

NECESSARY CONNECTIONS AND CONTINUOUS CREATION: MALEBRANCHE'S TWO
ARGUMENTS FOR OCCASIONALISM
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Abstract

Malebranche presents two major arguments for occasionalism: the 'no necessary connection' argument (NNC) and the 'conservation is but continuous creation' argument (CCC). NNC appears prominently in his *Search After Truth* but virtually disappears and surrenders the spotlight to CCC in his later major work, *Dialogues on Metaphysics and on Religion*. This paper investigates the possible reasons and motivations behind this significant shift. I argue that the shift is no surprise if we consider the two ways in which the CCC is preferable to NNC: it is not only more effective against opponents but also more consistent with his own views on freedom.

In the latter half of the 17th century and early 18th century in Continental Europe, causation was a hot topic. Armed with a new, "anti-Aristotelian" approach to understanding nature, one which emphasized nature's quantifiable features along with simple, mechanistic laws governing them, philosophers were keen on presenting adequate causal explanations of natural phenomena that would account for the new scientific discoveries and developments. But many, if not all, of these philosophers were also theists, which meant that they were committed to maintaining the various metaphysical and theological principles that comprised the core of what might be called their "traditional" world view, still a very central part of their beliefs. Thus, a natural issue for these philosophers arose in the following manner: how is one to understand God and divine causal involvement with the natural world in light of this new "modern" approach and its implications?

Of the philosophers who wrote on causation during this time, Nicolas Malebranche was perhaps the most influential. His answer to the aforementioned question consisted in his thesis of occasionalism, according to which "there is only one true cause because there is only one true God; ...the nature or power of each thing is nothing but the will of God; ... all natural causes are not *true* causes but only *occasional* causes."¹ The arguments Malebranche presented for this

¹ Nicolas Malebranche, *De la recherche de la vérité* (1678), VI, ii, 3 in *Oeuvres complètes de Malebranche [OCM]*, ed. André Robinet (Paris: Vrin, 1958–84), vol. II, 312. The works of Malebranche will be cited by volume and page

thesis not only anticipate Hume's later analysis of causation but also had a profound impact on Leibniz, influencing his doctrine of "pre-established harmony" and this account of divine concurrence. It is these arguments that concern this paper.

Malebranche presents many distinct arguments for this thesis of occasionalism but his two "global" arguments for occasionalism will be my central concern. The goal is to examine the relationship between the "no necessary connection" (hereafter, NNC) argument and the "conservation is but continuous creation" (hereafter, CCC) argument.² Given its ancestral relation to Hume's analysis of causation and its prominent position in Book 6 Part 2 Chapter 3 of *The Search after Truth*, the NNC argument has received much of the attention.³ But, interestingly enough, it appears to fall out of favor for Malebranche and is conspicuously absent in his later major work to deal with occasionalism, *Dialogues on Metaphysics and on Religion* (1688, *OCM* XII). In this important work, Malebranche rather pushes the CCC argument to the fore as the major argument for occasionalism. What might have motivated Malebranche to give up on what may be his most influential and distinctive contribution to the debate concerning the nature of causation? Are there reasons to think that he himself found the NNC argument problematic, or was the shift merely strategic in character? To my knowledge, Malebranche himself does not provide us with an autobiographical account behind this shift, nor has the topic been adequately addressed in the secondary literature.⁴ But given the philosophical significance

in *OCM* and by the relevant English translations. In the case of the *Recherche* and the *Elucidations*, I follow Lennon and Olscamp, trans., *The Search for Truth and Elucidations of the Search for Truth [LO]* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). For the *Entretiens sur la métaphysique et sur la religion*, I use Jolley, ed., Scott, trans., *Dialogues on Metaphysics and on Religion [Dialogues]* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

² There seem to be at least two "local" arguments for occasionalism, by which I mean arguments which purport to establish the occasionalistic conclusion for the dual Cartesian substances of mind and body independently. One is the "passive nature" argument for bodies, the other is the "no representation" argument for minds. For further discussions of these local arguments, see Steven Nadler, "Malebranche on Causation," in Steven Nadler, ed., *Cambridge Companion to Malebranche* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), Nicholas Jolley's "Introduction" in *Dialogues on Metaphysics and on Religion*, ed. Nicholas Jolley, trans. David Scott (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), and my "Passive Natures and No Representations: Malebranche's Two 'Local' Arguments for Occasionalism", *The Harvard Review of Philosophy* XV (2007): 72-91.

³ For more on Malebranche's influence on Hume, see Charles McCracken, *Malebranche and British Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983).

⁴ An exception is Andrew Pyle's discussion of the continuous creation argument in his *Malebranche [Malebranche]* (London: Routledge, 2003), 96-130. Though I agree with Pyle's assessment that the CCC argument is "most

of the shift, one cannot help be interested in reconstructing the possible motivations behind it, and I will present what I will take to be reasons behind this move.

In my view, there are two main reasons that help us see why it is no surprise that the CCC argument comes out as his preferred argument. The first is that the CCC argument has a strong dialectical advantage over the NNC argument in arguing against “divine concurrentism,” the other prominent alternative with regard to the question of how divine causality relates to creaturely activity. Historically speaking, divine concurrentism was the preferred alternative to occasionalism for many, since, according to divine concurrentism, *both God and the creature* are causally active in bringing about a natural effect. As God and the creature *concur* in the production of natural effects, one appears to avoid the extreme of occasionalism and enjoy the best of both worlds: genuine creaturely causation *and* God’s direct involvement.⁵ To bring this dialectical advantage of the CCC argument into relief, I will focus on and compare the resources each of these arguments has against divine concurrentism. My suggestion will be that the CCC argument, while perhaps not a knockdown argument for occasionalism, has a lot more going for it in that it can put a lot of pressure on the concurrentist position. More specifically, while the NNC argument 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 CCC argument is based, is accepted by most, if not all, divine concurrentists. In other words, with the CCC argument, Malebranche has a strategic advantage and is able to shift the dialectical balance in his favor, since it is now up to the divine concurrentist to avoid the rather forceful inference that Malebranche presents, namely, the inference from the conservation is but continuous creation principle to occasionalism.⁶

powerful and sweeping” argument, our interpretations with regard to (1) how the CCC argument responds to the NNC argument and its problems and (2) why Malebranche might have been motivated to prefer the CCC argument are significantly different. I will discuss Pyle’s interpretation in more detail later.

⁵ Why divine concurrentism historically was the preferred position will be discussed in more detail later.

⁶ This inference will be one of the main topics of the fourth section of this paper, which deals with the CCC argument itself. The idea, roughly put, is that, if God conserves creatures by continuously recreating them, then just as God fully determines and causes all of their states and properties in the initial moment of creation, so does God fully determine and cause all of the states and properties of the subsequent moments of conservation.

But this strategic advantage in dealing with the alternative of concurrentism is not the only reason for the shift toward the CCC argument. In my view, the CCC argument also plays an important role for Malebranche in resolving a thorny issue that accompanies the notion of cause stipulated in the NNC argument. The problem, I take it, is that with such a demanding notion of cause, it seems hopeless to think creatures are causally responsible for any thing in this world, and this would then seemingly imply that God is the “true cause of sin” (*OCM* III 18/*LO* 547). In other words, the conception of causation essential to the NNC argument is not only too strong for Malebranche’s opponents to accept, but also too demanding for Malebranche’s own purposes, since it does not allow room for creaturely causation, pivotal to Malebranche’s account of free volitional action.

Now one might think that reconciling an occasionalism as deep and thorough as Malebranche’s with some account of causal agency on the part of the creature seems rather unlikely. I do not contest that such a reconciliation seems rather daunting. Nor will I take a stand on the question of whether Malebranche’s account of human freedom ultimately succeeds in accomplishing this task. Rather my point will be to convince the reader that with the CCC argument Malebranche is taking a further positive step in dealing with this difficult issue, which is significant progress compared to the situation with the NNC argument. For with the CCC argument, it is possible to both (1) get clear in what sense souls are not causes, true to the occasionalist spirit; and (2) still make room for souls to be active in a sense conducive to attributing causal and moral responsibility to them. In other words, in my view, the second reason why the CCC argument comes to the fore in Malebranche’s later work is that the CCC argument permits a framework that allows Malebranche to make the two claims he wants to make—that is, souls are not causes in a sense supportive of the spirit of occasionalism, while they are, in some other sense, causally active so as to support the claim that they are responsible for some of their actions. These two claims can be made, I will argue, because the CCC argument allows for a framework that distinguishes different types of causes. In order for this second reason to be convincing, it will be important to show why such a framework is not

available to the NNC argument. I will suggest that the basic setup of the NNC argument involves a reductive analysis of causation that is fundamentally in tension with an account that endorses distinct types of causation.

