

DOESN'T CONTINUOUS CREATION ENTAIL OCCASIONALISM?
MALEBRANCHE (AND DESCARTES)
by Josh Spears

Introduction

For the medievals and moderns, the nature of God's act of conserving (or sustaining) the universe was the locus of no small controversy. To be more precise, the controversy wasn't so much *that* God sustains the universe¹; instead the controversy was *how* God sustains the universe. Many of that era understood God's sustenance of the universe in terms of continuous creation. This conception, however, seems to entail a peculiar consequence, namely, occasionalism. That continuous creation entails occasionalism has recently come into question.² In what follows, I argue that denying this entailment fails in part because of a failure to offer an appropriate understanding of continuous creation. In order to facilitate the argument, I will offer two possible understandings of continuous creation commiserate with Malebranche's and Descartes' and show that there is some sense in which both entail occasionalism. More specifically, I'll argue below that whether continuous creation entails occasionalism depends not upon the *continuous* in continuous creation but the *creation* in continuous creation.

A. Why does continuous creation (seem to) entail occasionalism?

Suppose we understand the nature of conservation in terms of continuous creation (hereafter CC). I'll have more to say about what this doctrine means below, but for now let us think of CC as that doctrine which ascribes the continuation of the universe to God's constantly creating the world. This means that God creates each object in the universe at each moment and, more importantly for this paper, creates each object in a certain position and with certain properties. Now if God acts in this way it doesn't appear as though there is anything for created objects to *do*. God has done everything and there's no need for created objects to bring about causal changes in the world. This view seems to lead to the conclusion that there are no finite, created, active or passive³ causes, a view that has come to be known as occasionalism.⁴ On this

¹ Though this has been disputed, see Jonathan L. Kvanvig and Hugh McCann who discuss arguments against theses promoting the notion that the universe continues to exist apart from God's immediate sustaining activity. See their "Divine Conservation and the Persistence of the World" in *Divine and Human Action: Essays in the Metaphysics of Theism*, Thomas V. Morris, ed., (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988).

² See Andrew Pessin, "Does Continuous Creation Entail Occasionalism? Malebranche (and Descartes)" in *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 30.3 (2000): 413-440. All references to this article will be parenthetical in the text. Katherine A. Rogers has also denied this entailment, see her "What's Wrong with Occasionalism?" in *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 75 (Summer 2001): 345-369.

³ On the distinction between 'active' and 'passive' causal powers, see Alfred Fredosso, "Medieval Aristotelianism and the Case against Secondary Causation in Nature," in Thomas V. Morris, ed., *Divine and Human Action: Essays in the Metaphysics of Theism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), 79-83.

⁴ There are four sorts of causal interactions that may be differentiated, viz., Mind-Mind (MM), Mind-Body (MB), Body-Mind (BM) and Body-Body (BB). Given these options, one may hold to 'partial occasionalism' or

view, God alone is *the* true or genuine cause in the universe relegating all other “causes” to the status of occasional cause. For example, if I were to throw a baseball into a window, it would not be the baseball that causes the window to break. Instead, God, on the occasion of the ball striking the window, causes the window to break. Thus, according to occasionalism, created objects provide an occasion for God to bring about some effect.⁵ This seems to be a peculiar consequence, indeed. This would mean, of course, that our common sense notions of cause and effect are mere illusions. It’s not *really* the rain that makes the grass grow, but God making the grass grow. There is a more troubling implication. On this account it’s difficult to make sense of God’s relationship to the evil in his world. If God is the only true cause, then God is *the* cause of evil in the universe. This is a consequence that no orthodox theologian may accept.

B. *What is continuous creation?*

Understanding God’s relationship to the continual being of the universe in terms of continuous creation was popular among both the medievals and early moderns. For Malebranche (and Descartes) it was impious to construe God’s activity in the world as being limited to the initial state of the universe; that is, and to use a term anachronistically, these two moderns found any sense of deism incompatible with an orthodox conception of God’s relation to the world. Making explicit sense of the doctrine, however, was not so easy. CC is open varied interpretations, two of which I will deal with here. First, it is plausible to understand CC simply as God’s upholding the world in existence. Where ‘W’ means ‘weak’.

