in particular *self-knowledge*. In 3.1, I showed that, for Amo, human minds are unique amongst spirits in that they require ideas – and, in turn, mental representation – to know themselves. According to Amo, representation pre-supposes absence (ID, p. 167). In God, “all things are present” so there is no need for representation (ID, p. 165). He also insists that “other spirits” (i.e., non-human finite spirits like angels) do not require mental representation either; they “understand themselves, their operations, and other things without any ideality or ideas and recollected sensorions” (ID, pp. 165–167). However, human minds, uniquely, require ideas to know themselves because of their “very tight bond and commerce with the body” (ID, p. 167). These remarks indicate that the purpose of ideas is to provide the mind with self-knowledge of a part of itself that is ‘absent’ by representing the body (specifically, its sensations). In fact, this seems to be implicit in Amo's reasoning that God and other non-human spirits *could not* have ideas because they do not have a body.

But on Menn and Smith's reading of Amo, the aim of ideas is not to provide self-knowledge of the body and its sensations. Instead, on their reading, the human mind's knowledge of its body's sensations is a by-product of its knowledge of *external objects*. In their words,

we [i.e., human minds] start by being conscious of the end [something we wish to know], and, through an operation of intending, become conscious of something else as related to that end... a sensation produced in our body by the intended external object. (2020, 134)

Consider the fact that when gaining knowledge of someone's appearance by looking at a photograph of them, one might also “notice” certain things about the photograph itself (say, its dimensions, the quality of the picture, its weight). On Menn and Smith's reading of Amo, knowledge of sensations is, similarly, a by-product of our knowledge of external things. To support this reading, Menn and Smith cite Amo's remarks about the role the body plays as an instrument or medium of the mind in achieving its theoretical ends (ID, p. 169). Their reasoning is that if the body is an instrument or medium then it must be something *else* that, ultimately, the mind intends to know about (see Menn & Smith, 2020, p. 130).<sup>22</sup>

On the one hand, as an account of human knowledge of the external world, this seems right. Amo certainly does think of the body as something that is used to gain knowledge of external objects. However, Menn and Smith's reading of how the mind knows *the body* (and its sensations) does not strike me as consistent with Amo's motivations for positing that human minds, uniquely, gain knowledge via ideas in the first place. We saw above that, for Amo, ideas are generated when, and only when, there is an *absence*: when some piece (or pieces) of knowledge is missing. Amo's point is that, as minds *with bodies*, were it not for our ideas then certain knowledge about *ourselves* would be absent. In other words, we need ideas to provide us with knowledge about a part of ourselves which would otherwise be absent: our bodies. Menn and Smith are quite right to note that by setting up sensations “as present” (ID, p. 183) ideas also provide us with knowledge of external objects – and, more generally, the material world that our bodies inhabit. But it does not seem in keeping with the spirit of Amo's emphasis on the importance of ideas for self-knowledge – and the crucial role that the body plays in providing ‘archetypes’ for those ideas – to suggest that ideas only represent bodily sensations to us as by-products of knowledge of external objects.

Consequently, instead of placing the emphasis squarely on ‘intention’, as Menn and Smith do, I think Amo's account of mental representation hinges on *both* his talk of ‘intention’ *and* his references to ‘attention’. On Menn and Smith's reading, the mind sets out with an intention to know things about the external world – and learns about sensations in the body as a by-product of that. On my reading, however, the human mind sets out with an intention to learn about itself (specifically, a part of itself; the body) and uses the activity of *attention* to realise that intention. Knowledge of the world external to the body is, in turn, a by-product of that *self-knowledge*.<sup>23</sup>

Attention, Amo explains is the mental act whereby “the mind directs its whole faculty of understanding and all its sense exclusively towards the object proximately present, either for momentary application or ensuing reflection” (TAP, p. 157). Note that there are two candidates for what “the object proximately present” might refer to

here. First, it could be an external object that is 'proximately present' to the body. Or, it could be a sensation that is somehow 'proximately present' to the mind. Menn and Smith would opt for the first option since, on their reading, the mind's intentions strive towards knowledge of external objects, with knowledge of bodily sensations arriving as a by-product. However, I think the reconstruction of bodily sensation provided in the previous subsection, which identified certain affinities between Amo's views and Hobbes' account of memory and imagination, indicate that the second option should be preferred. As we saw previously, Amo maintains that the "nearest object" of our knowledge is "the representable or remanent sensation" (TAP, p. 139) – that which is 'stored' or 'fixed' in the brain and sense-organs. With this view in mind, if Amo thinks attention involves the mind directing its faculties to the "the object proximately present" then we should think of as attention as the mind directing its faculties towards *sensations*.