Again, I stress that, in order to appreciate the interpretive point that I am trying to make, one need not agree with Malebranche that this framework can ultimately be maintained nor that the two claims in question can be consistently held. In fact, as I will briefly discuss later, I find Malebranche's endeavor, tentatively speaking, unsuccessful. But this failure should not obscure the facts that Malebranche himself might not have accepted such a diagnosis, and that he was actively engaged in trying to come up with a robust account of volitional activity that is nonetheless consistent with his occasionalism about souls. That Malebranche wanted to endorse a kind of free activity robust enough to underwrite our responsibility is undeniable. Moreover, it is also clear that Malebranche's most mature formulation of his account of free volitional activity incorporates this framework of distinct types of causation. These facts are particularly relevant to our understanding of Malebranche's shift from the NNC argument to the CCC argument, or so I will argue. For, if he thought that the two claims could be consistently brought together within the framework permitted by the CCC argument while they couldn't under the NNC argument, then he would have had a strong reason to prefer this argument over the NNC argument.

1. The "No Necessary Connection" (NNC) Argument

The first global argument for occasionalism is the "no necessary connection" argument.⁷ It first appears in Book 6 Part 2 Chapter 3 of the *Search*, the main topic of which, we are told, is "the most dangerous error of the philosophy of the ancients" (*OCM* II, 309/*LO* 446). Here Malebranche appears to present the necessary and sufficient conditions for genuine causation and argues that finite substances do not satisfy these conditions:

⁷ I follow Steven Nadler in his description of this argument, which is presented in his "'No Necessary Connection': The Medieval Roots of the Occasionalist Roots of Hume," *The Monist* 73 (1996): 448-466.

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. (*OCM* II 316/*LO* 450)

According to this striking passage, our perception of necessary connections is what apparently allows us to identify and attribute genuine causality. But, before going any further, I wish to make the following proposal on how to read this argument: despite its obvious emphasis on our *perceiving* necessary connections, I suggest that we take Malebranche here to be mainly making a metaphysical claim about what counts as a true cause by holding that a true cause is necessarily efficacious. In other words, I propose that Malebranche's point here is more of a conceptual point in the sense that he is proposing that the very idea of causation suggests that what there are at metaphysical bottom are necessary connections. This, I take it, is an independent point from whether or not we can perceive those connections.⁸ An advantage of this "metaphysical" reading is that it insulates the NNC argument from certain problems raised by some of Malebranche's own epistemological views, including his claim in the *Christian and Metaphysical Meditations* (1683) that "even if you believe that God does what he wills, it is not that you see clearly that there is a necessary connection between the will of God and its effects, since you do not even know what the will of God is" (*OCM* X 96). On my proposed reading, Malebranche need not be committed to actually *perceiving* the necessary connections between divine will and its effects. Rather the necessary efficaciousness of divine volition could be thought to follow from the conception of divine omnipotence, even though we do not know the exact content of God's will. Another reason for this metaphysical reading is that it will help us see a key point of this paper, namely, that there are good philosophical reasons why Malebranche shifts his emphasis from the

⁸ In this sense, I think that Malebranche's argument here exhibits something close to the Humean idea—though not developed as clearly and emphatically as in Hume—that we have no conception of what a causal connection would be, if it is not a necessary connection. And, relatedly, I also think that Malebranche could have provided such a rationale for holding premise (A) in the formulation of the argument to come, i.e., the claim that an event is a true cause if and only if there is a necessary connection between it and its effect. Whether he could have stood by such a rationale when he saw how it would impinge upon his own views about human freedom and related theological issues, is another story and will be dealt with later on in this section. I thank Robert Adams for helpful discussion on this point.

NNC argument to the CCC argument in his later work. In the end, I will argue that, against the background of the various accounts addressing the traditional problem of divine and secondary causation in nature, the NNC argument by itself is both ineffective in establishing the occasionalist thesis and problematic for Malebranche's own views concerning freedom, while the CCC argument is both dialectically more effective in making the case for occasionalism and has more room for his account of volitional action, at least from Malebranche's perspective.

With this goal in mind, I formulate the NNC argument as follows:

(A) An event is a true cause if and only if there is a necessary connection between it and its effect.

(B) There are necessary connections only between the will of an infinitely perfect being and its effects.

(C) Therefore, the only true cause is the infinitely perfect being, i.e., God.

Here we can see that the argument is global in character since it sets forth a general characterization of what counts as real causation, one which would be applicable to any type of Cartesian substance, be it minds or bodies.

Given our exposure to Hume's analysis of causation, we probably are not as impressed at the simplicity and clarity of this reductive analysis. But things were different for Malebranche's contemporaries. Just imagine yourself involved in the early modern debate where the traditional view involved the dizzying array of the four "Aristotelian" causes, while the *Zeitgeist* is aiming to gain some clarity in the matter. Everyone seems to have been trying to tidy things up conceptually in light of the new scientific discoveries surrounding, among other things, the laws of contact collision, but definitive statements of what causation itself amounts to were hard to come by. Given this historical context, it is clear that Malebranche's analysis is revolutionary in terms of its simplicity and clarity. But, despite these merits, we should also note that, considering the theological context, the conception of causation expressed in (A) would have seemed rather stipulative to Malebranche's contemporaries and likely given rise to controversy. Again, given

our Humean heritage, this conception of causation might seem totally innocent and uncontroversial to us. But I hope to show that for the vast majority of Malebranche's opponents the characterization of causation in (A) would not have been taken for granted, given some common theologically motivated assumptions that both Malebranche and his interlocutors shared.

So let me flag (A) and suggest bearing in mind the question of how plausible it is to hold that something is a true cause if and only if the effect is necessarily connected to it. Given the centrality of this claim to the NNC argument, whether or not Malebranche can provide a plausible defense of (A) will be an important factor in the success of the argument. I think Malebranche ultimately comes up short in defending (A), a shortcoming that I will suggest could have easily motivated him to switch over to the CCC argument. But before dealing more extensively with (A), let us first see on what grounds one might hold (B).

(B) states that necessary connections exist only between God's will and its effects. The reasoning here seems straightforward. Given divine omnipotence, God's causal power is necessarily efficaciousness. It is inconceivable that God will a state of affairs p and p not obtain. Thus, necessarily, if God wills p then p . But in the case of creaturely causes, given that divine efficaciousness is necessary and that God could have willed some outcome different from the event allegedly brought about by the creature, Malebranche thinks that it is plainly conceivable that I will to raise my arm and it not go up:

...[L]et us suppose that God wills to produce the opposite of what some minds will, as might be thought in the case of demons... that deserve this punishment. One could not say in this case that God would communicate His power to them, since they could do nothing they willed to do. (*OCM* II 316/*LO* 450)

Finite substances, thus, are not necessarily efficacious: against the backdrop of God's necessary efficaciousness, the effect of a finite cause, to borrow Hume's terms, does not "follow necessarily from"⁹ the cause. In fact, the very supposition that there are effects that necessarily

⁹ David Hume, *Enquiries concerning Human Understanding and concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 63.

follow from finite causes seems to go against the idea that divine causal power is omnipotent. For, were there such necessary connections between finite causes and effects, then this would entail that even if God were to will otherwise, these effects would necessarily follow. But this can't be right, unless one were to give up divine omnipotence, something any theist, occasionalist or not, would not countenance.¹⁰ So let's return to the more controversial thesis. Why is something disqualified as a cause simply because its effect does not follow necessarily from it? In other words, why subscribe to (A)?

I think the thought experiment proposed above is highly suggestive of Malebranche's probable answer. While it might normally be true that if creature *A* wills outcome *p*, *p* occurs, it is not true necessarily. It is conceivable that *A* wills *p*, and not-*p*. A likely situation in which such a state of affairs might occur, according to Malebranche, is one in which *A* wills *p*, but God intervenes to bring about not-*p*. When this happens, *A* is not causing not-*p*, since *A*'s alleged efficacy consists just in its power to bring about *p*. It is God's causal power alone that brings about not-*p*, despite or against the alleged causal power of *A*. Now consider the normal case in which *A* wills *p*, and *p* occurs. That *A* wills *p* and *p* occurs implies that God did not will not-*p*, for if God did will not-*p*, then it would be the case that not-*p*—for divine volition is necessarily efficacious—and this would bring us back to the intervention case. But the interesting question then is, did God will anything at all when *A* wills *p*, and *p* obtains?

