

## Chapter 2

# Occasionalism

**Abstract** Malebranche's so-called Conservation is Continuous Creation Argument (CCCA) for Occasionalism can be construed as an instance of the Generalized Exclusion Argument. This shows that the CCCA and the two stages of the Supervenience Argument are isomorphic with respect to each other. This allows interlocutors in these disparate areas of philosophy to engage in fruitful dialogue.

**Keywords** Occasionalism · Providence · Conservation · Continuous creation

### 2.1 Providence

There is a venerable thesis found in many monotheistic traditions that claims everything that happens in the world is a result of divine providence. Within the Christian tradition John Calvin and Thomas Aquinas, among others, have presented and defended this thesis. Thomas Flint summarizes their positions nicely:

A provident God is one who not only knows what will happen, but in some sense or other actively controls what will happen; in Calvin's memorable phrase, providence 'belongs no less to his hands than to his eyes.' Christians see God as sovereign over his world, as 'holding the helm of the universe, and regulating all events.' To call God provident yet deny him such control would be, from the orthodox perspective, to contradict oneself. (Flint 1988, p. 149)

The core Thomist contention is that every contingent event and proposition, including those involving free agents, is completely determined by God; my action, even if free, is still determined by God's action. (Flint 1988, p. 165)

The Thomist God is an active sovereign who knowingly causes (directly or indirectly) all that occurs. (Flint 1988, p. 168)

Let us call this way of understanding God's involvement with the world Providence.

**Providence:** God actively brings about everything that happens in the world.

Besides having well-respected defenders Providence seems to enjoy strong support from the sacred texts embedded in the various monotheistic traditions. Some

denominations within the Christian tradition have even included Providence among their set of core beliefs. Here, for example, is a relevant portion of the Baptist Confession of Faith:

God the good Creator of all things, in His infinite power and wisdom does uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures and things, from the greatest even to the least, by His most wise and holy providence, to the end for which they were created, according unto His infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of His own will. (Lumpkin 1969, Chap. 5)

Providence has been an important thesis throughout the history of the various monotheistic traditions and remains an influential position today.

## 2.2 The Conservation Is Continuous Creation Argument

Now I would like to consider how an argument raised in the philosophy of religion based on Providence can be construed as an instance of the Generalized Exclusion Argument (GEA). The argument I have in mind is Malebranche's so-called Conservation is Continuous Creation Argument for Occasionalism. To get a handle on this it will be instructive to begin with a quick overview of Occasionalism.

Occasionalism is the doctrine that God is the only causally efficacious entity in the world—all other entities, let us call them creatures, including planets, humans, animals, rocks, etc., are causally inefficacious. When, for example, a feather comes in contact with a fire we may, quite naturally, be inclined to think that the fire causes the feather to burn. According to Occasionalism, however, this would be a mistake. The feather's coming into contact with the fire is but an occasion for God, and not the fire, to cause the feather to burn. *Prima facie*, and I'm sure many would agree, Occasionalism is a highly implausible doctrine. It claims, contrary to our instinctive understanding of the world, that creaturely causation never occurs. Planets, humans, animals, rocks, etc., are not causally responsible for anything that happens! The fire does not cause the feather to burn, the sun does not cause the planets to remain in their orbits, and I do not cause my behavior. What reasons might a 17th century Occasionalist have offered to defend such a radical claim?

Malebranche, perhaps the most famous defender of Occasionalism, has offered at least four arguments in its favor.<sup>1</sup> While each argument is interesting in its own right I will focus my attention on one of his 'global'<sup>2</sup> arguments for Occasionalism, the so-called Conservation is Continuous Creation Argument (CCCA), and examine its relative merits. A forceful presentation of this argument can be found in his *Dialogues on Metaphysics and on Religion*. He begins by claiming that bodies must either be at

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<sup>1</sup>For more on these arguments see Lee (2007, 2008) and Nadler (2011).

<sup>2</sup>These arguments are called 'global' according to Lee (2007) because they purport to show that all things other than God are causally impotent. Malebranche has also offered so-called 'local' arguments for Occasionalism. These arguments purport to show that some things, like finite minds or finite bodies, are causally impotent.

rest or in motion. That is, a given body cannot simply exist. This, for Malebranche, was a conceptually necessary truth and not even God, despite His omnipotence, could will a given body, call it  $x$ , to exist without  $x$ 's either being at rest or in motion. It seems to follow that not even God could will  $x$  to simply exist. In order for God to will that  $x$  exist God must simultaneously will that  $x$  be at rest or in motion. If we further assume, as many of Malebranche's contemporaries did, that nothing can exist without God's willing that it exist, then for  $x$  to exist God must will both that  $x$  exist and that  $x$  be at rest or in motion. The upshot is that both  $x$ 's existing and  $x$ 's being at rest or in motion are brought about by God's will.

We might put the CCCA into premise/conclusion form as follows. For all bodies  $x$ :

- (1) It is impossible that:  $x$  exists and it is false that  $x$  is at rest or in motion.
- (2) It is impossible that:  $x$  exists and it is false that God wills that  $x$  exists.
- (3) Therefore, it is impossible that:  $x$  exists and it is false that God wills that  $x$  is at rest or in motion.

Put this way it is not difficult to see that there is a gap in the inference from premises (1) and (2) to the conclusion (3). Just because  $x$  cannot simply exist without being at rest or in motion and  $x$  cannot exist without God's willing that  $x$  exist, it does not follow that  $x$  cannot be at rest or in motion without God's willing that  $x$  be at rest or in motion. It seems easy enough to imagine a situation where  $x$ 's existence is brought about by God's will but  $x$ 's being at rest or in motion is brought about by something else.

One might concede, perhaps, that the inference from (1) and (2) to (3) is valid in the case of initial creation—when, for example, God first created  $x$ . But the inference seems to be invalid in cases of subsequent conservation—when, for example, God having already created  $x$ , continues to keep  $x$  in existence. This is because there is an important distinction between God's initially creating the world and God's subsequently conserving the world in existence. Let us say that  $x$  is the first thing God ever created. When  $x$  is first brought into existence via God's creative power there is nothing (besides God), by definition, that could have existed prior to  $x$  (both temporally and ontologically). It follows that nothing, besides God, could have influenced  $x$  in any way. So in the initial act of creation God must not only have willed  $x$ 's existence but God must also have willed  $x$ 's being at rest or in motion. The inference, then, from (1) and (2) to (3) is valid in the initial act of creation. Were  $x$  already in existence, however, and the moment of creation passed,  $x$ 's being at rest or in motion might have been brought about by something other than God, say, a different finite body, let us call it  $y$ , created at some earlier time by God. Perhaps  $x$  is currently in motion because  $y$ , at an earlier time, collided with it. While it is granted that  $x$ 's continued existence is brought about by God's willing that  $x$  exist, it does not follow that  $x$ 's being at rest or in motion is, after  $x$ 's initial creation, likewise brought about by God's willing that  $x$  be at rest or in motion. That is, the inference from (1) and (2) to (3) is invalid in subsequent acts of conservation.

Anticipating this move, Malebranche has a ready response. He falls back on the orthodox theological slogan, something most of his contemporaries would have

accepted, that God's conservation of the world is identical to God's continuous creation of the world.<sup>3</sup> Let us call this the CCC thesis. This thesis claims that the alleged distinction between initial creation and subsequent conservation, used to block the CCCA, is collapsed. He writes:

"The moment of creation has passed!" But if this moment does not pass, then you are in a spot, and will have to yield... God wills that a certain kind of world exist. His will is omnipotent, and this world is thus created. Let God no longer will there to be a world, and it is thereby annihilated. For the world assuredly depends on 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. (Malebranche 1997a, p. 112)

Malebranche emphatically denies that there is a distinction between God's initial creation of  $x$  and God's subsequent conservation of  $x$ . Each moment  $x$  exists is a moment in which God creates  $x$ . That is, God's conservation of  $x$  is nothing but God's continuous creation of  $x$ . This, Malebranche thinks, makes the inference from (1) and (2) to (3) valid in all instances. By identifying conservation with continuous creation Malebranche argues that  $x$ 's existence and  $x$ 's being at rest or in motion are both brought about by God's will—not only when  $x$  was initially created but also for all subsequent moments during which  $x$  continues to exist. Moreover, just as God is the sole reason of  $x$ 's initial creation and  $x$ 's initially being at rest or in motion so God remains the sole reason of  $x$ 's continued existence and  $x$ 's subsequently being at rest or in motion.