Amo's claims about attention, then, are key to understanding how mental representation works. In attending to its body's sensations, the mind is 'occasioned' to generate certain ideas (or "represented sensation[s]" (ID, p. 183)). Attention seems to be the best way to cash out this 'occasional causal' relation. In other words, the mind directs its faculties towards (that is, 'attends to') a sensation in the body and in response generates a corresponding idea: an idea which sets up "as present" (ID, p. 183) a sensation as *if* it were in the mind (which it, of course, cannot actually be since minds and bodies are "contrary opposites" (ID, p. 163)).

Thus, we have an explanation of what mental representation looks like for Amo that is consistent with reading him as adopting a theory of occasional causation. Yet, one might still ask what kind of relation that mental representation is grounded on. That is, what makes it the case that the ideas generated when the mind is 'occasioned' to do so represent certain bodily sensations (and not others)? We saw previously that typical ways of grounding mental representation, such as causation or resemblance, are not available to Amo. Meyns claims that it is a "principle of isomorphism" that underlies the mind's ability to represent sensations to itself as ideas. But I think this is perhaps a little ambiguous. A more precise way of putting things is to say that mental representation, for Amo, is grounded in the fact that the two *functions* (one bodily, one mental), outlined above, are being served. For mental representation to take place (that is, for an idea to set up "as present" in the mind a sensation (ID, p. 183)), for Amo, *just is* for the body to serve its function and the mind to do the same. In other words, these two roles being served *in tandem*, for Amo, are the necessary and sufficient conditions for mental representation to take place. But note that this does not entail that the mind and the body are playing *merely parallel* roles – this is not a case of 'harmony' – for the mind's role is dependent on the body's role being played. The mind *could not* serve its function of setting up a sensation as present were it not for the fact that the body had 'fixed' certain sensations in the brain or sense-organs *to be represented*. It is in that sense, Amo thinks, that the mind and the body share a "tight bond and commerce" (ID, p. 167).

I have established that the body and mind serve crucial functions which, when served in tandem, allow mental representation to occur. It is because both functions must be served for an idea to be set up as present in the mind that Amo thinks of mental representation as a uniquely human activity. Having now laid the groundwork, and shown what Amo's account of mental representation involves, in the next Section 1 show that this account faces a problem that can only be solved if we attribute to Amo a specific version of occasional causation known as concurrentism.

## 5 | THE PROBLEM OF PRIOR KNOWLEDGE AND THE CASE FOR CONCURRENTISM

In this section, I show that Amo's account of mental representation seems to face what I call the Problem of Prior Knowledge. I then explain what a commitment to 'concurrentism' about the body-mind relation involves and show that if Amo is read as adopting this position, then the problem can be solved. I contrast my reading of Amo as a concurrentist with an alternative reading, defended by Julie Walsh, where the body-mind occasional causal relation is grounded on a divinely instantiated "nomological principle" (2019, 14). I argue that, despite some important similarities, my reading has the advantage of being consistent with Amo's view that the human mind efficiently causes its ideas in response to what is happening in the body, rather than being compelled to do so by God or a divine law.

Therefore, since my reading avoids the Problem of Prior Knowledge in a manner that is more consistent with Amo's remarks on the mind's activity, I conclude that we should take Amo to be a concurrentist.

## 5.1 | The Problem of Prior Knowledge

The problem, for Amo's view as construed above, is that the human mind would seem to require *prior knowledge* of the body's sensations in order to generate ideas which can set up those sensations "as present". Consider the following concern that Menn and Smith raise with Amo's account:

We may be dissatisfied with Amo's account of the previous consciousness of the end or object, which is apparently required before we can have an intellection or volition or effective act directed toward it. (2020, 137)