(WCC) For any contingent object x and time t , x continues to exist at some subsequent time t^* if and only if God upholds x through t^* .⁶

‘Upholds’⁷ in (WCC) should be understood not in terms of God’s *activity* as much as God’s *power*. That is, rather than thinking of CC as God’s performing the exact same act that he

what I call a ‘full blown occasionalism’ (FBO). The difference between the two is that those of the former accept the occasionalist thesis only for some of the causal interactions mentioned above [often (BB) and (BM)], whereas the latter accept the occasionalist thesis for all four interactions.

⁵ Though this is changing, students of Introductory Philosophy courses are often fed the line the Malebranche only develops his occasionalism as an *ad hoc* solution to the problem of interaction that beset Cartesian dualism. Malebranche’s occasionalism does indeed solve the problem of interaction, but this was not his primary motivation for the doctrine. It is clear that Malebranche intended his occasionalism to cover all causal interactions, not simply those that occur between minds and bodies.

⁶ I owe this formulation of WCC to a discussion with the members of the 2008 Meeting of the Kansas Philosophical Society.

⁷ One conceivable way to interpret ‘upholds’ is to maintain that when God created the universe he instilled in it some tendency or power of self-preservation to which he grants permission (i.e., he doesn’t over ride) this tendency or power at each moment the universe exists. This seems to be the position of John M. Frame in his *Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 2002), 278. It is pretty clear, however, that neither Malebranche nor Descartes would accept this understanding of ‘upholds’, and I won’t consider it here either.

performed in the beginning at each subsequent moment the universe exists, CC should be construed as an exercise of the exact same power in each subsequent instance of the universe's existence as that which was required to bring about the universe in its first instance of existence. (WCC) entails simply that at every instant in which the universe exists, it is radically contingent and as such, each instant requires no less than the very power of God that was needed in order to bring about creation in the first place.⁸ According to (WCC), God must be as actively and directly involved in conservation as he is in creation and his activity of sustaining the existence of the world is essentially the same as his activity of producing it.⁹ It is important to understand what is meant by 'essentially'. The claim isn't that God's action is exactly the same action. Instead, it is plausible to understand (WCC) to mean that God's *power* is the same irrespective of what the object of that power might be. Hence, the same power it took to create the world *ex nihilo* is the same required to preserve the world at each moment thereafter.

There is a second, much stronger interpretation of the doctrine. Where 'S' means 'strong'.

(SCC) For any contingent object x and time t , x continues to exist at some subsequent time t^* if and only if God creates (*ex nihilo*) x at t^* .

(SCC) interprets CC in terms of *re-creation*. The universe is such that it tends to pass into non-being if God does not continuously create it at each moment it exists. For any created substance to persist at any moment requires that God create that substance again as though it had never existed prior to the moment in which it exists. On this understanding there is no qualitative or quantitative difference between creation and conservation—they are precisely the same act on God's part. For the universe (and all the things contained therein) to exist at any moment of time, God must create (quite literally), *ex nihilo*, the universe (and all the things contained therein) at each moment of time.

C. What did Malebranche (and Descartes) hold?

Which, if either, of the two continuous creation doctrines did Malebranche and Descartes hold? Prima fascia, it is reasonable to conclude that Descartes holds (SCC). Indeed, he uses the very language found in (SCC) to describe God's sustaining activity as nothing more than the creating of substances anew at each moment they exist.¹⁰ There is, however, a natural reading of

