Sample modern philosophy reading response type 2 – Malebranche

Section 1

In the *Search After Truth* Malebranche argues for occasionalism. This is the view that causes in nature are not true (or real) causes but are occasional causes. An occasional cause is a cause that provides the occasion for which God acts. On this view, God is the one and only true cause; every other candidate cause is a mere occasional cause. For Malebranche to argue that God is the only true cause he has to argue that minds and bodies (material objects) are not true causes. One argument he gives towards this general conclusion is as follows. For me to move my body I need to know the detailed anatomical workings of my body (*Search After Truth*, p. 450). However, I do not know the detailed anatomical workings of my body. Therefore, I do not move my body. In other words, I am not the cause of my body’s movements – some other thing must be the cause.

Section 2

This argument is not successful. Consider the premise that for me to move my body I need to know the detailed anatomical workings of my body. This premise is questionable. Just because I do not know the detailed anatomical workings of my body it does not follow that I do not move my body. Here is an example that supports this suggestion: an illiterate peasant from the 13th century knew how to move his limbs when ploughing in the field even though this peasant did not know about the sophisticated science of the micro-occurrences in his muscles. Clearly, this is true, which refutes the first premise of Malebranche’s argument.