¹⁰ The issue of why finite creatures are not necessarily efficacious is slightly more complicated than this. Though all theists would agree that, against the backdrop of divine omnipotence, creaturely powers are not necessarily efficacious, Aristotelians about creaturely powers—those who posit robust causal essences in creatures—would disagree with occasionalists like Malebranche as to how creatures fail to have their alleged effects. Briefly put, an Aristotelian about creaturely essences will likely hold that, while God can miraculously disrupt the causal powers of fire from having their usual effect of burning flesh on a given occasion, God cannot create fire without it having this power. In contrast, Malebranche denies there are such essential causal powers in creatures, so in miraculous cases of flesh not burning in fire, there are no natural powers of the fire for God to disrupt. For an illuminating discussion of these issues, see Alfred Freddoso, "Medieval Aristotelianism and the Case against Secondary Causation in Nature," in *Divine and Human Action: Essays in the Metaphysics of Theism*, ed. Thomas V. Morris, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 74–118. One natural question would be whether these creaturely powers might still be regarded as genuine causes, even if their naturally essential powers can be frustrated on the part of God. But this is a question more about premise (A), i.e., whether necessary efficaciousness is a legitimate criterion of causation.

There are two possibilities. One is that God is indifferent, as it were, and wills no specific state of affairs, be it p or not- p . The other possibility is that God actively wills p . Let us first consider the latter option in which God wills p . The main intuition behind Malebranche's position here appears to be something like the following: just as it was God who brought about not- p by willing not- p in the divine intervention case, it is God who brings about p by willing p in the normal case. And just as A played no real or active part in bringing about not- p in the divine intervention case, A plays no active or real part in bringing about p in the normal case.

The right intuition, I suspect, for an occasionalist but rather unconvincing for the proponent of genuine creaturely causation. For one thing, why couldn't p 's obtaining be overdetermined? Why couldn't p have been caused by both A and God? Malebranche might bring in considerations related to the simplicity of divine ways to rule out cases of overdetermination but ruling out overdetermination with simplicity seems rather weak as a response, if we consider what is at stake.¹¹ For the reasoning, when stripped of its gloss, seems to be something like the following: it is, at bottom, considerations about divine simplicity that rule out genuine creaturely causation, rather than there being something inherently problematic with the claim that creatures have genuine causal powers. But one might think that if there are advantages in attributing genuine causal powers to creatures—for instance, being able to hold creatures causally responsible for certain evils in this world—then it is not obvious that concerns about divine simplicity should trump these advantages in dealing with the problem of evil. Moreover, the basic idea behind overdetermination is fertile enough to suggest that, even in the divine intervention case, it is not that the creature's efficacy is nonexistent but rather that the creature's power is overpowered by God. So when A wills p and God brings about not- p , it is not the case that A was causally inert. Rather the creature's causal powers were overridden by divine causal power. It would be analogous to a situation in which my son pushes to shut the refrigerator door, while I pull to open it, and I prevail, at least for now. In other words, the idea is that the

¹¹ Jolley discusses this implicit presumption of no overdetermination. See his "Introduction" to the *Dialogues*, xxiii.

overwhelming success of divine volition need not entail the altogether absence of creaturely efficacy.

But suppose we grant that Malebranche has a viable response to this problem of overdetermination and related possibilities. Is this the end of his worries? I would think not, since there is another, perhaps more serious challenge awaiting. Another possibility in our normal case where both God and *A* will *p*, is that God and *A* *concur* in bringing about the effect *p*. What if God and *A* are directly involved in jointly bringing about the effect *p*?

2. Divine Causation in Nature

At this point, let us consider what Alfred Freddoso has described as “the general problem of divine action in nature—or alternatively, the problem of secondary causality in nature”.¹² The problem, as Freddoso notes, consists of the following questions: if God ultimately is the first and direct cause of everything, including whatever occurs and exists in nature, can there be any causal activity on the part of creatures?; and if there is secondary causation, how does this causal activity fit in with God’s causal activity?

Historically, three positions have appeared in response to this problem: “conservationism,” “concurrentism,” and “occasionalism.” Conservationism holds that, after the initial act of creation, God’s subsequent causal activity in nature is exhausted by his sustaining finite substances with their causal powers in existence. So, according to conservationism, when a creature acts to bring about a certain effect, say, a given modification (or mode) of a created substance, though God keeps the creature in existence with its powers, in exercising these powers the creature acts alone and thus is the sole immediate cause of the resulting modification. God’s causal contribution is *remote* or *indirect* in that God’s causal contribution consists in merely conserving the cause in question with its power, and the actions of the creature are in

¹² See Alfred Freddoso, “God’s General Concurrence with Secondary Causes: Pitfalls and Prospects,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 68 (1994): 131–135.

some straightforward sense the creature's own and not God's.¹³ Concurrentism, by contrast, holds that when a natural effect is produced, it is *directly* caused by both God and the creature. God and the creature are both directly involved in bringing about the effects attributed to the creature. Exactly how this joint venture is supposed to work is a separate and tricky question, but history tells us that when faced with the issue of divine and secondary causation in nature, the vast majority of theists took this position of concurrence.¹⁴

Another thing going for concurrentism is the fact that concurrence is not overdetermination. The concurrentist is fundamentally committed to the claim that God's causal contribution in bringing about an effect is a necessary component, and thus, unlike overdetermination, the creature's causality is not in itself sufficient to produce the effect. *Both* powers are needed. In fact, it is because divine input is a necessary component that the directness of God's causal input is secured, unlike the conservationism model. Concurrentism, then, might be viewed as the middle ground between occasionalism and conservationism: unlike occasionalism, the creature is genuinely causally active, while, contrary to conservationism, God's causal activity is direct in producing the effect.

Conservationism, obviously, will not be an option for Malebranche. And, as mentioned, in his rejection of conservationism, he is not alone, since, most of the important figures in the history of Christian philosophical theology have rejected this position as philosophically deficient and theologically suspect. Most problematic would have been the denial of God's direct activity in the production of the substance's modifications or states. Since the productive action

¹³ Freddoso, "God's General Concurrence with Secondary Causes: Why Conservation Is not Enough," *Philosophical Perspectives* 5 (1991): 554.

¹⁴ That the majority of theists accepted this option is not surprising, if one seriously considers the alternatives of conservationism and occasionalism. Conservationism, on the one hand, was viewed as theologically suspect in that it came worryingly close to some form of deism, given the remoteness of divine causality in the production of natural effects. Occasionalism, on the other hand, not only seemed to contradict the seemingly obvious fact that creatures are indeed possessed of genuine causal powers, but, as noted earlier, also appeared to leave itself open to a host of other problems, including the problem of evil, particularly, the "author of sin" problem. Even if one grants that the existence of evil can somehow be made compatible with God's omnipotence and his benevolence, there remains the further issue as to how God himself could have caused the evil, i.e., be the "author of sin," since creatures are, in principle, causally inert. I will later discuss the 'author of sin' problem as it relates to Malebranche's occasionalism in more detail.

of bringing about modes or modifications is just that of the creature and not of God, not only is the causal power solely credited to the creature, but the effect is more directly dependent on the creature than on God. And this conclusion seems to fly in the face of the critically important theological principle that God is a first and direct cause of everything, a principle many theists of the late Scholastic and early modern period apparently found difficult to surrender.¹⁵ For instance, as Freddoso has pointed out, Suárez set forth as his best argument against conservationism the view that “theistic naturalists should be antecedently disposed to countenance in nature the maximal degree of divine activity compatible with the thesis that there is genuine secondary causation.”¹⁶ And Leibniz goes on to echo Suárez by claiming that “it must be taken as certain that there is as much dependence of things on God as is possible without infringing divine justice.”¹⁷

So, we now see that the first possibility mentioned earlier with regard to God’s volition in the normal situation, namely, the case in which p occurs despite the fact that God neither actively wills p nor not- p but is, as it were, indifferent, would be too close to conservationism for Malebranche. And, in fact, in the *Elucidations* he explicitly repudiates Cardinal Durandus, the most prominent proponent of conservationism, noting that the position “appears to me so contrary to Scripture” (*OCM* III 243/*LO* 680).