Though I have only presented the CCCA in a way that purports to show that God's will brings about  $x$ 's existence and  $x$ 's being at rest or in motion, it is easy to extend this argument to apply to all properties that  $x$  may or may not instantiate. For instance, we might consider what brought about  $x$ 's being square-shaped (or any other property of your choosing). We could rerun the CCCA and replace every instance of 'at rest or in motion' with 'square-shaped or not square-shaped' and conclude that  $x$ 's existence and  $x$ 's being square-shaped or not square-shaped are both brought about solely by God's will.

## 2.3 The CCCA as an Instance of the GEA

Now that the basic contours of the argument have been laid out I want to make explicit how Malebranche's Conservation is Continuous Creation Argument can be construed as an instance of the Generalized Exclusion Argument. For convenience let us rehearse the GEA here. The GEA is set up as a tension between two events, C1 and C2. C1 is of type  $A$ , C2 is of type  $B$  and they both lay claim to being determiners of a third event,  $E$ . Here then are the premises needed to formulate the GEA:

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<sup>3</sup>While there are some who dispute the coherence of this theological slogan, I will grant its truth for the sake of exploring the CCCA. For an interesting discussion on the conceptual difference between creation and conservation see Craig (1998).

**Efficacy:** *A*-events are causally efficacious.

**Irreducibility:** *A*-events are distinct from and irreducible with respect to *B*-events.

**Exclusion:** No single event can have more than one sufficient determiner occurring at any given time—unless it is a genuine case of overdetermination.

**No-Overdetermination:** The case under consideration is not a genuine case of overdetermination.

**Tension-Generator:** This claim, in juxtaposition with Efficacy, is supposed to generate an Exclusion-based tension.

**Tension-Resolver:** This claim is supposed to be the decisive reason for resolving the Exclusion-based tension in favor of the *B*-events.

These claims yield a contradiction. The only way to resolve this tension is to give up one (or more) of these claims. My aim, in what follows, is to show how Malebranche's so-called Conservation is Continuous Creation Argument (CCCA) for Occasionalism can be construed as an instance of the GEA.

Cashing out the first four claims are relatively straightforward. This might be done as follows.

**Efficacy:** Creatures are causally efficacious (Efficacy<sub>C</sub>).

**Irreducibility:** Creatures are distinct from and irreducible with respect to God (Irreducibility<sub>CG</sub>).

**Exclusion:** No single event can have more than one sufficient determiner occurring at any given time—unless it is a genuine case of overdetermination.

**No-Overdetermination:** The case under consideration is not a genuine case of overdetermination.

The final two claims, the Tension-Generator and the Tension-Resolver, will be based on the notion of Providence that is at work in the CCCA. In trying to keep the GEA-construal of the CCCA as closely aligned with the way Kim has regimented the stages of the SA, Providence can be interpreted in at least two different ways: via supervenience or via closure.

### 2.3.1 Providence as Supervenience

One way of interpreting Providence would be to follow Stage 1 of the Supervenience Argument and introduce a supervenience thesis, of some sort, as the Tension-Generator. This, it seems, would be a sensible move since it is not difficult to see how Providence can be understood in terms of the supervenience relation. In order to do this, however, I need to make a modification to the way supervenience was discussed in the previous chapter. Supervenience, if you remember, is a relation between two sets of properties that are instantiated in *one and the same object*.

**Supervenience:** *A-properties* supervene on *B-properties* if and only if necessarily for any property *M* in *A*, if an object *x* has *M*, then there exists a property *P* in *B* such that *x* has *P* and necessarily if any object *x* has *P* then it has *M*.

The properties of interest regarding the CCCA, however, are not properties of one and the same object. They are properties of two different objects: the world and God. The first set of properties are properties that concern the way the world can be. Since the world itself is constituted by many smaller objects (like planets, humans, animals, and rocks), specifying the way the world is is to implicitly specify the way all the objects that constitute the world are. So, for example, to say that the world instantiates a particular property is to implicitly say, among many other things, that Abraham, one of the constituent parts of the world, instantiates a property, say, the property of being six feet tall. Let us call this first set of properties the  $\delta$ -properties. The second set of properties are properties concerning the way that God's will can be. An example of such a property might be the property of willing that Abraham is six feet tall. So we might say that God instantiates the property of willing that Abraham is six feet tall. Let us call this second set of properties the  $\theta$ -properties. Here, then, is a supervenience relation that is specifically tailored for my purposes.

**Supervenience\*:** *A-properties* in an object *x* supervene\* on *B-properties* in a different object *y* if and only if *necessarily* for any property *M* in *A*, if *x* has *M*, then there exists a property *P* in *B* such that *y* has *P* and *necessarily* if *y* has *P* then *x* has *M*.

We might say that the  $\delta$ -properties regarding the way the world is supervene\* on the  $\theta$ -properties regarding the way God's will is. Or more colloquially, we might say that the way the world is supervenes\* on God's will. So we can give content to the Tension-Generator claim of the CCCA as follows:

**Tension-Generator:** The way the world is supervenes\* on God's will (Supervenience<sub>CG</sub>).

Construing the CCCA in this way makes it a rather tight isomorph of Stage 1 of the SA. In Stage 1 Supervenience<sub>MP</sub> is the claim that mental properties supervene on physical properties. No mental property  $M$  can exist without the presence of some physical property  $P$  (or particular set of physical properties). And the presence of  $P$  necessitates the presence of  $M$  in all metaphysically possible worlds. Similarly, a defender of the CCCA could say that Supervenience<sub>CG</sub> nicely captures the idea behind Providence. The set of properties that concern the way the universe is supervenes\* on the set of properties that concern the way God's will is. No property  $Q$  that is a member of the  $\delta$ -properties can be instantiated by the world without some property  $R$  that is a member of the  $\theta$ -properties being instantiated by God. And the instantiation of  $R$  by God necessitates the instantiation of  $Q$  by the world. That is, the world cannot exist in the way that it does without God's willing that it exist in that way and God's willing that the world exist in that way necessitates that the world exist in that way.

Now we can run the CCCA in the spirit of Stage 1 of the SA. Consider, again, a case of creature-to-creature causation: a fire comes in contact with a feather and the fire causes the feather to burn. This is permitted by our commitment to Efficacy<sub>C</sub>. According to Supervenience<sub>CG</sub>, however, the feather's burning supervenes\* on God's will. Here we have two determinative relations that are connected to the feather's burning: the fire and God both seem to determine the feather's burning. This, according to Exclusion, is not permissible unless it is a genuine case of overdetermination. According to No-Overdetermination, however, overdetermination is not an option. So we are forced to exclude the fire or God from being a *true* determiner of the feather's burning, but which one? Nothing presented so far gives us reason to prefer one over the other. This is where the Tension-Resolver comes into play. Malebranche needs a claim to give precedence to God and thereby exclude creaturely causation.

**Tension-Resolver:** Supervenience\* relations take priority over causal relations in contests of determinative supremacy.