⁸ See Kvanvig and McCann, "Divine Conservation," 15.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff and Dugald Murdoch, trans. 2 vol (Cambridge University Press, 1985), 2.33. Hereafter notes as CSM. In his Third Meditation argument for God's existence, Descartes argues that the only reason he continues to exist is because "it does not follow from the fact that [he] existed a little while ago that [he] must exist now, unless there is some cause which as it were *creates me afresh* at this moment—that is preserves [him]." This 'creation afresh' is crucial to his argument as he argues that if bodies are to sustain themselves in existence at each moment there must be within them "some power in it that recreates it continuously as it were" (CSM 2.79). He goes on to argue that time is such that its earlier parts

Descartes' words that do not commit him to (SCC). Descartes' use of the phrase 'as it were' in these passages suggests that he wished to avoid (SCC). In using the strong language of "recreating" and "creates me afresh", his aim should be understood as stressing that God's *power* is no less involved in the continual existence of the universe than what it took to get the universe to appear in the first place. For Descartes, then, "the distinction between creation and conservation is only a conceptual one."¹¹ Descartes' claim that the certain and commonly held opinion of the theologians that "the act by which God conserves [the universe] is just the same as that by which he created it"¹² should not be understood as meaning God's act of conservation is *exactly* the same act as that which was performed in the beginning. On the contrary, the act of creation implies an action performed which brings something about whereas conservation is an action performed upon something already existing. To say that conservation is the same act as creation is simply to say that God exercises the same quantity of power in both, not that God produces everything *ex nihilo*. The same act of power is performed but the object of that power is radically different. Thus, Descartes claims that "no less a *cause* is needed to preserve something than is needed to create it in the first place."¹³ Descartes, then, held (WCC) not (SCC).

What of Malebranche? It seems clear that for Malebranche God must recreate the universe at each moment of its existence. Malebranche affirms (SCC). He believes "it certain that conservation is but continued creation, for it is but the same will of God, who continues to

are not sufficient to bring about later ones and therefore, "the fact that I exist now does not imply that I shall continue to exist unless there is a cause which creates me *afresh*, as it were, at each moment of time" (CSM 2.79, emphasis added). But this power is not to be found in bodies and therefore it must be found in God alone. He alone has the power sufficient to be considered the sustainer of bodies at each moment they exist. To strengthen this reading, this talk of creating things anew at each moment is supposed to follow from Descartes' understanding of the nature of time. For, "It is quite clear to anyone who attentively considers the nature of time that the same power and action that are needed to preserve anything at each individual moment of its duration would be required to create that thing anew if it were not yet in existence" (CSM 2.33) Given what Descartes says about a substance's duration through time, it appears as though he is committed to the claim that God must create each substance *ex nihilo* at each moment it exists. He seems to be committed to (SCC). However, I will argue below that contrary to appearance, Descartes holds (WCC) instead.

¹¹ CSM 2.33. Suarez's words are illuminating. He believes there is "at least a conceptual distinction here, given that an entity (i) is not said to be conserved in the first instant at which it is created and (ii) it is not said to be created after the first instant during the rest of the time during which it is conserved." Francisco J. Suarez, *On Creation, Conservation and Concurrence: Metaphysical Disputations 20, 21, and 22*, Alfred J. Freddoso, trans. (South Bend: St. Augustine's Press, 2001), 21.2.7 cited by Geoffrey Gorham, "Cartesian Causation: Continuous, Instantaneous and Overdetermined" *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 42.4 (2004), 392, nt. 12. Gorham cites this passage in his discussion of Descartes' doctrine of continuous creation seemingly wishing to show that Suarez helps illuminate what Descartes means by the 'conceptual' distinction between creation and conservation.

¹² CSM 2.133.