But notice that conservationism wasn’t the real worry here. Rather it is the concurrentist who mounts the real challenge by arguing that just because God is involved in bringing about a given state of affairs, albeit as a necessarily efficacious cause, this in itself does not imply that God is the only genuine cause. And the concurrentist cannot be ruled out by the same criticism

¹⁵ On the one hand, the denial of this principle might have been thought to entail a degree of autonomy or independence on the part of creatures that comes worryingly close to certain forms of deism. On the other hand, the denial of this principle could have been thought to simply get things wrong, in that the actual state of affairs, according to theological orthodoxy, is one in which divine causal activity is primary and direct.

¹⁶ See Freddoso, “God’s General Concurrence with Secondary Causes: Why Conservation Is not Enough,” 577.

¹⁷ G. W. Leibniz, *Opusculs et fragments inédits de Leibniz*, ed. Louis Couturat (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1903), 21. The translation is from Leibniz, *Philosophical Writings*, ed. and trans. Mary Morris and G.H.R. Parkinson (London: Dent, 1973), 102.

used against the conservationist, since concurrentism is not making the theologically suspicious move of rendering God's causal activity remote or indirect.

By the time of his reply to the 7th proof presented against occasionalism in *Elucidation 15*, Malebranche seems clearly aware that the insistence on the necessarily efficacious cause being the only cause will not cut any ice against his concurrentist opponents, and he meets the challenge head on:

I hold, as I have said elsewhere, that bodies, for example, do not have the force to move themselves and that therefore ... their motor force is but the will of God, always necessarily efficacious, which conserves them successively in different places. ... This being so, when a body collides with and moves another, I can say that it acts through the concours of God, and that this concurs is not different from its own action. For a body moves the one with which it collides only by its action or its motor force, which ultimately is but God's will, which conserves this body successively in several places. (OCM III 240–1/LO 678, my emphasis)

Here we see what I take to be a major shift in the dialectic. It is no longer the necessary efficaciousness of divine will that is doing the brunt of the work in establishing occasionalism but rather the claim that “motor force is but the will of God.” At first glance, it seems as though Malebranche in this passage is trying to accommodate concurrentism within his occasionalism. But, surely, this attempt is more of a reduction than an accommodation. For, if we accept what Malebranche is saying here, then the efficacious action of a creature just is divine volition, and unless creaturely causes share in this extraordinary power of divine volition, there can be nothing to secondary causes in terms of causal contribution. Malebranche, somewhat disingenuously, says that divine causal activity “concur[s]” with secondary causes, but concurrence hardly seems to be the right word, since there isn't any genuine causal activity on part of the creature for God to concur with.¹⁸

In this respect, Malebranche's discussion here seems more of an argument against concurrentism than an accommodation. But we note that the argument largely rests on a new

¹⁸ In *Elucidation XV*, Malebranche does explicitly argue against the intelligibility of the notion of concurrence. So, to be fair, rather than being a case of disingenuousness, Malebranche might be trying to provide an alternative account of what we *mean* to say when we say that God and the creature “concur,” given that the notion of concurrence itself is unintelligible. See *OCM III 237–8/LO 676–7*. I thank Tad Schmaltz for bringing my attention to this point.

claim, namely, that motor force is but the will of God, which conserves bodies successively in different places. This move, I take it, was forced upon Malebranche in part by his recognition that the NNC argument based on the necessary efficaciousness of divine volition could not meet the challenge presented by the concurrentists as an alternative to the problem of secondary causation, an alternative which makes room for genuine causal powers in creatures without compromising the directness and immediacy of God's causal involvement in every aspect of the world. In other words, if the affirmation of genuine causal powers in creatures automatically committed one to conservationism, then, given the theologically unacceptable aspects of conservationism, one might be persuaded to adopt occasionalism as the alternative. But given the middle ground of concurrentism, another choice is available and the affirmation of genuine creaturely causality need not have these drastic implications. This is why, I take it, the NNC argument is already missing in the *Elucidations to the Search*, when they first appeared in 1678.

Here's a different way to make the point. The concurrentist would not deny Malebranche's point about the uniqueness of divine volition in terms of its necessary efficaciousness. In other words, they would easily accept premise (B) of the NNC argument. But the concurrentist would contest whether this kind of uniqueness entails the kind of uniqueness occasionalism needs, namely, the uniqueness of being the genuine cause. Going back to the previous analogy about shutting doors, the fact that I could have closed the door by myself doesn't imply that my son played no causal role when we closed the door together. The divine concurrentist would strongly contest the inference from being the unique *necessarily* efficacious cause to being the unique *efficacious* cause. Given that the affirmation of divine omnipotence prohibits most theists from endorsing any necessarily efficacious causal connection between a creaturely cause and its effect, from the concurrentist's perspective, the conception of cause expressed in premise (A) is unacceptably problematic in that it rules out creaturely causation in principle. The divine concurrentist concedes that natural causal powers of creatures are disruptable by divine intervention and, thus, they are not necessarily efficacious, but this fact need not entail that they are causally inert when there is no such disruption. Insofar as concurrentism looms in the

background as a viable account of divine and creaturely causation, Malebranche would have had good reason to opt for a strategy that better handles this powerful alternative. Of course, whether the CCC argument is better in this regard is to be seen, and I will discuss in what sense the CCC argument better deals with concurrentism in the next sections. But the point I am making here should be clear enough: given the lack of resources in dealing with divine concurrentism, it is not at all surprising that the NNC argument is absent in his later major work to deal extensively with the thesis of occasionalism, the *Dialogues on Metaphysics and on Religion*.

3. Free Volitional Activity and the NNC Argument

But is this strategic, dialectical consideration the only reason why Malebranche shies away from the NNC argument later on in his works? While he found the NNC argument as sound as ever, did he merely retreat for strategic reasons or was premise (A)—the necessary efficaciousness conception of causation—problematic for him as well? These are difficult questions, but, as mentioned at the outset, in this section I will propose a second reason, albeit more speculative than the first, as to why Malebranche shied away from the NNC argument as his preferred argument for occasionalism.

Suppose I am right about the first reason, that Malebranche suppresses the NNC argument in favor of the CCC argument, in light of the unlikelihood of its main premise (A) being accepted by his main opponents, the divine concurrentists. This raises the interesting question of whether Malebranche himself ever doubted the truth of the main premise of the NNC argument, that is, the claim that only necessarily efficacious agents are real causes. There are two ways to go here. One answer would be that it was just due to the dialectical and strategic considerations that Malebranche holds back on the NNC argument and that he himself firmly stands by the claim that the only causes are necessarily efficacious agents. The other possibility is that Malebranche too had reasons to regard the claim as somewhat problematic, if not for the very same reasons that motivated the concurrentists. I'm inclined to think that the latter was the case and, in the following, I will present my reasons for thinking so.

As noted earlier in this section, divine concurrentists hold that creatures are genuine causes of natural effects while maintaining that God's causal activity is also direct and immediate. One reason for preferring divine concurrentism over occasionalism might be that the idea that there is genuine creaturely activity just seems intuitively appealing. But one can easily see that there are some theological advantages as well in holding that creatures are causally responsible—even if only partially—for certain effects in nature. By having real causal powers in creatures, the divine concurrentist can attribute the causal origin of sin and other evils to creatures themselves, and the divine concurrentist thus seems to have an advantage over the occasionalist in dealing with a particular aspect of the problem of evil, namely the “author of sin” problem.¹⁹ In contrast, the occasionalist seems to be in a particularly difficult position with regard to the ‘author of sin’ problem, since the very idea of occasionalism appears to entail that there simply are no causal connections that can be tracked back to the creature.

In fairness to Malebranche, we should point out that he most likely would not have conceded this weakness. He would probably respond that the charge is too quick, since there might be an account of free volitional actions, which would carry the brunt of the causal work needed when creatures are indeed wherein the sinful acts originate, while consistently maintaining the occasionalist position that God is the unique cause. In fact, Malebranche devotes the very first Chapter of the first Book of the *Search* to argue that we are free and thus responsible for our sins, only to follow it up with the NNC argument for occasionalism in Book six, Part two, Chapter three. So Malebranche initially might not have even been concerned with this problem of compatibility.

¹⁹ All theistic accounts attempting to deal with the issue of secondary causation in nature face the problem of evil, namely, how the evils in this world could be compatible with God's goodness and omnipotence. But a viable theodicy, in addition, needs to detach God from the evil so that God is in no way the cause of the sinfulness of the actions of creatures. Note that this detachment holds despite the fact that God is causally relevant in some manner or another in the actions of the creature, including the sinful ones. Hence, the ‘author of sin’ problem. The point here is that occasionalism appears to have a particular difficulty with this problem.