There seems to be a more general, underlying assumption at work here; namely, that in order for the mind to 'intend' to know something, it must *know* what it is that it wants to know.<sup>24</sup> The concern, as articulated by Menn and Smith, is directed at Amo's theory of intentions. However, this kind of concern can also be expressed in a way that targets Amo's account of mental representation as expounded in the previous section. The concern is this: if the mind generates ideas on the basis of 'attending to' certain bodily sensations, it would seem to be the case that the mind must *already know* something about the body *before* ideas are generated. Without such prior knowledge, one might argue, there is no explanation for how the mind knows *which* ideas to efficiently cause in response to certain sensations. If that *were* the case then it would be inconsistent with Amo's indirect theory of perception where it is ideas that are the "nearest object[s]" of knowledge (TAP, p. 139). In other words, by Amo's own lights, ideas are meant to provide the human mind with knowledge of bodily sensations *in the first instance*. Yet, it seems as though the mind would require prior knowledge of bodily sensations in order to generate ideas that represent them. Consider an example: in order for me to hold up a photograph showing you what the President of Ireland looks like, I need to know (already) what he does indeed look like – unless I get very lucky. Assuming that the human mind does not *systematically* 'get lucky', we can justifiably ask: if the mind does not gain prior knowledge about bodily sensations when attending to them, how could it possibly *represent* them? Given that bodily sensations do not efficiently cause ideas, and that human minds are supposed to gain knowledge of the body *from* those sensations, it is unclear, on Amo's account of mental representation, what grounds the fact that the mind generates *this*, and not that, idea in response to a certain bodily sensation.

Other models of occasional causation from the Early Modern period can get around this concern. For instance, Margaret Cavendish, who is not a Cartesian dualist but does adopt a model of occasional causation in her account of perception, argues that the individual parts of matter that make up the human mind do in fact perceive external objects *prior* to those objects being represented in the mind itself (2001, p. 167). In other words, Cavendish's account (whether or not it is plausible) explains how the matter that composes the mind 'knows' what to represent to itself. But Amo's system, as understood so far, does not have the capacity to offer a similar explanation. Again, for Amo, occasional causation is supposed to explain how the immaterial mind comes to know about the material body *in the first instance*.

## 5.2 | Concurrentism

Since a more naturalistic solution to this problem is not forthcoming, and given Amo's context and background, a plausible interpretative move is to suggest that *God* must play a role here. After all, other Cartesians, such as Malebranche, turned to God to explain how the mind generates ideas.<sup>25</sup> One thing it is important to note at this stage is

that none of Amo's remarks explicitly commits him to such a view. On the other hand, nothing that Amo says rules out that God has a role to play either.

As it turns out, there is a particular version of occasional causation in which God plays an important role – one that was popular amongst both Medieval and Early Modern thinkers – that does not strip human minds of their causal agency and which, I will argue, promises to solve the Problem of Prior Knowledge. In contemporary scholarship, this version of occasional causation is known as *concurrentism*.<sup>26</sup> In contrast to *occasionalism*, the view most famously defended by Malebranche, whereby God is the efficient cause of all mental and physical activity, on the concurrentist model, God is not the sole causal agent. Rather, God acts *alongside* the human mind in generating ideas. As Jeffrey McDonough explains, concurrentism was one of several accounts of human agency (along with occasionalism and other versions of occasional causation) that arose amidst “attempts to find a suitable balance between divine and creaturely contributions” to causal activity (2008, 568). He explains:

concurrentists maintain that although creatures are endowed with genuine causal powers, no creaturely causal power could be efficacious in bringing about its appropriate effects without God's active general assistance, or 'concurrency'. (2008, 569)

McDonough adds that concurrentism was a “default position” (2008, 570) in the first half of the eighteenth century that no thinker at the time “could have failed to recognize... as a serious option” (2008, 572). Given Amo's engagement with both Cartesian and Medieval Scholastic debates, it seems very likely he would have been aware of concurrentism and thus viewed it as a live option.

There are different ways that concurrentism can be cashed out. For instance, a concurrentist might argue that God concurs with my volitions to move my limbs and thereby cause bodily movement.<sup>27</sup> However, I am attributing to Amo a specific concurrentist view about the production of ideas in the human mind. The important thing to note is that, on a concurrentist model of causation, as Sukjae Lee puts it, effects are “immediately caused by *both* God and the creature” (2020, 2.2, emphasis in original) – specifically, in this case, the human mind. My contention is that we should read Amo as holding that God and human minds ‘concur’ in the production of ideas. On this reading, both the human mind and God simultaneously contribute to the production of ideas in the mind. Human minds remain “the efficient cause of ideas” (TAP, p. 139), but their capacity to do so relies on God's assistance.