Now we can see that the Tension-Resolver in this particular GEA-based construal of the CCCA is nearly identical to the Tension-Resolver in Stage 1 of the SA. The only difference is that the Tension-Resolver here is based on supervenience\* and the one in Stage 1 is based on supervenience. Kim argues that  $M_1$  is excluded from being a cause of  $M_2$  because the mind-body supervenience relation excludes mental-to-mental causation. Similarly, Malebranche argues that the fire is excluded from being a cause of the feather's burning because the world-God supervenience\* relation excludes creature-to-creature causation. In essence they are both using Edwards' Dictum (or something very much like it) to resolve the tension generated by Efficacy, Irreducibility, Exclusion, No-Overdetermination, and Supervenience (in some form). Indeed closer inspection shows that they engage in similar reasoning and their differing justifications can be compared and contrasted with each.

### 2.3.2 *Providence as Closure*

Another way of interpreting Providence would be to follow Stage 2 of the Supervenience Argument and introduce a closure thesis, of some sort, as the Tension-Generator. This, it seems, would be an even more natural way of understanding Providence since, unlike the previous interpretation, new concepts, like supervenience, need not be introduced. We can give content to the Tension-Generator as follows:

**Tension-Generator:** If an event in the world has a cause at time  $t$ , it has a divine cause at  $t$  (Closure<sub>D</sub>).

This sounds very much like the definition of Providence given above. Here it is again for convenience.

**Providence:** God actively brings about everything that happens in the world.

All that has to be added to Closure<sub>D</sub> to make it essentially equivalent to Providence is the claim that all events in the world are caused. Be that as it may, given this way of developing the Tension-Generator there is a natural way of cashing out the Tension-Resolver.

**Tension-Resolver:** Divine causal relations take priority over creaturely causal relations in contests of determinative supremacy.

This GEA-based way of construing the CCCA makes it a tight isomorph of Stage 2 of the SA. If you recall Kim used Closure<sub>P</sub> to threaten the non-reductive physicalist with a vicious infinite regress. This is interesting because Malebranche does not consider this kind of justification for prioritizing divine causal relations over creaturely causal relations. So it would be helpful to explore how this might be used to provide additional support for the CCCA.

## 2.4 Tension-Resolvers

Before considering how good the justifications offered by Kim and Malebranche are for their respective Tension-Resolvers it is interesting to note that, in the divine context, supervenience and closure, when used to give an analysis of Providence, nearly amount to the same thing. That is, Supervenience<sub>CG</sub> is very similar to Closure<sub>D</sub>. Let us call this claim Equivalence<sub>SC</sub>. Consider how the divine causes, as they are deployed in Closure<sub>D</sub>, differ from creaturely causes. Divine causes, unlike creaturely causes, *necessarily* bring about their effects. Creaturely causes can be thwarted or blocked in a number of ways depending on how external factors stack up. The fire's



coming into contact with the feather *usually* causes the feather's subsequent burning but this can be prevented in a number of ways. A snow storm, for example, could have started such that the fire comes into contact with the feather just as a load of snow simultaneously engulfs the feather. No such situation can arise for divine causes. If God had willed that the feather burn not even a raging snow storm could have prevented the feather from burning. So to say that a natural event was brought about by a divine cause carries a necessity with it that creaturely causes do not carry.

Moreover, given Closure<sub>D</sub> (and assuming that every event in the world has a cause), we can say of any natural event that God must have caused the event. This, coupled with the observations made above, allows us to say, as we did regarding Supervenience<sub>CG</sub>, the following. No property  $Q$  that is a member of the  $\delta$ -properties can be instantiated by the world without some property  $R$  that is a member of the  $\theta$ -properties being instantiated by God. That is no event in the world can occur without some form of God's will causing that event to occur. And the instantiation of  $R$  by God necessitates the instantiation of  $Q$  by the world. That is, God's will to cause an event in the world to occur necessitates the occurrence of that very event in the world. So it seems we have reason to hold Equivalence<sub>SC</sub>.

It turns out, then, that the different reasons Kim offered in defense of Edwards' Dictum and in defense of the Tension-Resolver in Stage 2 of the SA are, when adapted to the divine context, by and large interchangeable. The infinite regress-based reason given for the Tension-Resolver involving the supervenience\*-based construal of Providence can be used to support the Tension-Resolver involving the Closure<sub>D</sub>-based construal of Providence. And the necessitation-based reason given for the Tension-Resolver involving the Closure<sub>D</sub>-based construal of Providence can be used to support the Tension-Resolver involving the supervenience\*-based construal of Providence. It will be helpful, therefore, to keep this in mind as I discuss the various justifications that have been canvassed by Kim and Malebranche in what follows.

### 2.4.1 *Why Edwards' Dictum?*

When Providence is understood in terms of supervenience\* and the CCCA is framed as an instance of the GEA we can see that the CCCA and Stage 1 of the SA turn on essentially the same issues. This makes it ideal for us to fruitfully compare and contrast the strategies that have been used by both Kim and Malebranche in their attempts to resolve the tension. In particular, we can look at the way Kim and Malebranche try to justify Edwards' Dictum.

Kim defends Edwards' Dictum, with regard to the SA, with the following two reasons: (i) if I instantiate  $P$  (being in a certain brain state) at  $t$ , let us call this event  $P$ , I will instantiate  $M$  (having a desire to yell 'ouch!') at  $t$ , let us call this event  $M$ , no matter what happened before  $t$  and (ii) unless I instantiate  $P$  at  $t$  (or some other physical realizer) I cannot instantiate  $M$  at  $t$ . His first reason is that nothing can override  $P$ 's determinative influence regarding  $M$ 's occurring. That is,  $P$  is necessarily efficacious regarding  $M$ 's occurrence. For consider what would happen

if my friend tickles me just before  $t$ . Usually my friend's tickling me would prevent me from instantiating  $M$ . My friend's tickling me would cause me to have a desire to laugh, not a desire to yell 'ouch!' But my friend's tickling me is rendered causally impotent regarding my desire to laugh at  $t$  if I were to instantiate  $P$  at  $t$ . Because  $P$ 's instantiation is necessarily efficacious regarding  $M$ 's instantiation, whatever causal efficacy my friend's tickling me might have had regarding my desire to laugh it is clear that  $P$ 's instantiation at  $t$  would override the causal influence of my friend's tickling. Can this reason be used to ground Edwards' Dictum? It seems not. One may be willing to agree with Kim that vertical determination relations, because of their necessary efficacy, enjoy a kind of causal priority over horizontal causal relations. As a result, whenever these relations *oppose* each other the vertical determination relations will, so to speak, win. But what about situations in which vertical determination relations and horizontal causal relations mutually support each other? Let us consider the mental causation scenario again. Instead of my friend's tickling me just prior to  $t$ , let us assume that he pricks me with a pin. My friend's pricking me is usually a cause of my instantiating  $M$ . Though it is not a necessarily efficacious cause it seems to be a cause nonetheless. How does the necessary efficacy of  $P$ 's instantiation exclude my friend's pricking me from also being a contributing cause? Nothing Kim has said, I contend, substantiates this claim.

Consider the following loose analogy. After getting some snacks out of the cupboard I close the cupboard door. It just so happens that my little nephew closes the door at the same time. There is no question that my causal powers, in an important respect, take priority over his. I am, after all, stronger than he is. Had he simultaneously tried to open the door I would still have succeeded in closing the door and he would have failed in opening the door. Moreover, even if we assumed that my nephew couldn't close the door himself, my nephew's inability does not imply that he played no causal role whatsoever in closing the door. Similarly, that my instantiating  $P$  vertically determines my instantiating  $M$  does not imply that my friend's pricking me plays no causal role in my instantiation of  $M$ .