¹³ CSM 2.116, emphasis added.

will what He has willed, and this is the general view among theologians.”¹⁴ As an example, he claims that a body exists

because God wills that it exist, and He wills it to exist either here or there, for He cannot create it nowhere. And if he creates it here, is it conceivable that a creature should displace it and move it elsewhere unless God at the same time wills to create it elsewhere in order to share His power with His creature as far as it is capable of it?¹⁵

The connection between God’s will and its object is a necessary one. For God to will that p , entails p . Thus, God’s act of conservation is necessarily effectual and without it, the universe would cease to exist. “Creation does not pass, because the conservation of creatures is—on God’s part—simply a continuous creation, a single volition subsisting and operating continuously.”¹⁶ The world is not an artifact like a house which subsists despite the death of its architect. It is dependent upon the creator to the extent that without the active willing its continued creation it would cease to exist, i.e., it would be annihilated. To suggest otherwise is to admit that the creation is independent of the creator and this suggestion is not in line with the nature of God’s being. Notice, though, what is lacking in Malebranche’s exposition of CC. With Descartes’ doctrine, there is language which qualified the nature of continuous creation. Conspicuous by absence is this language in Malebranche’s doctrine. He does not qualify his talk and appears to readily accept the conclusion that creation *ex nihilo* is the means by which God conserves the universe. There is nothing about the previous existence of a substance at t which entails (logically, causally, etc.) that that substance exist at some subsequent time t^* .¹⁷ With respect to any substance, say, an armchair, it is God who “wills it to exist somewhere and unless, by the efficacy of His will, He puts it there, conserves it there, *creates* it there.”¹⁸ I conclude then that Malebranche accepts (SCC).

D. Does CC entail occasionalism?

Now, with respect to the question of whether CC entails occasionalism, it appears that it is of little consequence whether Malebranche and Descartes held (WCC) or (SCC). For, suppose that we think of the contingent objects in (SCC) and (WCC) as Cartesian substances. In that

¹⁴ Nicolas Malebranche, *The Search After Truth*, Thomas M. Lennon and Paul J. Olscamp, eds., (London: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 551. Hereafter noted as *Search*.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 551-552.

¹⁶ Nicolas Malebranche, *Dialogues on Metaphysics and on Religion*, Nicholas Jolley and David Scott, eds., (London: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 7.10, 115. Hereafter noted as *Dialogues*. Furthermore, Malebranche argues, if God ceases this to perform this act, nothing would continue to subsist. For, “Let God no longer will there to be a world, and it is thereby annihilated. For the world assuredly depends upon the will of the creator. If the world subsists, it is because God continues to will its existence. Thus the conservation of creatures is, on the part of God, nothing but their continued creation” (*Dialogues*, 7.7, 112).

¹⁷Cf. Jonathan Edwards’ argument for the same conclusion in his treatise, *The Great Christian Doctrine of Original Sin Defended in The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 2 vol. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Pub., Inc. 2000).

¹⁸*Dialogues*, 7.10, 116, emphasis added.

case, as they stand, neither entails occasionalism. And this is true even if God re-creates each substance *ex nihilo*. That is, both are consistent with the existence of created substances possessing causal powers. Is it possible to add anything to these interpretations of CC to ensure an occasionalist inference? It seems so. Both interpretations of CC may be strengthened to include the modes of a substance as well. Consider corollaries to (SCC) and (WCC), respectively.

(SCC₂) For any contingent object x at t , if x is F at t , then x continues to be F at some subsequent time t^* if and only if God creates (*ex nihilo*) x as F at t^* .

and

(WCC₂) For any contingent object x at t , if x is F at t , then x continues to be F at some subsequent time t^* if and only if God upholds x as F through t^* .

Do these help to strengthen the case for the entailment of occasionalism from CC? It doesn't appear that either of them do. Beginning with the weakest interpretation of CC, does the conjunction of (WCC₂) entail occasionalism? Not on its own. For notice that on this picture God may have initially created substances with certain causal powers and simply upholds those substances and their (causal) modes in existence. It is interesting to note that Descartes uses the same language in describing what God conserves with respect to modes and substances. He claims that there is merely a conceptual distinction between modes and substances and God cannot create a substance without its modes. It is inconceivable to consider a body without the mode of extension. If we understand this 'conceptual distinction' here as we did above it seems as though God must create a substance determinately, that is, with all of its modes. But even this doesn't entail occasionalism; for it may be that among the modes determinately created by God are causal powers. And at the very least, Descartes is committed to the claim that minds are active causes.¹⁹