The most compelling reason to read Amo as a concurrentist is that doing so can help his account of mental representation avoid the Problem of Prior Knowledge. How so? I suggest, by assigning to God the assistive role of determining *which* ideas the mind efficiently causes in response to certain bodily sensations – and thus removing the need for the mind's having prior knowledge. Note, then, that the human mind, on this view, is the immediate cause of its ideas, although God's own causal activity ensures that the human mind generates *the right* ideas. To make it clear how this reading works, it is worth laying out the chain of causal events leading from the initial bodily sensation to the resultant idea in the human mind. On the concurrentist reading, God's activity is not an extra link in that causal chain. It is not the case, as it would be for a Malebranchian occasionalist, that upon the occasion of a bodily sensation God steps in and causes an idea in the human mind. Rather, the bodily sensation occasions the mind to generate an idea and *at the very same time* God directs the mind to generate a *particular* idea. In this way, God *concur*s in the production of an idea.

One concern that might arise with concurrentism, generally, is that it seems (on the surface at least) to involve causal *overdetermination*. That is, by identifying both God and human agents as the joint causes of certain events or processes (such as the generation of ideas) concurrentism runs the risk of implying that such events or processes are overdetermined (i.e., have more than one sufficient cause). Hence, as McDonough explains, it was important for Medieval and Early Modern concurrentists to identify and separate *God's contribution* to such causal activity from the *contributions of human agents*.<sup>28</sup> This is also possible – and in fact coheres very well – with what I think we should take to be Amo's version of concurrentism. The Problem of Prior Knowledge left us wondering *how* the human mind knows which idea to generate in response to certain bodily sensations. In other words, it was unclear how the mind could

'know' that it should generate this and not that idea. However, once God is in the picture, he can be assigned this role. That is, we can plausibly take Amo to have believed that God's role – his assistive or 'concurrent' act – is to ensure that the human mind generates *the right ideas*. If we attribute to Amo the view that God is playing this role, and thus assisting the mind's efficient causal activity, then the claim that the mind requires prior knowledge of the body no longer applies. To return to my previous example, on this reading, God is like someone telling you to choose *this* and not that photo, when asked to hold up a photograph of the President of Ireland. But, of course, that does not mean you are not, ultimately, the one holding up the photo. Similarly, on the concurrentist model of occasional causation, the mind is still the efficient cause of its ideas. What's more, on this reading, the mind is not compelled (i.e., it remains the efficient cause of its ideas) but rather assisted by God in the generation of ideas. As a result, the human mind remains an (efficient) causal agent that generates ideas in response to bodily sensations.

At least one other commentator has also appealed to God to help Amo avoid the Problem of Prior Knowledge. Julie Walsh notes that "the non-arbitrary relationship between a sensory experience (the occasional cause) and the content of the idea (the effect) produced by the mind (the efficient cause) must be explained" (2019, 13). In other words, Walsh is also asking for an explanation of how the human mind generates the right kind of ideas in response to certain bodily sensations. While Walsh does not explicitly raise it, something like the Problem of Prior Knowledge seems to be behind this concern since without a straightforward body-mind efficient causal relation, it seems hard to understand how ideas can provide knowledge of bodily sensations *in the first instance*. To address this concern, Walsh suggests that, for Amo, it is a "nomological principle" grounded in the divine will of God that ensures that the right ideas are generated upon the occasion of certain bodily sensations (2019, 14). It is worth carefully distinguishing Walsh's reading from the concurrentist reading I have defended above, since there are some notable points of overlap. Despite these similarities, however, I will argue that my concurrentist reading is more consistent with Amo's view that the human mind and body are in a "tight bond and commerce" (ID, p. 167).<sup>29</sup>

As noted, Walsh's reading and my own are similar in important ways. Walsh emphasises that it is important to respect Amo's commitment to the view that the mind is the efficient cause of its own ideas (2019, 9). She also notes that what we are looking for is a model of body-mind interaction that does not, as she puts it, compromise Amo's "criterion for self-determination" (2019, 7) – i.e., one that respects his commitment to the essential activity of spirits. And the position that Walsh arrives at sounds, at times, very close to my own concurrentist reading. For instance, she writes that, on her reading, "sensory experience provides the occasion for the mind to exert an efficient causal power to produce an idea" (2019, 13) and that Amo could plausibly have appealed to God to explain how the *right* ideas are produced.