What about Kim's second reason? Let us assume that I cannot instantiate  $M$  without simultaneously instantiating  $P$ . That is, the instantiation of  $P$  is a necessary condition for the instantiation of  $M$ . Does  $P$ 's instantiation being necessary for  $M$ 's instantiation provide adequate grounds for holding Edwards' Dictum? It seems not. We all know that fires cannot exist in the absence of oxygen. Does oxygen's being necessary for fires somehow exclude the striking of matches from being causally relevant to fires? It seems not. What must be shown, if Edwards' Dictum is to be defended, is not merely that  $P$ 's instantiation is necessary for  $M$ 's instantiation but that  $P$ 's instantiation is the sole determining factor for  $M$ 's instantiation—that  $P$ 's instantiation somehow excludes all other factors from being causally relevant to  $M$ 's instantiation. The mere necessity of  $P$ 's instantiation, however, does not ensure this result.

It seems that Kim has not offered adequate reasons to ground the general application of Edwards' Dictum. Neither the necessary efficacy nor the necessity of vertical determination relations provides adequate grounds for Edwards' Dictum. Perhaps Kim's reasons can be used to show that horizontal causation, when it *conflicts*

with vertical determination, is rendered causally inefficacious and therefore excluded from being causally relevant. But it fails to show that horizontal causation is always excluded by vertical determination. As I hope I have shown, when it is in accord with vertical determination, there is no reason to believe that horizontal causation cannot be efficacious. What this means is that Stage 1 of the SA fails to show that mental causation under non-reductive physicalism is impossible. Mental causation under non-reductive physicalism is possible when mental causes are properly aligned with their physical supervenience bases.

Does Malebranche have access to better reasons in grounding Edwards' Dictum via the CCC thesis? To assess this possibility let us turn now to a closer examination of the CCC thesis. It is helpful in this regard to note a difference between Occasionalism and non-reductive physicalism. Earlier I said that the relationship between God's willing the world to exist and the world's existing is a supervenience\* relationship, but this is not in fact quite right. It would be more accurate to say that the relationship between God's willing a state of affairs and that state of affairs actually obtaining is a *species* of the supervenience\* relationship. While it is true to say that all states of affairs supervene\* on God's willing those states to obtain this would be, perhaps, to say too little. Malebranche, no doubt, affirms that the way the world is supervenes\* on God's will: (i) God's willing a state of affairs, say the feather's burning, to obtain is necessarily efficacious in bringing it about and (ii) God's willing the feather's burning is necessary for the feather's burning to obtain. But, as argued above, these reasons do not adequately ground Edwards' Dictum.

The CCC thesis suggests that there is more to the relationship between God's willing a state of affairs and the state of affairs obtaining. According to the CCC thesis whatever properties are associated with God in the initial creation of the world (with regard to his bringing about the world) should also be associated with God in the subsequent conservation of the world because God's conservation of the world is identical to God's creation of the world. Since God has the property of being the *sole* determining factor regarding the world when God initially created the world, it follows from the CCC thesis that God also has the property of being the sole determining factor regarding the world when God subsequently conserves the world. Here is how Lee summarizes this idea:

... the continuous creation thesis tells us that the divine volition in bringing about any subsequent, conserved state of affairs turns out to be metaphysically identical, in terms of divine causal involvement, to God's creative volition that brought about the initial state of the world. If so, then just as it was God alone who brought about a completely determinate state of affairs in the initial moment of creation, it is God who is the only causal agent in all subsequent acts of conservation. (Lee 2008, p. 555)

So the identity of creation and conservation, it might be argued, provides additional grounds, grounds apparently not available to Kim, for resolving the tension. There is, however, a possible ambiguity concerning the identity claim in the CCC thesis that threatens to undermine the justification for this rationale. Is the identity claim here to be understood as a relation of type identity or numerical identity? Let us consider the implications of each option.

To say that conservation is type identical to creation is to say that God's initial act of creating the world, though a distinct act from God's subsequent conservation of the world, is nevertheless the same *kind* of act as God's subsequent conservation of the world. This seems to be a natural way of understanding the CCC thesis. Lee, for one, seems to suggest such a reading. He writes that God alone "brought about a completely determinate state of affairs in the initial moment of creation" and it is God alone who brings about completely determinate states of affairs "in all subsequent acts of conservation." Apparently Lee makes a distinction between the act of creation and all subsequent acts of conservation. Though they are all the same type of act they are nevertheless different instances of this kind. There is a single act of creation followed by multiple acts of conservation.

This way of understanding the CCC thesis, however, cannot be used to ground Edwards' Dictum. Consider the property, call it *SOLE*, of being the sole candidate for being a determining factor of a given state of affairs. *SOLE* seems to be an extrinsic property. It suggests that the environment makes a difference regarding the instantiation of this property. That is, its instantiation is relative to whatever else is going on in the world. Just prior to the initial act of creation it is easy to see how God instantiates *SOLE* since nothing, besides God, exists. But the prospects change, it seems, after the world comes into existence. In subsequent acts of God's conservation of the world we can no longer say that God is the sole candidate for being a determining factor of the world. Something other than God, namely the world, now exists and can at least be considered a candidate for being a determining factor of subsequent states of the world. That is, God no longer instantiates *SOLE* after the initial act of creation. If conservation is type identical to creation then *SOLE* is an extrinsic property that is had by God in the initial act of creation but not had by God in subsequent acts of conservation. Consequently, the CCC thesis, understood in terms of type identity, does not seem to be a promising way of grounding Edwards' Dictum.

What are the prospects for grounding Edwards' Dictum if we construe the CCC thesis in terms of numerical identity? It seems, *prima facie*, that the prospects are better. If conservation is numerically identical to creation then God's being the sole determining factor concerning the world must be true not only of God's initial act of creation but of God's subsequent act of conservation since these are not really two separate acts but a single act (described in different terms). The difficulty with this move is that it is hard to understand how the act of creation can literally be the same act as the act of conservation. Whatever else might be said about conservation and creation it seems their being distinct is rather obvious. One act, namely creation, occurs during the first moment in time when the world comes into existence. The other act, namely conservation, occurs (and continues to occur) after the world comes into existence. There seems to be, at least, an important temporal distinction between these two acts.

One might argue, however, that creation should not be understood as a temporally instantaneous act. Instead it should be construed as a temporally extended act. Creation is not instantaneous; it is an ongoing activity. Though temporally extended it should still be considered a single divine act. Indeed, Malebranche seems to endorse

(though perhaps not consistently in all his writings) this way of understanding the CCC thesis. He writes:

For on the part of creatures there appears to be a difference, since by the act of creation they pass from nothingness to being, whereas by the act of conservation they continue to be. But in essence the act of creation does not cease, because in God creation and conservation are but a single volition which, consequently, is necessarily followed by the same effects. (Malebranche 1997b, p. 112)

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. (Malebranche 1997a, p. 115)

If this is right then it seems we can make conceptual sense of the claim that conservation is numerically identical to creation. The reason we think conservation and creation cannot be numerically identified is that we have a mistaken conception of creation.

What this move seems to suggest is that creation, being a process, is composed of temporal parts. Because the single act of creation happens over time it can be said of some temporally indexed states of the world that they occur before or after different temporally indexed states of the world. It is meaningful, for example, to say that the fire existed prior to the feather's burning and it is meaningful to say that my being in pain is preceded by my desire to yell 'ouch!' But the fact that states of the world can be distinguished temporally allows the problem facing the type identity understanding of the CCC thesis to rear its head again. While God was alone when the world first came into being (during the first temporally indexed state of the world), God was no longer alone after this event. So one might concede that the act of creation is numerically identical to the act of conservation. But because creation is now being construed as a process it can be said of this single process that it has temporally indexed parts. Consequently we can say during the first moment of God's creation that God had the property of being the sole candidate for being a determining factor of the world but that God ceased to have this property after the first instant of creation. There is, after all, metaphysical room for diachronic causal relations to obtain within the created order. So even if the CCC thesis is understood in terms of numerical identity it is far from clear that the CCC thesis grounds Edwards' Dictum. These observations suggest that defending Edwards' Dictum in terms of God's instantiating *SOLE* is not a promising project.