Still, as is expected, an opponent of occasionalism would not and probably should not accept, simply on the basis of Malebranche's word, that his account of human free action is compatible with a thoroughly going occasionalism like his. In other words, we need something more than a simple reassurance that such a reconciliation can work. And we have evidence that, at least by the time of the publication of the *Elucidations to the Search*, published as a supplement to the third edition of the *Search* four years after its first edition, Malebranche was aware of this difficulty. This is how he describes his predicament in his first *Elucidation to the Search*:

They [i.e., those who raise questions about my account of freedom presented in Chapter one of the *Search*] would have me explain, if I can, what God does in us and what we ourselves do when we sin, because in their opinion, my explanation would make me either agree that man is capable of giving himself some new modification, or else recognize that God is the true cause of sin. (OCM III 17–8/LO 547)

Malebranche aptly describes the challenge that faces him. On the one hand, for his account of human free action to work, it seems as though the causality involved should be sufficiently robust, which, in turn, suggests that when we act freely, we actually make a difference by bringing about new modifications, sinful or not.²⁰ But, on the other hand, this kind of causal power then seems to be rather too robust for a serious occasionalist about minds to hold, and if one, on the pain of inconsistency, rejects such a power within us, it seems to follow that God is actually “the true cause of sin.” More importantly, this text clearly shows that Malebranche at this time appreciates the potential incompatibility between his occasionalism and his account of free activity.

²⁰ Here the underlying premise seems to be something like the following: something is a genuine cause if and only if it is capable of producing new modifications. This conception of causation seems to something Malebranche ought to accept, since, he himself, in the *Traité de morale*, notes “[a]ll willing by creatures is inefficacious in itself. Only He who gives being could be able to give the ways [*manières*] of being, since the ways of being are nothing but beings themselves, in this or that fashion” (OCM XI 160). The translation is from Craig Walton, trans., *Treatise on Ethics [Treatise on Ethics]* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1993), 147. But the dilemma for Malebranche is that, while he wants to reserve causal powers so construed for God alone, he does not want to accept what seems to follow from reserving such powers to God, i.e., that creatures lack genuine causal powers. This text is interesting in several other respects and will be relevant in our later discussion of the applicability of the CCC argument to minds as well.

The recognition of this tension, of course, does not mean that Malebranche gave up on the goal of rendering compatible these two central tenets of his metaphysics,²¹ and we know that he pursued such a project until the very end of his career. It does, however, lend support to the interpretation that Malebranche would have been motivated to remove any unnecessary obstacles in achieving this goal. Given that the NNC argument is already absent in the *Elucidations*, it is my contention that the NNC argument, due to its basic argumentative strategy, emerges as such an obstacle. Let's see why.

In bringing occasionalism and free volitional activity together, the challenge for Malebranche is to carve out a notion of causality involved in free activity that is both *thin* enough to be consistent with his occasionalism and *thick* enough to do the work in dealing with the author of sin problem.²² Again, as I said at the outset, I will not in this paper be taking a stand on whether Malebranche is ultimately successful in coming up with a notion of causality that fits this bill. The point rather is that, if one holds firm to the unilateral understanding of causality that something is a cause if and only if it is necessarily efficacious—the very notion of causality stipulated in the NNC argument—then it would seem to defeat the whole purpose of trying to come up with such a well-crafted notion of causation, since the understanding of causality as necessary efficaciousness would in principle rule out any *other* notion of causation, regardless of how it is carved out.

For suppose Malebranche is successful in coming up with a notion of cause that underwrites our free acts of volition, one that doesn't bring about new modifications but is still an active enough power to suggest that it is we who sin when sin occurs. Whatever this power consists in, insofar as the necessary connection criterion is employed to demarcate genuine causation, our

²¹ In fact, the synopsis of Elucidation One states “God produces whatever is real in the mind's impulses and in the determinations of these impulses; nevertheless, He is not the author of sin” (*OCM* III 17/*LO* 547).

²² Given that, within Malebranche's overall story of the causal network of the world all states of creatures end up being occasional causes of some effect or another, one might think that the notion of ‘occasional cause’ fits this role. But occasional causes literally don't bring about anything; they merely ‘occasion’ various events that are brought about by divine volition, i.e., they are merely terms, as it were, that appear in God's general volitions, which are in fact the sole efficacious force behind the occurrence of any effect. In other words, occasional causation is too thin to do the job.

exercise of this power has to fall short of real causality. All the fancy footwork involved in coming up with this nuanced notion of cause turns out to be useless, since given that such causes cannot meet the criterion of necessary efficaciousness, they are not real causes but at best just simulate them.²³ Only if Malebranche is willing to concede that the stipulative notion of cause in the NNC argument is too restrictive and narrow, can the project of coming up with a full blown occasionalism coupled with an account of free volitional activity even get off the ground. To put the point differently, if genuine causal powers are strictly identified with necessary efficaciousness, then such an understanding would not merely exacerbate the attempt of finding a causal process originating from creatures. It would actually make it impossible. So, in effect, even for Malebranche's own purposes—that is, the goal of coming up with an account of free volitional action that would address the 'author of sin' problem—the notion of causality central to the NNC is too strong.

So far I have presented two reasons why we shouldn't be surprised to see Malebranche leave behind the NNC argument and shift to the CCC argument as his preferred argument for occasionalism. The ways in which the NNC argument comes up short is instructive in that it reveals what the preferred argument should be capable of doing. The new improved argument would ideally be able to do two things. One would be to start off the argument for occasionalism with premises that would be acceptable to those holding concurrentism, which would make it strategically more effective than the NNC argument. Second, the argument would leave logical space for diverse notions of causation, which would allow for the possibility that creatures are causes in a sense strong enough to anchor our being volitionally active, while securing the occasionalist thesis that creatures, even souls, are not causally efficacious in some other

²³ Why does the causality involved in free volitional action necessarily have to fall short of the necessary connection criterion? As we had seen in our discussion of the second premise of the NNC argument, the pressure comes from the notion of divine omnipotence. It cannot be the case that the creature's will is invincible, if by 'invincibility' we mean there is a necessary connection between the volition and its effect. For the invincibility of this will would imply that, given the creature's volition, even God cannot break the necessary connection between the volition and its effect, and this would seem to be an unacceptably problematic violation of divine omnipotence, no matter how divine omnipotence is construed.

important sense. In the remaining sections of this paper, I will argue that the CCC argument goes a considerable way in satisfying these desiderata. But before moving on, let us briefly examine an interesting interpretation recently been presented by Andrew Pyle on the relation between the NNC argument and the CCC argument.²⁴

In discussing the NNC argument and the CCC argument, Pyle describes them as the “thin” argument and the “deep” argument respectively. This description is based on Pyle’s diagnosis that “[c]ritics of Malebranche ... have objected to the tautological and seemingly merely verbal character of [the NNC] argument” and that Malebranche’s main line of response to this “fundamental objection” is his theory of continuous creation. Insofar as I take the CCC argument to be both a response to the problematic nature of the NNC argument and a better argument for Malebranche, we are in agreement.²⁵ But, as we shall see, Pyle in discussing the problems with the NNC argument focuses on a complaint different from mine. For Pyle, the main complaint against the NNC argument is that the necessary efficaciousness criterion of causation doesn’t really give us a good idea of the nature of causal relations, a criticism, as he notes, originates from Fontenelle.²⁶ Pyle writes,

[w]e seek rational insight into the relation between cause and effect and are fobbed off with what looks like a merely verbal proof. If I can’t understand how my volitions can bring about the voluntary motions of my body, does it help to be told that the volitions of an omnipotent being are, necessarily efficacious? If I understand ‘omnipotent’, I will grant the validity of the inference from “An omnipotent being willed X to occur” to “X occurred”, but it seems to shed no light whatsoever on the nature of the causal relation. (Pyle, *Malebranche*, 101)

In other words, the complaint, according to Pyle, is that the claim that divine will is omnipotent tells us nothing about the nature of causal powers. We want to know what it is about this power that allows it to bring about its effect necessarily, but we are told nothing. The problem I have

²⁴ See Pyle, *Malebranche*, 98–114.

²⁵ Steven Nadler also identifies the CCC argument as the “most powerful and sweeping argument for God as the sole causal agent in the universe” but he does not discuss the issues at hand—that is, why Malebranche shifts to the CCC argument and, how the NNC argument and the CCC argument might be related. See Nadler, “Malebranche on Causation,” 126.