Malebranche would not accept (SCC₂) as it stands.²⁰ Instead, he would amend it to

(SCC₃) For any contingent object x at t , if x is F at t , then x continues to be F at some subsequent time t^* if and only if God creates (*ex nihilo*) x as F at t^* and no F is an active or passive causal power.²¹

¹⁹ Supposing that (SCC₂) is true, these two theses are still not enough; FBO still doesn't follow and neither does any other subspecies of occasionalism. It may very well be the case that what God continuously recreates are substances with all of their modes and these modes include causal powers. Then what follows is either overdetermination or concurrence. Gorham has argued that Descartes was an overdeterminist. See his "Cartesian Causation".

²⁰ He claims that God "establishes the modalities of substances" (*Dialogues* 7.1, 116.)

²¹ And the corollary for (WCC₂) is

(WCC₃) For any contingent object x at t , if x is F at t , then x continues to be F at some subsequent time t^* if and only if God upholds x as F through t^* and no F is an active or passive causal power.

Malebranche clearly infers occasionalism²² from CC via acceptance of (SCC₃). It is his position, as noted above, that God continually creates substances determinately (i.e., wills all of their modes) but this action is such that it becomes “a contradiction therefore for one body to be able to move another.” Further, he concludes that not even his interlocutor Aristes “can move his armchair” for this too would be “a contradiction.”²³ The contradiction comes when it is supposed that God can give to created substances causal powers. And this should be obvious; “For no power however great it be imagined, can surpass or even equal the power of God.”²⁴ God gives his power to creation only in that he determines their modes in order that they may be occasional causes.²⁵ Pessin (432) deals with the above passages from the *Dialogues* and adds another from the *Search* which seemingly suggests that God gives to created substances causal power. He cites Malebranche first from the *Dialogues* and then from the *Search*.

For no power ... can surpass or even equal the power of God ... Hence, no power can convey [a body] to where God does not convey it, nor fix nor stop it where God does not stop it, unless God accommodates the efficacy of His action to the inefficacious action of His creatures.... For once again, insofar as God wills to create or conserve this ball at point A ... no force can displace it from there.

And if He creates [a body] here, is it conceivable that a creature should displace it and move it elsewhere unless God at the same time wills to create it elsewhere in order to share His power with His creature ...?

It seems to me however that Pessin has missed the import of these passages. Malebranche is *not* claiming that God has given to creatures his power, that is, the power of causal efficaciousness. Indeed, he notes that creaturely action is ‘*inefficacious*’. It is natural to interpret Malebranche as claiming this inefficaciousness is due to God’s refraining from creating substances with active or passive causal powers. Pessin writes that Malebranche frames these discussions such that “God continuously creates, therefore no creature can exercise any causal power over bodies *that conflicts with God’s* (ibid., emphasis in original). Certainly Pessin is correct to note that this “leaves open the possibility that creatures could exercise causal powers...” (ibid) but this misunderstands the rest of Malebranche’s program. For, as was shown above, Malebranche accepts (SCC₃) and its denial that in creating (even in continuously creating) God confers causal powers onto his creation. What Pessin fails to cite in the ellipse of this sentence is what keeps him from his interpretation. I supply the missing quotation in italics: “For no power, *however great it be imagined*, can surpass or even equal the power of God.” It’s natural to interpret Malebranche as saying something like the following: Suppose that God created substances with causal powers. Suppose further that he created a substances with such causal powers that he is

²² In particular, (FBO)

²³ Ibid, 7.10, 115.

²⁴ Ibid, 7.10, 115-116.