A different way of grounding Edwards' Dictum, according to Winkler (2011), can be found by carefully considering what it means for the world to be continuously created. Winkler believes that a certain reading of the CCC thesis eliminates the possibility of diachronic creaturely causation. On this reading creaturely causation is only possible (if it is possible at all) as a species of synchronic, or simultaneous, causation where the cause and effect occur at the same time.<sup>4</sup> But, continues Winkler, simultaneous causation is objectionable so there is no creaturely causation. Winkler makes two substantive claims to make his case: (i) creaturely causation can only exist

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<sup>4</sup>This is an idea that has roots in Descartes. For more on this see Gorham (2004).

as an instance of synchronic causation and (ii) synchronic causation is impossible. Let us begin with the second claim first. Why think synchronic causation is objectionable? Here is Winkler's suggestion:

... the alleged cause, because it is produced at the same time as the effect, is not eligible to participate in the first place, because it is not on hand when it needs to be... the standard case [of causation] calls for two substances, one an agent and one a patient, each of which exists before the effect, and for so long as it takes for the effect to be fully realized... the cause, strictly so called, is, as a preexisting substance, unquestionably prior in time to both its action and its effect. (Winkler 2011, p. 299)

The thought is that causes always precede their effects for there seems to be a conceptual problem with thinking that a cause can occur at the very same time as the effect. It would imply, perhaps, that a cause could act on its effect before the cause even existed. Winkler is quick to concede that he is not out to give a rigorous defense of the impossibility of synchronic causation. He merely points out that synchronic causation departs, rather radically, from 'standard' cases of causation. I have my doubts<sup>5</sup> about the alleged impossibility or incoherence of synchronic causation. Moreover, I think a case can be made that most of the early modern interlocutors in this debate would have been unhappy with the claim that causation must be diachronic. After all, if we assume that God does not exist temporally and that God was the causal origin of the world then divine causation, at least in the act of initial creation, cannot be construed as a straightforward diachronic relation. Be that as it may, for the sake of argument, let us assume that Winkler is right to rule out synchronic causation.

How about Winkler's first claim? Why think that creaturely causation, given the CCC thesis, can only exist as an instance of synchronic causation? Here, there seems to be a gap in his reasoning. Even if we follow Winkler and assume that causation must be diachronic and that causes must exist prior to their effects, it is not evident how the CCC thesis precludes creaturely causation. The fire surely exists prior to the feather's burning. Why can't the fire's existence and coming into contact with the feather just prior to  $t$  be a diachronic cause of the feather's burning at  $t$ ? Winkler suggests that there are two different interpretations of the CCC thesis at play. One that threatens creaturely causation and one that doesn't. He writes:

... continuous creation threatens the causal power of finite substances only if it is construed as continuous recreation—as the rescue or rehabilitation of substances that have descended into nothingness. If it is construed as continuous maintenance, the threat seems to vanish. (Winkler 2011, p. 301)

There are, according to Winkler, two interpretations of the CCC thesis, continuous re-creation and continuous maintenance. And only under the continuous re-creation interpretation does the CCC thesis pose a threat to creaturely causation. The idea

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<sup>5</sup>I admit that synchronic causation departs from the 'standard' idea of causation (if there is such a thing) but I don't see why it is impossible. The analysis of causation is, after all, a large, complicated, and unsettled area of research. Besides, even if we grant that physical causation is always diachronic it does not follow that mental causation or divine causation must also be diachronic. Malebranche, after all, assumes that divine causation is possible and it is not evident that he takes this to be a diachronic relation.

is that if God continuously re-creates the world then this will leave infinitesimal, and perhaps humanly undetectable, temporal gaps between instances of the world. The fire exists and comes into contact with the feather just prior to  $t$  and the feather begins to burn at  $t$ , but in the infinitesimal temporal gap between the fire's coming into contact with the feather and the feather's burning the entire world descends into nothingness. Yes, the fire's coming into contact with the feather exists prior to the feather's burning but there is no existential continuity between the two states of affairs that would have allowed the fire to be a cause of the feather's burning. There is, one might say, a chasm of nonexistence that creaturely causal relations are unable to bridge. So the re-creation interpretation seems to fit the bill for grounding Edwards' Dictum.

The problem with this interpretation is that Malebranche probably would not have endorsed the re-creation interpretation. He does not suggest that continuous creation involves a perpetual cycle of descent into nothingness and ascent into being. So even if the re-creation interpretation provides grounds for Edwards' Dictum and thereby entails the impossibility of diachronic creaturely causation, the re-creation interpretation, it seems, would not have been Malebranche's interpretation of choice.

In light of this let us consider the continuous maintenance interpretation of the CCC thesis. This interpretation does not countenance any gaps between different states of the world. The fire and the feather, though constantly created, are maintained in a smooth continuum of existence. Under this interpretation of the CCC thesis the doctrine is not, according to Winkler, "an affirmation of perpetual coming into being, but being itself." (Winkler 2011, p. 302) This suggests that the world, after its initial creation, does not subsequently descend into nothingness and re-ascend into being. Rather the continuous maintenance of the world is a way of analyzing what it means for the world to exist and persist. While this may be a more satisfying way of understanding the CCC thesis it now becomes unclear how the CCC thesis can be used to ground Edwards' Dictum. There is nothing to convince us that God's continual maintenance of the world excludes creaturely causation. The fire exists prior to  $t$  and the fire continues to exist at  $t$  when the feather, having come into contact with the fire, begins to burn. The fire's being a cause of the feather's burning cannot be excluded based on any existential gaps between states of the fire's existence. The absence of existential continuity cannot be used to rule out diachronic creaturely causation. So it seems the fire can indeed be a cause of the feather's burning because it can no longer be said of the fire that it descends into nothingness prior to the feather's burning.

What this suggests is that there is a way to secure the Occasionalist conclusion that the fire's coming into contact with the feather does *not* cause the feather's subsequent burning. But this requires the dialectically unhelpful interpretation of the CCC thesis that is committed to continuous *re*-creation rather than continuous maintenance. So while it's difficult to assess how effective this line of reasoning would have been for Malebranche it may prove to be less troublesome for Kim to apply this line of reasoning in his defense of Edwards' Dictum.

These ideas, when applied in the context of mental causation, suggest that mentality be understood as continuously descending into nothingness and ascending into being. They are continuously being *re*-created and only offer an illusion of genuine



existential continuity. Physicality, on the other hand, persists smoothly without interruption over time. Whether or not this way of understanding the structure of the world is intuitively plausible or not is not the point. Rather it is simply to note that there is logical space for those who are enthusiastic about justifying Edwards' Dictum (in debates over the SA) via Malebranche-inspired insights to make progress.

### 2.4.2 *The Threat of Infinite Regress*

When Providence is understood in terms of  $\text{Closure}_D$  and the CCCA is framed as an instance of the GEA we can see that the CCCA and Stage 2 of the SA turn on essentially the same issues. This way of setting up the CCCA, as before, makes it ideal for engaging in a fruitful dialogue between philosophers of mind and philosophers of religion. What I want to consider is whether the Tension-Resolvers in these two arguments have justification. Here are the two Tension-Resolvers for convenience.

**Tension-Resolver:** Physical causal relations take priority over mental causal relations in contests of determinative supremacy.

**Tension-Resolver:** Divine causal relations take priority over creaturely causal relations in contests of determinative supremacy.

We saw in the previous chapter how Kim used  $\text{Closure}_P$  to justify the claim that physical causal relations take priority over mental ones. But what about the claim that divine causal relations take priority over creaturely causal relations? What justifies this way of resolving the tension? Perhaps, following Kim, we could use  $\text{Closure}_D$ ?