²⁶ See Pyle, *Malebranche*, 100. For Fontenelle, see his *Doutes sur le systeme physique des causes occasionelles* in *Oeuvres de Fontenelle* (Paris, 1818), I 621.

identified with the NNC argument, in contrast, is significantly different. For I'm granting, in a way, that the intuition that Malebranche seems to be pushing—that causal connections just are necessary connections—actually has some intuitive appeal. The objection, as I understand it, is rather that this conception of causation, though perhaps plausible in its own right, is too narrow for an opponent of occasionalism to accept, since given divine omnipotence no finite substance could possibly satisfy this condition.

Here is a further, potentially problematic, aspect of Pyle's interpretation. If it is the case that the "fundamental objection" to the NNC argument is that the argument tells us nothing about this omnipotent power, and we therefore don't have a good idea of what kind of power this omnipotent causal force is supposed to be, I wonder if things are better off when it comes to the CCC argument. I'm not sure things are, since I'm not sure whether we have a better sense of God's creative power when compared to God's necessarily efficacious power. The idea of creation *ex nihilo* seems just as mysterious as (or perhaps even more so than) the idea of an omnipotent power to bring things about. Just as we are not necessarily efficacious and have no idea of what it would be like to be so, we are not causal agents that create *ex nihilo* and have no idea what it would be like to bring about what most theists of this time period regarded as "miracles of the first rank." But if this is the case, then the CCC argument doesn't seem to actually address what Pyle takes to be the fundamental objection raised against the NNC argument. In other words, if Pyle's rendition of the main problem of the NNC argument is correct, I don't see how the CCC argument meets the challenge. For the CCC argument doesn't seem to provide us with any better or clearer idea of what a causal power is. Again, describing the power as a *creative* power doesn't seem to help since we are no more creators *ex nihilo* than necessarily efficacious agents. So, on Pyle's interpretation, I fail to see how the CCC argument is a response to the NNC argument, and whether it is indeed the "deeper" argument.

Lastly, as Pyle himself notes, we know that in his exchange with Fontenelle Malebranche flatly rejects the basic principle behind Fontenelle's objection, namely, that, for conception of causation presented in the NNC argument to be convincing, one needs to know how God's will

brings about its effects.²⁷ As the earlier quote from the *Christian and Metaphysical Meditations* (1683) shows, Malebranche thinks he has good reason to deny Fontenelle's requirement: though we "do not even know what the will of God is," this shouldn't stop us from accepting that divine volition is necessarily efficacious.²⁸ Thus, Malebranche seems to have a perfectly adequate response to this Fontenellean objection. If so, then, given that there already is an effective response, it would seem unlikely that Malebranche presents the CCC argument as another response to the same objection, particularly when the alleged response doesn't do much to help meet the objection itself. I have, therefore, been arguing that we should look for the motivation elsewhere, by identifying fundamentally different problems with the NNC argument.

4. The "Conservation is but Continuous Creation" (CCC) Argument

The beginnings of what looks very much like the argument for occasionalism from the thesis of continuous creation are found as early as the 1st *Elucidation*.²⁹ But the argument is given its most forceful presentation in the 7th *Dialogue on Metaphysics and on Religion*, published 10 years later. By section V, Aristes has given up his belief that bodies have powers to act on our minds, but he is still reluctant to accept that bodies cannot act upon one another. Thus Theodore begins a long argument to prove that "there is a contradiction in the claim that bodies can act on bodies" (*OCM XII 154/Dialogues 110*).

Theodore first establishes that "it is a contradiction for a body to be neither at rest nor in motion", against which Aristes offers no resistance. Theodore then presents a key claim, namely that, "God cannot will that this chair exist, without at the same time willing that it exist either here or there and without His will placing it somewhere" (*OCM XII 156/Dialogues 112*).

²⁷ Pyle, *Malebranche*, 99.

²⁸ This view of Malebranche was one reason why I suggested we take the NNC argument to be more *metaphysical* in character than *epistemological*. In other words, Malebranche himself does not take the NNC argument to be susceptible to the problem that Fontenelle is raising.

²⁹ See *OCM III 26/LO 551–2*. As I have already noted, this strongly suggests that from as early as 1678, Malebranche had qualms about presenting the NNC argument as his main argument for occasionalism.

To this, Aristes grants that this might be the case but only so when God is creating the world:

Very well, Theodore, I grant you that. When God creates a body *initially* He must place it either at rest or in motion. But once the moment of creation has passed, this is no longer the case. Bodies dispose themselves haphazardly, or according to the law of the strongest. (*OCM XII 156/Dialogues 112*, my emphasis)

And it is at this point that Theodore presents the main claim that conservation is but continuous creation:

“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. (*OCM XII 156–7/Dialogues 112*)

The idea is that since God conserves the world by continuously recreating it, he not only sustains the existence (or being) of substances but also fully determines their modes or modifications. Just as in the initial act of creation *ex nihilo* God alone fully caused and determined the entire state of affairs, in every subsequent ‘conserving’ act of the world it is God who does everything. This being the case, there is nothing left for creatures to do, hence Malebranche’s denial of genuine causal powers in creatures.

The key inference is that from God’s willing a certain state of affairs to God’s being the sole causal contributor. Now the divine concurrentist might question the inference, since she would hold that, even on concurrentist accounts, divine volition plays a critical role, but this in itself doesn’t straightforwardly entail that creatures lack causal contribution. But here with the continuous creation thesis Malebranche is on firm ground to respond. The inference goes through, since 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 in the initial moment of creation, it was God alone who brought about a completely determinate state of affairs, in all subsequent acts of conservation, it is God who is

the only causal agent.³⁰ Conservation is but continuous acts of creation. In other words, since Malebranche is arguing that all creaturely states, be they the initially created states or the subsequent conserved states, are caused by what is effectively identical to God's act of creation, it would be difficult for any one, in the theological context, to suppose that creatures partake in creating or in the causing that is creating.

In attempting to resist the inference, the concurrentist might raise the possibility of overdetermination again, but given the continuous creation thesis, the prospect of overdetermination in creation and conservation doesn't look good. For one, overdetermination appears to imply that there is an overdetermining cause other than God, with creative powers analogous to God. Secondly, the existence of such an overdetermining cause seems incompatible with the notion of creation *ex nihilo*, which implies that there is nothing metaphysically prior to creation other than God.

The question then seems to be whether one should accept the continuous creation thesis at all. But, here again, Malebranche is on solid footing here since the vast majority of concurrentists, including Descartes and Leibniz, accepted the thesis.³¹ In this regard, the CCC argument fulfills the first key desiderata mentioned earlier, namely, that of starting out with a premise that is less

³⁰ To say that the divine volitions are sufficient to bring about the fully determinate and specific state of affairs need not entail that the volitions themselves are particular in terms of their content so as to fall short of being law-like. For instance, consider the law $F=ma$; it is clearly general in the sense that it is applicable to all entities with mass, but for each different quantity of mass, we would obviously end up with a different quantity of force. Thus, if the quantity of mass of a given object changes from time t_1 to t_2 , then this change would determine the specific quantity of force that would have to change correspondingly. In other words, a general volition can be law-like in that it can be general in the sense of being applicable to multiple events that are distinguishable but still be powerful enough to fully specify and determine the subsequent states. I thank Tad Schmaltz for pressing me on this point. This doesn't mean, however, that I am taking a stand on the controversial issue about whether God's general volitions are particular or not. For more on this controversy, see Steven Nadler, "Occasionalism and the General Will in Malebranche," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 31(1993): 31–47, Andrew Pessin, "Malebranche's Distinction between General and Particular Volitions," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 39 (2001): 77–99, and Tad Schmaltz, "Occasionalism and Mechanism: Fontenelle's Objections to Malebranche," *British Journal of the History of Philosophy* (forthcoming).

³¹ For instance, see Descartes's *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Meditation Three in particular (AT VII 49/CSM II 33). Also see AT VII 109/CSM II 79 and AT VII 301–2/210 (All works of Descartes are cited by volume and page in Adam and Tannery and in the standard English translation of Cottingham, Stoothoff and Murdoch). In Leibniz, see his *Texts inédits*, ed. by Gaston Grua (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1948), 330 and *Theodicy* §27, §§382–385 (cited from C. I. Gerhardt, ed., *Die philosophischen Schriften von Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz*, vol. IV (Berlin: Weidman, 1875–90) by section number).

controversial and more likely to be accepted by the opponents of occasionalism, in particular, the divine concurrentists. And with the continuous creation thesis, the tide seems to have turned in Malebranche's favor, since now any one accepting the continuous creation thesis seems precariously close to endorsing occasionalism. It is now up to the concurrentist to prevent this collapse. To wit, with the NNC argument, the burden of proof lay with Malebranche, in convincing his opponents why one should accept necessary efficaciousness as the criterion of causation. But the continuous creation account of conservation shifts the dialectical balance in favor of Malebranche. For it is now up to the concurrentist to either deny the commonly accepted view that conservation is continuous creation or resist the inference from the continuous creation thesis to occasionalism, an inference Malebranche has so forcefully presented. Neither option seems an easy route for the concurrentist to take.