The difference between our readings lies in the structure of the causal chain of events that begins with a bodily sensation and ends with an idea in the human mind. On Walsh's reading, either God himself or a divinely instated "nomological principle" (2019, 14) are an intermediary standing between the initial bodily sensation and the mind itself. On this reading, the bodily sensation first occasions God to communicate certain of his properties or effects to the human mind, in accordance with this "nomological principle". These properties or effects, communicated from God, then "compel the mind to generate ideas" (Walsh, 2019, p. 11). In this way, Walsh places God – or a nomological principle rooted in the divine will – into the sequence of events in a linear fashion; as an intermediary between the initial bodily sensation and the mind's own act of generating an idea. However, as we saw above, on my reading God is not situated between the bodily sensation and the mind's generation of an idea. Instead, God's causal activity occurs *simultaneously* with the mind's own causal activity – that is, the two *concur* in the generation of a particular idea and God's contribution is restricted to that of ensuring that the human mind generates the right kind of idea. Again, we can think of God as playing a *directing* role; akin to that of someone who, looking over your shoulder, informs or directs you to choose the photo that best represents the President of Ireland. In a similar way, God *directs or assists* the mind in generating a *particular* idea, rather than *compelling* the mind to generate an idea per se. In that sense, God's causal contribution to this metaphysical state of affairs plays a crucial *epistemic* role (and, for that reason, we can put aside any worries of causal overdetermination).

Having distinguished between Walsh's and my own interpretation, it is worth explaining why I take the concurrentist reading to be preferable. Ultimately, as I see it, the problem is that Walsh's model does not sit well with Amo's commitment to the "tight bond and commerce" between the mind and the body.<sup>30</sup> On Walsh's reading, an initial bodily sensation shares a relation of occasional causation with God, while God shares a further nomological relation with the human mind – which is then compelled to efficiently cause an idea. This places the mind at a remove from the body in that it is no longer the case that the mind *immediately* 'responds' to the body's sensations. Rather, the mind immediately responds to God (or a divinely instated nomological principle) and only *mediately* responds to the initial bodily sensation. It is true that the mind remains the efficient cause of its ideas but creating this kind of distance between the mind and its bodily sensations threatens to undermine Amo's insistence that the human mind and body operate in a "tight bond and commerce" to one another (ID, p. 167).

My own concurrentist reading of Amo does not create any such distance between the mind and body – God does not enter the picture as an additional link in the chain stretching from a bodily sensation to an idea in the mind. Rather, God's activity occurs simultaneously (i.e., *concur*s) with the human mind's and plays the crucial epistemic role of ensuring – by *informing* or *directing* the mind – that the right idea is generated.

## 6 | CONCLUSION

I set out with two aims in this paper. First, to provide an overview of literature on Amo's account of the mind-body relation and to outline the two lines of interpretation developed in that literature: the Leibnizian reading and the occasional causation reading. My second aim was to take this debate in a new direction, by making the case for reading Amo as a specific kind of occasional causation theorist: a *concurrentist*. I did so on philosophical, rather than textual grounds; arguing that unless Amo is read as a concurrentist, his theory of mental representation gives rise to the Problem of Prior Knowledge.

It is also worth noting that this paper also helps to further embed Amo in wide-ranging discussions about human knowledge and agency in the Early Modern period. My reconstruction of Amo's theory of mental representation revealed some striking similarities with Hobbes' account of memory and imagination, while my case for thinking of Amo as a concurrentist (at least when it comes to the generation of ideas in the mind) places him within a tradition that has roots in both earlier Early Modern and Medieval Scholastic thought. Thus, the interpretative debate over Amo's account of the mind-body relation is exemplary of the fact that the more we focus on typically under-discussed figures, the richer our picture of Early Modern philosophy becomes.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> For more thorough biographical discussions of Amo, and the context of the Dissertations and Treatise, see Nwala, 1978, Emma-Adamah 2015 (ch.1), Smith, 2015 (ch.8), and Menn & Smith, 2020 ('Introduction').