Of course, given a commitment to  $\text{Equivalences}_C$ , we could simply fall back on the reasons given in the previous section based on the unique features of the supervenience relation and show how these features trump any causal relation to make our case. But this would just return us to the same dialectic as before. In this regard, Kim offers us a different way of justifying the present Tension-Resolver—a way that doesn't depend on exploiting something unique about the nature of divine causes.

Returning to the burning feather example, it seems both the fire (based on  $\text{Efficacy}_C$ ) and God (based on  $\text{Closure}_D$ ) are sufficient causes of the feather's burning. But given Exclusion and No-Overdetermination it seems one of these two putative causes must be excluded. One option would be to eliminate the divine cause, let us call it D, in favor of the creaturely cause. If one were to do this, however,  $\text{Closure}_D$  would force us to come up with a different divine cause, let us call it D\*, in order to ensure that the feather's burning still had a divine cause. But this would only force us to deal with Exclusion again. Now instead of considering the fire and D as generating a tension regarding the feather's burning we would have to consider the fire and D\*. Which putative cause should we exclude? Exclusion, as before, is silent on this matter. If one were to exclude D\* in favor of the fire  $\text{Closure}_D$  would, again,



force us to come up with yet another divine cause, say  $D^{**}$ , in order to ensure that the feather's burning still had a divine cause. I hope it is evident that sticking to a policy that favors the creaturely cause over the divine cause quickly leads to a vicious infinite regress. This unpalatable result can easily be avoided if the decision policy is reversed and the creaturely cause is excluded instead of its divine counterpart. So, it seems,  $\text{Closure}_D$  tips the balance in favor of the divine cause thereby excluding the creaturely cause. But this would mean that the fire is not a cause of the feather's burning. This, then, seems to be a legitimate way for a defender of the CCCA to justify the relevant Tension-Resolver.

Having come this far it seems that similar reasoning can be used to defend the Tension-Resolver in the Supervenience\*-based version of the CCCA. After all, as stated in  $\text{Equivalences}_{SC}$ ,  $\text{Supervenience}_{CG}$  and  $\text{Closure}_D$  essentially come out to the same thing in the divine context. We can run an infinite regress style argument to justify the claim that supervenience\* relations take priority over causal relations. Given the determinative tension generated by the fire's causal relation and God's supervenience\* relation with the feather's burning, we are forced, given Exclusion and No-Overdetermination, to make a choice between the two. One option would be to exclude the divine supervenience\* base, let us call it  $D$ , in favor of the creaturely cause. If one were to do this, however,  $\text{Supervenience}_{CG}$  would force us to come up with a different divine supervenience\* base, let us call it  $D^*$ , in order to ensure that the feather's burning still had a divine cause. But this would only force us to deal with Exclusion again. Now instead of considering the fire and  $D$  as generating a tension regarding the feather's burning we would have to consider the fire and  $D^*$ . Which putative determiner should we exclude? Exclusion, as before, is silent on this matter. If one were to exclude  $D^*$  in favor of the fire  $\text{Supervenience}_{CG}$  would, again, force us to come up with yet another divine supervenience\* base, say  $D^{**}$ , in order to ensure that the feather's burning still had a divine supervenience\* base. I hope it is evident that sticking to a policy that favors the creaturely cause over the divine supervenience\* base quickly leads to a vicious infinite regress. This unpalatable result can easily be avoided if the decision policy is reversed and the creaturely cause is excluded instead of the divine supervenience\* base. So, it seems,  $\text{Supervenience}_{CG}$ , in a way nearly identical to  $\text{Closure}_D$ , tips the balance in favor of the divine supervenience\* base thereby excluding the creaturely cause.

This is an interesting result since it allows us to dispense with the somewhat convoluted ways of arguing over the CCCA. For one, defenders of the CCCA do not have to defend the (controversial) re-creation interpretation of the CCC thesis in order to justify the exclusion of creaturely causation. Instead a line that tries to show, regarding the CCCA, that  $\text{Supervenience}_{CG}$  leads to a vicious infinite regress can do the necessary justificatory work.

Indeed we can use this same style of reasoning to rehabilitate Stage 1 of the Supervenience Argument. Earlier I argued that Kim's reasoning fails to justify Edwards' Dictum<sub>MP</sub>. But now we see that there is a reason to prioritize supervenience relations over causal relations. Unless supervenience relations are prioritized over causal relations the threat of a vicious infinite regress based on  $\text{Supervenience}_{MP}$  (and not on  $\text{Closure}_P$ ) looms.

The upshot of all this is that the Malebranche's CCCA and the two stages of Kim's Supervenience Argument can all be construed as instances of the GEA. Moreover, sustained reflection on the justifications Malebranche and Kim have offered in defense of the various Tension-Resolvers embedded in the various instances of the GEA demonstrate that plausible justifications exist. So, it seems, the premises that constitute the GEA, at least in the forms I have discussed them in, are mutually incompatible and one (or more) of the claims must be discarded. Malebranche thinks that this forces one to reject Efficacy<sub>C</sub> and embrace Occasionalism. Kim thinks that this forces one to reject Irreducibility<sub>MP</sub> and embrace some form of reductionism.

## 2.5 A Lacuna in the CCCA

If what I have said so far is right then the CCCA can be interpreted in ways that make creaturely causation impossible. One way to do this is to understand the CCC thesis in terms of continuous re-creation. This provides a rationale for Edwards' Dictum by showing that the nature of God's willing the world to exist in a certain way excludes the possibility of creature-to-creature causation. Should a line like this be pursued in the context of Stage 1 of the SA a similar conclusion might be reached concerning mental-to-mental causation. Another way of securing this result is to co-opt Kim's reasoning regarding Closure<sub>rep</sub>, based on the threat of a vicious infinite regress, to exclude the possibility of creature-to-creature causation.

What this suggests is that there are legitimate ways of rejecting creature-to-creature causation based on the CCCA. Does this, however, demonstrate that creaturely causation does not exist *tout court*? No. To see why we simply need to make explicit an important difference between the stages of the SA and the CCCA. Stage 1 of the SA is an attack on mental-to-mental causation but Stage 2 of the SA is an attack on mental-to-physical causation. The first is an attack on, what we might call, *intra-domain* causation. The second is an attack on *inter-domain* causation. The Supervenience<sub>CG</sub>-based version of the CCCA and the Closure<sub>D</sub>-based version of the CCCA, however, were both attacks on creature-to-creature causation—intra-domain causation. Nothing yet has been said, in the divine context, about the possibility of creature-to-God causation—inter-domain causation.

To explore this possibility let us see how Kim's completion of Stage 1 of the Supervenience Argument might be adapted to the debate over the CCCA. Kim, based on Edwards' Dictum, rules out the possibility of the instantiation of  $M_1$ 's playing any causal role in the instantiation of  $M_2$ . As I noted earlier it is far from clear that Kim provides a convincing rationale for this move (though certain interpretations of the CCC thesis offer more convincing grounds and, as I suggested, an infinite regress style reason can also be used). Let us assume, however, that Kim is justified in deploying Edwards' Dictum to rule out the possibility of  $M_1$ 's instantiation being a cause of  $M_2$ 's instantiation. Given the causal inefficacy of  $M_1$ 's instantiation with regard to  $M_2$ 's instantiation Kim then considers, what seems to be a natural move, the possibility of rescuing the causal relevance of  $M_1$ 's instantiation with respect to  $M_2$ 's

instantiation via  $P_2$ 's instantiation. Perhaps the instantiation of  $M_1$  does not directly cause the instantiation of  $M_2$  but there is the possibility that the instantiation of  $M_1$  may indirectly determine the instantiation of  $M_2$  by causing  $P_2$ , the supervenience base of  $M_2$ , to be instantiated. Kim writes:

This last observation points to a simple and natural way of dissipating the tension created by [the vertical determination and horizontal causation relations]: [ $M_1$ ] caused [ $M_2$ ] by causing its supervenience base  $P_2$ . This completes Stage 1. What the argument has shown at this point is that if supervenience is assumed, mental-to-mental causation entails mental-to-physical causation... it is not possible to have causation in the mental realm without causation that crosses into the physical realm. (Kim 2005, p. 40)

What Kim is suggesting is that even if Edwards' Dictum precludes mental-to-mental causal relations, mental-to-physical causal relations remain a live possibility. Indeed mental-to-physical causal relations may be used to rescue indirect mental-to-mental causation.