²⁵ Ibid., that is to say, God re-creates water in such a way that its modes allow for it to be the occasional cause of God’s bring it to boil when placed over heat rather than freeze when placed over heat.

the strongest created substance; no created substance could best him. Even if God so acted, it doesn't follow these created substances could overrule God's power. We should think of Malebranche, therefore, as using this language as a rhetorical device for emphasis. He doesn't really think God gives created substances causal power.

For Malebranche the argument seems to run as follows. If causation is a matter of the mind's perceiving a necessary connection and only God's will is efficacious in this way and this is a perfection of the divine that cannot be passed on to the creation, then for God to create any substance (whether mental or material) just is to create substances *sans* causal powers. And if conservation just is (SCC₃)²⁶ then God re-creates all substances just as they were in the first instance, and occasionalism is in fact a consequence of CC. Thus, whether CC entails occasionalism depends on what God created in that first instant. If, as it appears to be the case with Descartes, God created substances with some causal power or other, then CC does not entail occasionalism, at least not (FBO). But if with Malebranche, it is held that God creates substances without causal powers, then CC does entail occasionalism. But notice what hasn't happened—there hasn't been an extra doctrine *added* to CC to get occasionalism; we've simply specified what it is for God to continuously create the universe. Instead, it has been shown that if CC is understood properly, then *by itself* it entails occasionalism.

Both Descartes and Malebranche deny that bodies are in any way causally efficacious. If this is true then both are committed to occasionalism with respect to (BB) and (BM) causation. I have argued that Descartes accepts (WCC₂). Would he accept (WCC₃) as well? It appears not, for he argues that finite minds have the ability to produce change in the world. "In contrast to purely physical interaction," writes Gorham, "Descartes does not hold that the causal power of minds is merely a manifestation of God's continuous creation/conservation of transfers and impulses."²⁷ On the contrary Descartes ascribes to human minds a god-like ability to produce motion. "The power of causing motion may be the power of God himself preserving [continuously creating—JS] the transfer in matter as he put it in the first moment of creation; *or it may be the power of a created substance, like our mind...*"²⁸ So, Descartes it seems would accept

(WCC₄) For any contingent object x at t , if x is F at t , then x continues to be F at some subsequent time t^* if and only if God upholds x as F through t^* and if x is a material body and x is F then no F is an active or passive causal power.

Here Descartes gets only that bodies lack any causal power and it is therefore up to God to move bodies but (WCC₄) also leaves open the possibility that minds have active causal powers. Thus, Descartes is only committed to a partial occasionalism. But again note that it is (WCC₄) that

²⁶ Or even (WCC₃).

²⁷ Gorham, "Cartesian Causation", 403.

²⁸ *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes: The Correspondence*, John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff and Dugald Murdoch, Anthony Kenny, trans. 2 vol (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 381, cited by Gorham, "Cartesian Causation", 403-404, emphasis added.

entails occasionalism, though not (FBO). We have not smuggled in any other Cartesian doctrines. Occasionalism again follows from a right understanding of CC.²⁹

Conclusion

What follows from all this is a fascinating morass of philosophical and theological questions about the relationship between God's continuing to keep the universe in existence and the (alleged) causal relations in that universe. The consequences of accepting (SCC) in any of its forms is uninviting at best. I suggest earlier that there are severe consequences for God's goodness in the face of evil in accepting occasionalism. To avoid this consequence, we might reject the occasionalist thesis (SCC₃) and accept the more plausible (SCC₂) instead. On this account, we rescue the common sense view that there are casual relations in the world. The fallout from such a move, however, is that causation turns out to be instantaneous and this runs wildly counter intuitive to our common sense view that causes precede their effects.³⁰ I've suggested (see note 29) that if Descartes accepts (WCC₄), he is committed to the odd combination of occasionalism *and* concurrence.³¹ What's left is (WCC₂). This appears to me to

²⁹This commits Descartes to the odd view that both occasionalism and concurrence are true and it's up to him to offer a story of how the two views are supposed to reconcile. Suppose, on the other hand, that Descartes held (SCC) instead and that he further held not (SCC₂) or (SCC₃) but

(SCC₄) For any contingent object x at t , if x is F at t , then x continues to be F at some subsequent time t^* if and only if God creates (*ex nihilo*) x as F at t^* and if x is a material body and x is F then no F is an active or passive causal power.