<sup>2</sup> Note that I am only attributing to Amo the view that God 'concur's' with the human mind in efficiently causing its ideas. I am not, for example, attributing to Amo the view that God 'concur's' with the human mind in efficiently causing its body to move (although I am not seeking to rule out that interpretation either).

- <sup>3</sup> All references to the Inaugural Dissertation on the Impassivity of the Human Mind and Philosophical Disputation Containing a Distinct Idea of those Things that Pertain either to the Mind or to Our Living and Organic Body are to Anton Wilhelm Amo's *Philosophical Dissertations on Mind and Body*, edited and translated by Menn and Smith (2020). References to *Treatise on the Art of Philosophising Soberly and Accurately* are to Nwala (1978). I am indebted to these scholars' translations of the texts from the original Latin.
- <sup>4</sup> The *Treatise* is also a logic textbook reminiscent of earlier texts such as Antoine Arnauld and Pierre Nicole's *Port-Royal Logic*, published in 1662.
- <sup>5</sup> I leave aside the question of whether Amo's reading of Descartes is accurate. However, as Nadler (2011) argues, there is reason to believe that Descartes saw the relation between body and mind not as one of straightforward efficient causation but as one of occasional causation. On the other hand, Meyns suggests there is good reason to believe that, in the *Meditations* at least, Descartes maintains that the mind can be passive in sensation (2019, 3).
- <sup>6</sup> As Menn and Smith note, "if the argument were simply this, it would not accomplish what Amo wants: for, given this very strong stipulative definition of spirit, why should anyone concede that the only substances are bodies and spirits, or that the human mind is a spirit in this sense?" (2020, 105).
- <sup>7</sup> For an overview of the different ways that 'ideas' were construed by the Early Moderns, see McRae, 1965.
- <sup>8</sup> For an outline and critique of the standard resemblance theory of representation, see Crane, 1995, ch. 1.
- <sup>9</sup> The Peripatetic axiom is more typically associated with thinkers outside the Cartesian tradition such as Hobbes or Locke. Chris Meyns suggests that Amo may have been familiar with Lockean thought, if not Locke's writing itself, through Jean Le Clerc (2019, 9). In committing himself to the Peripatetic axiom, Amo goes against the views of many early Cartesians such as Antoine Arnauld, for example, who writes: "It is false... that all of our ideas come through our senses" (Arnauld, 1970, p. 7). For the roots of this principle in Ancient and Medieval thought, see Dawes 2017.
- <sup>10</sup> Smith also adds that "the position Amo takes up is clearly in line with the general account of the mind-body relation Leibniz offers in the *New Essays Concerning Human Understanding*" (2015, 226).
- <sup>11</sup> It seems that Emma-Adamah may have simply failed to consider that a theory of occasional causation might underlie Amo's account of mental representation, as suggested by his claim that Amo's account "can *only* be understood against the background of Leibniz's pre-established harmony" (2015, 204). Thanks to an anonymous referee for this suggestion.
- <sup>12</sup> Stephen Menn and Justin Smith, in the Introduction to their translation of Amo's *Dissertations*, also endorse an occasional causation reading. They write: "Amo clearly rejects occasionalism and pre-established harmony" (2020, 139). In place of those views, they suggest, "[p]erhaps we can say that bodies and their motions can also be occasional causes, not in the Malebranchian sense that they can occasion God to act, but in the sense that they can occasion a human mind to act" (2020, 140).
- <sup>13</sup> Amo does not discuss non-human animals so their status in his system is hard to ascertain. Given that he is working in a Cartesian framework, we might attribute to him Descartes' view that animals do not have minds (understood as immaterial spirits). On the other hand, Amo's view that *bodies* (not minds) have sensations might warrant thinking of him as treating animals as sentient, if not rational.
- <sup>14</sup> Amo explains that alongside human minds, there are two kinds of "created spirits": "those of the blessed and those of the damned, the former being angels and blessed souls, the latter devils and damned souls" (TAP, 96). Following the previous footnote, Amo does not mention any other kinds of created spirits, such as those of non-human animals, suggesting he has a similar view of non-human animal agency as Descartes.
- <sup>15</sup> Although perhaps this is not totally surprising given that Hobbes, like Amo, believes that there is nothing in the intellect not first in the senses In Hobbes' own words, "For there is no conception in a mans mind, which hath not at first, totally, or by parts, been begotten upon the organs of Sense" (1994, 1.1). To be clear, I am not making a claim about causal influence here (I am unaware of any evidence that Amo read Hobbes, although it doesn't seem impossible). Rather, I am drawing a connection between the idea that there is nothing in the intellect not first in the senses, and Hobbes' and Amo's shared view (discussed below) that the brain and sense organs play an important role in 'storing' sensations to be cognised at a later point.
- <sup>16</sup> Amo also refers to "remanent" (TAP, p. 137) or "historical" (TAP, p. 140) sensations elsewhere.
- <sup>17</sup> For an outline of Descartes' distinction and its Scholastic precedents, see Adriaenssen, 2017, pp. 127–129.
- <sup>18</sup> I think this is roughly the same point that Wiredu (2004, p. 203) is making when he claims that, for Amo, an idea is "the conceptual aspect of what goes on" when we perceive external objects. Although Wiredu is perhaps guilty of playing down Amo's claim that an idea is *both* bodily *and* mental (or "conceptual").