But, as we can see, in order for the CCC argument to have the dialectical bite I have attributed to it, the continuous creation thesis itself must be understood in a way that might be controversial. Andrew Pessin has argued that for Malebranche the continuous creation thesis does not itself entail occasionalism, and accepting the continuous creation thesis is consistent with holding the following principle: "God's activity in sustaining the existence of (i.e., creating) substances is distinct from His activity in causing their modes or features."³² Pessin grants that the denial of Distinction principle along with the continuous creation thesis does entail occasionalism, for if God's causal involvement in sustaining the existence of a substance, required by the continuous creation thesis, is not distinct from God's activity as a "modal cause", then God effectively is the unique cause bringing about everything. But Pessin argues that there is nothing about the continuous creation thesis itself that forces one to take a position on the

³² Andrew Pessin, "Does Continuous Creation Entail Occasionalism? Malebranche (and Descartes)" ["Does Continuous Creation Entail Occasionalism?"], *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 30 (2000): 421. Let's call this principle the "Distinction" principle. Pessin notes that this way of formulating the distinction is originally Dan Garber's. See Garber, "How God Causes Motion: Descartes, Divine Sustenance, and Occasionalism," *Journal of Philosophy* 10 (1987): 577. Garber here also introduces the useful term, "modal cause"—that is, a cause of the particular modes or properties of a creature—which I will adopt as well.

Distinction principle one way or the other, and, thus, that one could be committed to continuous creation but resist being an occasionalist by accepting this distinction between God's activities.

As my interpretation of the CCC argument might suggest, I am reluctant to accept the picture we get from Pessin on how Malebranche or his contemporaries understood the continuous creation thesis. I grant that the inference from the continuous creation thesis to occasionalism is not automatic, as it were, particularly for the opponents of occasionalism. For instance, as I have argued elsewhere, Leibniz wants to accept a rather robust form of the continuous creation thesis, but he nonetheless rejects occasionalism.³³ But if the issue is what view Malebranche himself had about the inference, then I think that the texts are overwhelmingly supportive of the view that he did think that the continuous creation thesis provided a rather straightforward argument for occasionalism. And, in my view, Malebranche thought so because he had a reading of the continuous creation thesis that is stronger than one suggested by Pessin. In other words, I am concerned that what Pessin takes to be involved in the acceptance of what he calls "continuous creation *simpliciter*"³⁴ is far too weak, and that Pessin's reading thus does not adequately reflect what Malebranche himself had thought about the thesis nor the onus of those who accept the continuous creation thesis as considered by Malebranche.

This is what I mean. In my view, the logical space occupied by those who accept Pessin's rendition of continuous creation *simpliciter* seems to make room for "mere conservationism" discussed earlier, which I take to be an awkward consequence of Pessin's proposal. As we have seen, even conservationists like Durandus, the common adversary of occasionalists and concurrentist alike, accepted God's direct causal involvement in being the immediate and direct cause of the being (or existence) of creatures in his conserving activities. In other words, conservationists never denied that in terms of the being of created substances, creatures were just as dependent on God in moments of conservation as in the initial moment of creation. But

³³ See my "Leibniz on Divine Concurrence," *The Philosophical Review*, 113 (2004): 204–248.

³⁴ Pessin, "Does Continuous Creation Entail Occasionalism?," 414.

acknowledging such dependence, on Pessin's reading, seems enough to qualify them as accepting the continuous creation thesis. I doubt, however, that Malebranche would have thought so or that this was historically the case. Rather, to my knowledge, the benchmark for whether one accepted the continuous creation thesis seems to have been whether or not one thought that God's conserving activity was *exhausted* by God's sustaining or keeping in existence the being of created substances. As the term suggests, "mere" conservationists thought that God's conserving activity was indeed exhausted in this way, and concurrentists and occasionalists alike found conservationism theologically unacceptable precisely in this regard. Why? Because, as we had discussed, concurrentists and occasionalists thought that taking God's causal contribution in conservation to be exhausted by God's keeping the creature's being in existence denies a central theological doctrine that is non-negotiable: God's causal involvement is directly and immediately present in *every* aspect of the world, including the creature's modes and accidents. I take it that it is this doctrine concerning the immediacy and directness of God's ubiquitous causal involvement that was historically thought to be embodied in the continuous creation thesis or, at the least, as it was understood by Malebranche. Therefore, on this reading of the continuous creation thesis, if one accepts the continuous creation thesis, one is also minimally committed to God's causal involvement in the production of the creature's modes. Of course, how God is involved in this production is of critical importance and concurrentists and occasionalists parted ways on this issue. In fact, on my reading, Malebranche's main contribution to this debate, through his CCC argument, is that the best way to understand God's contribution as a modal cause in moments of conservation is to see it as that of a total, unique cause. For, at the initial moment of creation *ex nihilo*, this was how God brought about the modes of the creatures, and, as we know, conservation is but continuous creation. So there is a gap between the continuous creation thesis and occasionalism, and Malebranche is indeed trying to close the gap but the gap is neither where Pessin finds it nor is it as big. Malebranche's ingenuity consists in showing how close one actually is to occasionalism in accepting the continuous creation thesis by spelling out what the commitment to the continuous creation thesis really entails. And it is precisely because

Malebranche does this job so convincingly that the onus of those who accept the continuous creation thesis in Malebranche's footsteps increases if they want to argue for a different account of how God acts as a modal cause.³⁵

But what implications does this reading of Malebranche on the continuous creation thesis have for the other desideratum that the post-NNC argument preferably would be able to meet? Does the CCC argument make room for the delicate notion of causation we had been seeking, one thin enough to allow Malebranche to hold his occasionalism, while thick enough to support a causality underlying free volitional activity? It would seem that the continuous creation thesis, like the necessary efficaciousness criterion of causality, is too strong, since if God is causally responsible for all the modes or states of a soul in virtue of continuously recreating it, there doesn't seem to be any room for volitional activity on its part.

Another way to put the worry would be to say that it seems as though there should be some asymmetry between bodies and minds in terms of how the CCC argument applies to them respectively. In the case of bodies, there seems to be no problem with the straightforward application of the CCC argument, since we get the total denial of causal powers in extended substances, which is what a thoroughgoing occasionalism would want in the first place. Since God cannot will the existence of an extended substance without willing it here or there, in willing an extended substance to exist, it is God's will that brings about all the specific, particular properties. But in the case of souls or minds, the desired outcome is more nuanced. Malebranche wants to maintain his overall occasionalistic stance toward souls, but at the same time he hopes to save some power underlying the free activity of souls from the onslaught of

³⁵ My reading here of what the continuous creation thesis means for Malebranche is very much in the spirit of Steven Nadler's illuminating views on how the continuous creation thesis was understood by both Louis de La Forge and Malebranche. Nadler presents what I take to be a convincing case of how Louis de La Forge adopts this reading of the continuous creation thesis, which ultimately ends up influencing Malebranche's own reading. See his "Continuous Creation and the Activity of the Soul: Louis de la Forge and the Development of Occasionalism," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 36 (1998): 215–231.

global occasionalism. But can this be done, if my description of how the continuous creation thesis applies to creatures and their states is indeed the case?