Though Kim goes on to argue that mental-to-physical causal relations should, like mental-to-mental causal relations, be rejected under non-reductive physicalism, Kim makes an interesting suggestion that can be used to pose a potential problem for the CCCA. The CCCA purports to demonstrate the causal inefficacy of everything other than God. When the feather comes in contact with the fire, it is not the fire that causes the feather to burn but God's will. One possible reason for this is because God's conserving the feather and the fire in existence is nothing but God's continuously re-creating the feather and the fire. More precisely, the fire, even if it had causal powers, would not have the opportunity to exercise its powers on the feather because there is an existential gap that separates them. This shows, perhaps, that creature-to-creature causal relations are impossible. But what about the possibility of creature-to-God causal relations?

The first thing to note is that creature-to-God causation is not saddled with the same problem that creature-to-creature causation is regarding the re-creation interpretation of the CCC thesis. There is no existential gap that exists between creatures and God. Yes, the creature continually descends into nothingness and ascends into existence but while the creature exists (even if for a moment) it becomes a candidate for being a causal factor regarding God's states since God continually persists—God never descends into nothingness. One might object, however, that this kind of causation is unacceptable because it is a species of synchronic causation and synchronic causation, as I assumed along with Winkler, is objectionable. But, if as many theists assume, God does not exist in time it does not seem that creature-to-God causation can be considered a species of synchronic causation. If God does not exist in time we could not meaningfully say that the creaturely cause occurred *at the same time* as the divine effect since the divine effect does not exist in time. Moreover, since interlocutors in this debate would all grant God-to-creature causation it seems difficult, if not impossible, to argue that there is something conceptually incoherent about creature-to-God causation. After all understanding God-to-creature causation also has the difficulty of making sense of a causal relation with a causal relatum that does not exist in time. So, it seems, creature-to-God causation remains a genuine possibility, even under the re-creation interpretation of the CCC thesis.

However, this suggestion, some may argue, should be rejected based on other commitments Malebranche brings to the table. One might object that Malebranche does not merely argue that creatures never have an opportunity to exercise their causal powers; instead he argues that creatures have no causal powers whatsoever.<sup>6</sup> Second, the suggestion that creatures may causally influence God seems to be ruled out by a cherished doctrine in many theistic traditions: the immutability of God. These putative objections, I think, can be given reasonable responses.

First, let us consider the objection that creatures cannot have causal powers. This is not merely the claim that creatures cannot exercise their causal powers it's the more ambitious claim that creatures are causally inert substances. In fact Malebranche has an important argument to prove this very point, an argument based on his preferred analysis of causation. It is his so-called No Necessary Connections Argument (NNCA) for Occasionalism. Causation, according to Malebranche, is a relation involving necessary connections:  $x$  causes  $y$  only if  $x$  necessitates  $y$ . He writes:

A true cause as I understand it is one such that the mind perceives a necessary connection between it and its effect. Now the mind perceives a necessary connection only between the will of an infinitely perfect being and its effects. Therefore, it is only God who is the true cause and who truly has the power to move bodies. (Malebranche 1997b, p. 450)

Though Malebranche ties his analysis of causation to human perception in this particular passage, the overall context of his work clearly implies that he is making a metaphysical claim (and not merely an epistemological claim) about the nature of causation. Whether humans perceive the necessary connection or not is beside the point. Given Malebranche's analysis, what are the possible candidates for being a true cause? The fire cannot be a true cause of the feather's burning since the fire does not necessitate the feather's burning. The sun cannot be a true cause of the planetary orbits since the sun does not necessitate the planetary orbits. And I cannot be a true cause of my behavior since I do not necessitate my behavior. It should be noted that the modal strength of my usage of 'necessitate' is one of metaphysical, and not merely nomological, necessity. Surely there are possible worlds, worlds perhaps very distant from the actual world, where a fire's coming into contact with a feather is not followed by the feather's burning because the laws of nature in that world are radically different from our own.

The only candidate for being a true cause, it turns out, is an infinitely perfect being—God. For if God wills that a certain state of affairs obtains then that state of affairs, of (metaphysical) necessity, will obtain. This, after all, is what omnipotence implies. To be omnipotent is to have the power to realize one's will without exception. A bit of reflection on God's omnipotence also rules out the possibility of there being true causes anywhere else. To see this, consider the relationship I have with my

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<sup>6</sup> Alfred Freddoso (1988) argues that defenders of Occasionalism, in light of Aristotelian arguments against Occasionalism, have good reason to adopt the so-called 'no-nature' view of creaturely essences. Creaturely essences, at the very least, sit uneasily with Occasionalism. It would force on God additional work that seems gratuitous given Malebranche's convictions concerning the simplicity and economy of divine volitions.

own behavior. Let us say that I will that my arm be raised and my arm rises. Does my will necessitate my arm's rising? No, because there are possible worlds where I will that my arm is raised but God wills the contrary. Since God's will is backed by omnipotence it follows that my arm will not rise despite my willing it to do so. This demonstrates that my willing my arm to be raised does not necessitate my arm's rising. Consequently, I cannot be the true cause of my behavior. Similar things, of course, can be said for everything else (planets, animals, rocks, etc.) and Occasionalism is secured.

The NNCA is straightforward and powerful. If successful it shows that nothing other than God can have causal powers. It does not merely show that I have no opportunities to exercise my causal powers, it shows that I cannot have any causal powers whatsoever. It, in fact, dispenses with the CCCA altogether. The NNCA, as an argument for Occasionalism, can stand alone. One might wonder why Malebranche even bothered to develop the CCCA in light of this fact. The NNCA, however, rests on a highly questionable analysis of causation.<sup>7</sup> Aside from the fact that most contemporary metaphysicians would balk at this analysis, many of Malebranche's own contemporaries would also have balked at this analysis. When one considers the fact that many of Malebranche's contemporaries rejected Occasionalism in favor of Concurrentism—the claim that certain effects in the world are immediately caused by God and an entity other than God—it is not difficult to see why Malebranche's analysis was not widely accepted. According to Concurrentism, though God is a true cause of all things, including my behavior, I am also a true cause of my behavior. God's will and my will 'concur' in causing my behavior. So despite its sweeping force, the NNCA would have been dialectically impotent in moving fans of Concurrentism. In fact, it would have begged the question against Concurrentists.<sup>8</sup>

The value of the CCCA, in light of the NNCA, is its dialectical teeth. It does not show that creatures cannot have causal powers for it does not rest, in and of itself, on any particular analysis of causation. It leaves open the question of whether creatures have causal powers or not. It only purports to show that even if creatures had causal powers, because of the nature of divine conservation, these powers could never be exercised. Malebranche writes:

But when I consult my reason I clearly see that since bodies cannot move themselves, and since their motor force is but the will of God that conserves them successively in different places, they cannot communicate a power they do not have and could not communicate even if it were in their possession. (Malebranche 1997b, p. 660)

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<sup>7</sup>In an interesting article Quinn (1988) argues that on any of the three most prominent contemporary analyses of causation Occasionalism is not secured.