- <sup>19</sup> One might ask: does that mean memory is in the mind or the body? In line with his view that mental representation is a *pair* of functions, one bodily and one mental, I think Amo would answer: both. Memories are stored in the brain, but *remembering* involves an act of mental representation ('setting up as present'). Thanks to Manuel Fasko for raising this question.
- <sup>20</sup> Again, 'ideas' here is being used to refer to sensations in the body (the brain, specifically) and not in their other sense as *represented* sensations in the mind.
- <sup>21</sup> For context, this section of the *Treatise* focuses on how we can improve our critical thinking skills.
- <sup>22</sup> Their point being (I take it) that when we use an instrument like a pair of reading glasses we do so because we want to see the world around us, not the lenses of the glasses.
- <sup>23</sup> That is, by learning what sensations the body is experiencing, the mind can make inferences about the *causes* of those sensations.
- <sup>24</sup> This kind of concern has echoes of Plato's *Meno*, where the point is made that in order to learn we must be aware of our own ignorance; i.e., know what we desire to know.
- <sup>25</sup> Some interpretations of Descartes also take him to hold that God plays an important role in ensuring that the right ideas are occasioned by certain bodily sensations (see, e.g., Nadler, 2011, pp. 38–40; O'Neill, 2013, pp. 324–25).
- <sup>26</sup> In the discussion that follows, I am indebted to Jeffrey McDonough's (2008) exposition of concurrentism and its history. For further discussion, see Dvořák (2013) and Lee (2004), who attribute the position to Aquinas and Leibniz, respectively.
- <sup>27</sup> McDonough attributes this view to Berkeley.
- <sup>28</sup> In McDonough's words, when I cause a certain event to take place with God's concurrence, "it is still possible to conceptually trace some aspects of the production of that effect to my nature and some aspects to God's nature or will" (2008, P. 583).
- <sup>29</sup> It is worth noting that the textual evidence does not offer a 'smoking gun' in favour of my own or Walsh's reading. Walsh offers two possible pieces of textual support for her interpretation. The first is Amo's approving reference to Clerselier where he "names divine will as the cause of the union between the motions of the body and the thoughts of the mind" (2019, 13). The second is Amo's remark, in the *Treatise*, that both God and human minds "act in accordance with order" (TAP, 95). I take it that neither piece of textual evidence settles the matter. Clerselier's remark seems consistent with the concurrentist view I attribute to Amo, while Amo's reference to "order" is somewhat opaque. While this remark could be read as an implicit reference to nomological principles, it can also be read as a reinforcement of Amo's point that all spirits act in accordance with an intention. That is, spirits necessarily act in an *orderly*, intention-directed manner.
- <sup>30</sup> I agree with Walsh that her reading does not undermine Amo's commitment to the essential activity of minds – as she notes, Amo thinks this view is consistent with "spirit-spirit communication" (2019, 15). Amo opens the door to the possibility of efficient causal interaction between spirits (such as God and human minds) when he writes: "If a spirit were compelled by... another spirit, then the spontaneity or free faculty of acting and reacting would remain intact in both of them" (ID, 167). Amo's point here is efficient causal interaction between *spirits* is consistent with their "purely active" nature (ID, 159). There is more than could be said about *why* Amo thinks this (see Walsh, 2019, p. 5 for discussion).

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