One this view, as with (WCC₄) but for different reasons, the universe involves some mix of interactionism (or concurrence) and occasionalism. Consider, for example, my act of picking up a coffee mug. According to (SCC), God must continually create the mug, my hand and my mind at each moment that each exists. Further by (SCC₄) God recreates all of the modes of my mind including its active causal powers (e.g., volitions, inclinations, etc.). God further re-creates my hand and the mug (both of which by (SCC₄) lack causal powers). But the interpretation of (SCC₄)—along with Descartes' pineal gland doctrine—entails that my mind is the active cause of a change in my pineal gland. My hand, however, because it lacks causal power, cannot move the coffee mug because it too lacks causal power. Only God can move the coffee mug via my hand. Suppose, then, that God creates the mug, my hand and my mind with their respective modes at t_1 . At t_1 , God forms in me a volition to move the coffee mug and there is a resulting change in my pineal gland. But because there is nothing at t_1 that entails the existence of anything at t_2 , then God must recreate my mind, my hand and the mug at t_2 . But then at t_2 , *he* must move my hand; for, according to Descartes, motion takes time. But here we have a case of *both* causal interaction *and* occasionalism. This is a very peculiar doctrine indeed; one which needs more work in explaining exactly sense is to be made of it. The two most immediate problems are (i) how to explain instantaneous causation on which it depends and (ii) in what sense, if any, did *I* move the mug—it doesn't appear as though it is *my* action. It seems to me that something very similar to this holds if Descartes accepts (as I argued above) (WCC₄).

³⁰ There is a further problem lurking, (SCC) may lead to a loss of personal identity through time. See Philip Quinn, "Divine Conservation, Continuous Creation and Human Action" in Alfred J. Freddoso (ed.) *The Existence and Nature of God* (South Bend, IN: The University of Notre Dame Press, 1983).

³¹ The doctrine of concurrence is the view that God works in and through (i.e., he interacts with) created, finite causes. Often these created, finite causes are referred to as secondary causes, with God being the primary cause. There is debate among concurrentists as to the extent of God's causal influence. Some concurrentists (e.g.,

be the most sensible option, but one that has its own set of troubles, the most prominent of which is just how to explain God's interaction with created, finite causes.³²

I have argued that given Malebranche's understanding of what it means to create and therefore to *re*-create, the doctrine of continuous creation does indeed entail occasionalism. For Descartes, the matter is only slightly different. His understanding of continuous creation differs from Malebranche's but only to the extent that it allows him to avoid full-blown occasionalism. The trouble, as I've argued, isn't with the continual nature of God's creative activity, but in understanding *what* sort of objects He creates (and re-creates). He may very well create all things anew at each moment, but whether he conserves in this way or not, if he creates them *sans* causal powers, then occasionalism follows from continuous creation. The answer, therefore, to the title question, "Doesn't continuous creation entail occasionalism?" is 'Yes...and No'.

Aquinas, Calvin, Descartes) would argue that God brings it about that created entities act in exactly the manner they do; whereas other concurrentists (e.g., Arminius and the majority of contemporary concurrentists) would argue that God exercises a more general causal influence, whereby God does not cause created entities to act as they do. He merely conserves the causal relations that obtain in his world. See Alfred Freddoso, "God's General Concurrence with Secondary Causes: Pitfalls and Prospects," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 67 (1994); "God's General Concurrence With Secondary Causes: Why Conservation Is Not Enough" in James E. Tomberlin, ed., *Philosophical Perspectives* 5 (1991).

³² See Timothy D. Miller, *Continuous Creation, Persistence, and Secondary Causation : An Essay on the Metaphysics of Theism*, Ph.D. Dissertation (University of Oklahoma, 2007) .