<sup>8</sup>This is very similar, going back to the previous chapter, to Princess Elisabeth's Worry regarding the possibility of mental causation within a Cartesian substance dualist framework. Her worry is largely dismissed today because her analysis of causation is no longer deemed satisfactory. Interestingly Kim (2005) considers a similar move in discussing the closure principle. It is open to physicalists to push a *strong* form of closure, one that rules out nonphysical causes to begin with. While this effectively dispenses with the Supervenience Argument and makes physically irreducible mental properties causally impotent this also ends the prospects of debate from the outset and is therefore a move, according to Kim, to be resisted.

So Malebranche can indeed object to the possibility of creature-to-God causation based on the NNCA but this, in a very real sense, is to abandon the debate. Lee summarizes this point nicely:

The first is that the [CCCA] has a strong dialectical advantage over the [NNCA] in arguing against 'divine concurrentism'... while the [NNCA] employs a rather stipulative notion of cause, one which most serious divine concurrentists would simply reject, the 'conservation is but continuous creation' principle, on which the [CCCA] is based, is accepted by most, if not all, divine concurrentists. (Lee 2008, pp. 540–541)

No one serious about defending creaturely causation would be moved by, what essentially is, a question-begging analysis of causation.

Let us now consider the objection that the immutability of God precludes the possibility of creature-to-God causation. The thought might go something like this. If creature-to-God causation is possible then creatures can cause a change in God. That is, creature-to-God causation is only possible if God is mutable. But because, as all agree, God is immutable creature-to-God causation is impossible. This way of objecting to creature-to-God causation depends on a certain understanding of immutability. It seems immutability, according to this objector, must involve the idea that nothing in God can change. God cannot behave differently than He currently does and God cannot instantiate different properties than He currently does. It might even be said that God is, in a real sense, static. And if creature-to-God causation is understood as a creature's causing something to change in God then it seems creature-to-God causation and God's immutability are logically incompatible.

But is this the right way of understanding God's immutability? It seems not. Moreover, it does not seem to coincide with Malebranche's own understanding of divine immutability. Indeed Malebranche's fierce commitment to human freedom seems to preclude the idea of divine immutability described above. The fire coming into contact with the feather, after all, provides God with an occasion to act. God is not the same before the act and during the act for the simple reason that there was a time when God didn't act and a time when God did act. So we can say, in a straightforward sense, that God changed. God caused the feather's burning at  $t$  but God did not cause the feather's burning prior to  $t$ . Therefore divine immutability should not be understood as God's being static.

A better way of understanding God's immutability is by attending to God's action in the world. Malebranche is clear that God does not act in the world through particular volitions for God never intends to bring about any particular evils. God, for example, does not will that rain not fall on parched ground out of a volition to withhold something good. Instead God acts in the world through general volitions that are expressed via a minimal set of simple laws. Consequently, when God causes rain not to fall on parched ground God wills this particular event as a consequence, or by-product, of His overall will to uphold general laws. So God's action does cause the rain not to fall on parched ground but this particular action is motivated by a general and unchanging volition to uphold the laws of nature. He writes:

He does not allow monsters; it is He who makes them. But He makes them only in order to alter nothing in His action, only out of respect for the generality of His ways, only to follow

exactly the laws of nature He has established and has nonetheless established not for the monstrous effects they must produce, but for those effects more worthy of His wisdom and goodness. For He wills them only indirectly, only because they are the natural consequences of His laws. (Malebranche 1997a, p. 164)

The key for Malebranche is the idea of a general action that manifests itself in different ways at different times depending on the circumstances. We might say, speaking loosely, that God *changes* according to circumstances based on His *unchanging* commitment to the general laws of nature. In this way God, by following a regimented path of acting in accordance with his general laws, maintains His immutability.

I hope it is evident from this that creature-to-God causation and divine immutability are not logically incompatible. It might very well be the case that God created the natural order so that certain creaturely actions regularly cause certain divine changes. If a creature, say, cries out in humility and asks God for mercy this creaturely action may cause God's heart to be moved. Maintaining the general causal efficacy of prayer may, after all, be part of the way God decided to consistently act in the world. So it seems creature-to-God causation does not threaten divine immutability since it may be the case that a certain causal structure giving creatures the ability to influence God has been decreed and kept unchanged in accordance with God's unchanging nature.

But, one might object, all this seems to be predicated on the notion that God, in some way, exists in time. How are we to make sense of any changes in God if God exists outside time? One way to respond to this is to clearly distinguish the notion of immutability from the notion of impassibility. Impassibility is the claim that nothing external to God can affect God. It could then be said that creature-to-God causation violates divine impassibility but it does not violate divine immutability. That is, it is possible for a creature to causally affect God without changing God. Here's how the story might go. If God exists outside time then God would be changeless but God could changelessly be aware of events that were external to him. Perhaps God could be *caused* by certain creaturely events to be aware of them. God could changelessly *feel* certain ways towards these events. This simply means that God would feel these ways without changing—God would *always* feel these ways. Indeed God could even act in 'response' to creaturely events. This would simply mean that God would changelessly and continually be responding to these events. So by teasing the notions of immutability and impassibility apart it seems there is a way to preserve creature-to-God causation. We could say that creature-to-God causation is compatible with a view of God that includes divine immutability and rejects divine impassibility.

## 2.6 Wrapping up

If what I have said so far is on the right track then we have an interesting result. Stage 1 of the SA and Malebranche's CCCA, when Providence is understood via Supervenience<sub>CG</sub>, are structurally isomorphic because they are both instances of the GEA. Moreover, because the operative tension in Stage 1 of the SA is the same as the tension in the CCCA—the cause-supervenience tension—this strongly



suggests that observations and discussions that have proven to be insightful regarding one of these arguments can easily be adapted and applied to discussions regarding the other argument. One immediate area where fruitful dialogue between scholars working on these two arguments can be pursued is the justifications Kim and Malebranche offer in excluding mental-to-mental causation and creature-to-creature causation respectively. Although their justifications have similarities, closer inspection reveals some interesting differences that can be compared (and contrasted) with each other and ultimately be used in fruitful ways to move debates along in new ways. The *re-creation* interpretation of the CCC thesis may provide a way for Malebranche to eliminate creature-to-creature causation but this comes at a dialectical cost. Nevertheless, the basic idea behind the *re-creation* interpretation of the CCC thesis might usefully be adapted to do some work in the mental-to-mental causation context. Perhaps a defender of Stage 1 of the SA could claim that mental events are continually descending into nothingness and re-ascending into existence.

Stage 2 of the SA and the CCCA, when Providence is understood via Closure<sub>D</sub>, are also structurally isomorphic because they are both instances of the GEA. Moreover, because the operative tension in Stage 2 of the SA is the same as the tension in this version of the CCCA—the cause-cause tension—this strongly suggests that fruitful dialogue between philosophers of mind and philosophers of religion might easily be had. It seems that Malebranche could co-opt Kim's infinite regress-based reasoning to undermine the possibility of creature-to-creature causation. Indeed these same ideas can be used to rehabilitate Stage 1 of the SA. As I have shown, a commitment to Supervenience<sub>CG</sub> in the divine context and a commitment to Supervenience<sub>MP</sub> in the mental causation context may both be used to generate infinite regress style justifications for the claim that supervenience relations take priority over causal relations.

Finally, it seems there is a lacuna in Malebranche's CCCA. Piggy-backing on Kim's completion of Stage 1 of the SA, even if Malebranche's justification for the CCCA succeeded in eliminating creature-to-creature causation it would still leave open the possibility of salvaging an indirect form of creature-to-creature causation by exploiting creature-to-God causation. It seems to me, therefore, that a defender of creaturely causation could develop a Kim-inspired move in response to Malebranche's CCCA.

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