There is good evidence that Malebranche did not think that there was a relevant asymmetry between bodies and minds in how the CCC argument applies to them.³⁶ Consider the following passage from the *Treatise on Ethics* (1684) cited earlier:

Glory and Honor belong to God alone. Toward Him alone, all the movements of all minds ought to tend, because only in Him does power reside. All willing by creatures is *inefficacious in itself*. Only He who gives being could be able to give the ways of being, since the ways of being are nothing but beings themselves, in this or that fashion. Nothing is more evident to one who knows how to consult the inner truth. For what is more evident than that if God, for example, keeps a body always in one place, then no creature could move it to another? Or that no man could even move his own arm unless God wills to concur in doing that which ungrateful and stupid man thinks he is doing by himself? And the same goes for the ways of being of minds. If God keeps or creates the soul in a way of being which afflicts it, such as with pain, no mind can deliver itself therefrom, nor make itself to feel pleasure thereby, unless God concurs with it to carry out its desires. (OCM XI 160 / *Treatise on Ethics* 147, my emphasis)

Here we get something close to a generalized version of the key claim of the CCC argument in the *Dialogues* that God cannot will that an extended substance exist, “without at the same time willing that it exist either here or there and without His will placing it somewhere” (OCM XII 156/*Dialogues* 110): only he who gives being could be able to give the ways of being. And, importantly, this principle is said to be applicable to the “ways of being of minds.”³⁷ So in effect

³⁶ I should note that prior to emergence of the CCC argument as his primary argument for occasionalism, there is a clear strand of thought revolving around his discussion of free will where Malebranche seems to accept some form of the Distinction principle for minds. For instance, see OCM I 45–7/LO 4–5. As commentators like Tad Schmaltz as well as a referee for this journal have noted, here we get an early account of human freedom, according to which God provides an indeterminate striving for the good in general while we ‘steer’ this indeterminate inclination toward particular goods by our volitions. See Schmaltz, *Malebranche's Theory of the Soul: A Cartesian Interpretation* [*Malebranche's Theory of the Soul*] (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 220–221. I agree with the general assessment that this was not the account of volitional activity that Malebranche came to prefer in the end, according to which each and every determinate mode of soul is produced by God, and our only power is to consent or dissent. What is curious is that what looks like the endorsement of the Distinction principle for minds emerges as late as 1685, in a passage from *Réponse à la Dissertation XII* §XI. See OCM VII 569. This passage is from roughly around the same period as the *Treatise on Ethics* and well after the *Elucidations* (1678), where we get Malebranche’s explicit acknowledgement of the dilemma facing his early account of free volitional activity. The important issue is whether Malebranche accepted the Distinction principle for minds after he came to consider the full consequences of adopting the continuous creation thesis, and I doubt this is the case.

³⁷ There is some mention of God ‘concurring’ with the desire of a mind, but, once again, concurrence seems to be the wrong description here since if the continuous creation thesis is to be applied to minds in the same way that it is applied to bodies, then unless Malebranche is willing to accept that bodies concur with God as well, there doesn’t seem to be any creaturely power within minds that supports it being a concurring partner.

we are presented with an explicit denial of the Distinction principle even in the case of minds. And the CCC argument indeed seems to be fully applicable to the modes or ways of the being of the minds, just like bodies. All this is good news for the promotion of Malebranche's occasionalism, but one wonders about his account of freedom. Is Malebranche really willing to bite the bullet for an all-powerful, ubiquitous occasionalism, regardless of the consequences for his account of freedom? If so, then the second reason that I have presented as motivating the shift over to the CCC argument no longer seems convincing. The CCC argument, just like the NNC argument, turns out to be too strong to satisfy the second desiderata. Both arguments, though in different ways, seem to leave no room for a notion of power that could underlie acts of free volition.

5. The CCC Argument and the Two Powers of the Soul

Does the CCC argument fare any better than the NNC argument in terms of accommodating an account of freedom for Malebranche? This is the question to be addressed in this section of the paper.

The challenge is that insofar as the continuous creation thesis applies to minds in the same way that it does to bodies, it seems as though there is no room for a genuine causal power in the soul to anchor free volitional activity. I have already argued that, though initially wavering, Malebranche ultimately rejects the Distinction principle across the board and does not take there to be a relevant asymmetry between minds and bodies in this regard. So, admittedly, the prospects for securing any account of free volitional activity consistent with the CCC argument seem pretty bleak at this point. But there is a further difference in Malebranche's understanding of the natures of bodies and minds that needs to be examined in order to do justice to this complex issue.

Consider, once again, why, in the case of bodies, it is not difficult to see why Malebranche shouldn't accept the Distinction principle. As is commonly recognized, the identity conditions of a Cartesian extended substance are simply constituted by its various modes of relations of

distance. As Malebranche himself points out in the *Dialogues*,³⁸ while we can have an abstract, general notion of relations of distance, this does not imply that there actually is an abstract, general relation of distance. All actually existing relations of distance are concrete and particular in the sense that they are expressible in specific quantified terms. What it is to be a Cartesian extended substance simply is to possess, or be in, a certain set of such relations. Thus, insofar as Cartesian bodies are concerned, that the Distinction principle does not apply to them is no surprise, since there can't be an actual body without there being the particular relations of distance that constitute its identity conditions. This means that not only are these particular relations of distance necessary to be an extended substance, they are sufficient. In other words, having these particular relations of distance is all there is to being a body. There are no hidden “extra” modes lurking in the background.

But what about minds? As some of the complications of the preceding discussion have shown, we need to tread carefully here given Malebranche's complex and evolving views concerning freedom, the full treatment of which, unfortunately, cannot be presented here.³⁹ Nonetheless, I think it is reasonably clear and uncontroversial that Malebranche's mature position on free volitional activity involves a more sophisticated makeup for minds when compared to bodies. Minds or souls are not only characterized by their thoughts, sensations, and emotions—what I will call their “real” modes⁴⁰—but they have an additional component, the volitional aspect of the will, which involves both the general inclination towards the good and the will's free volitional activity of the consent or the withholding of consent to a particular good.

³⁸ See *OCM XII 150/Dialogues* 106.

³⁹ For insightful discussions on this complex topic, see Elmar Kremer, “Malebranche on Human Freedom” [“Malebranche on Human Freedom”] in the Nadler, ed., *Cambridge Companion to Malebranche*, 190–219 as well as Schmaltz, *Malebranche's Theory of the Soul*, 192–234.

⁴⁰ In calling them “real”, I take to be following Malebranche's lead: “I agree that God is the sole author of all substances and of all their modes, that He is the author of all beings: not only of all bodies but of all minds. But be careful: I understand by a *mode* of a substance only that which cannot change without there being some real or physical change in the substance of which it is the mode. ... Once again, I agree that God is the sole efficacious cause of all the real changes that take place in the world” (OC XVI 40).

For instance, consider the following passage from one of Malebranche's last works, the *Reflexion on Physical Premotion* (1715):

There are in the soul two different powers or activities. The first is properly only the action of God ... [who] continually creates the soul with the invincible desire to be happy, or continually moves it toward the good in general. But the second ... which is the essence of freedom, is ... very different from the first. It consists in a true power, not to produce, by its own efficacy, new modifications in itself, that is, new interesting perceptions or new movements in the will, but ... a true power of the soul to suspend or to give its consent to the movements that follow naturally upon interesting perceptions. (*OCM XVI 46-7*)

This remarkable passage provides us with a good picture of what Malebranche in the end took to be going on within thinking substances. The soul is described as having two powers or activities. The first, though, is not really the creature's power or activity, since it is the general inclination for the good, which is noticeably a result of God's *continually creating* the soul with this desire. Malebranche's affirmation of God's continuous creative activity in the case of souls is clearly confirmed here.

But even more interesting is the description of the second power, which we are told is "very different from the first." Malebranche insists that it is a "true power" but also is careful to tell us what kind of power it is *not*, despite being a genuine causal power. It is not a power to produce new modifications in itself, that is, new perceptions or movements of the will.⁴¹ These real modifications are rather the results of God's continuous creative activity, like the general inclination toward the good. So, with regard to these real modifications of the soul, the soul is powerless and causally inactive, and Malebranche, on this basis, can hold that he is an occasionalist about these modifications of the soul. In other words, creatures are powerless and causally inert, if by "power" we have a productive causal power in mind, one which is responsible for the production of real modifications such as thoughts, sensations, emotions, or

⁴¹ Also see the following from the *Dialogues VII*: "His will is efficacious, it is immutable. From it I derive my power and my faculties. God willed that I have certain sensations, certain emotions, whenever there are certain traces, certain disturbances of the spirits in my brain. ... I derive nothing from my nature, nothing from the imaginary nature of the philosophers. Everything comes from God and his decrees. God has integrated together all His works, without producing any connecting entities. He has subordinated them to one another, without conferring upon them any efficacious qualities" (*OCM XII 166/Dialogues 120*).

the general inclination toward the good. Just like the modifications of extended substances, the real modifications of the soul are continuously created by God.

But the way the CCC argument is employed in the case of souls is also significant in that it rules out *only* the productive causal powers of the mind. The CCC argument does not rule out a different, second power of the soul, the power to suspend or give consent to a particular good, the exercise of which results in the non-real modes of consent or dissent. According to Malebranche, this is also a genuine power, one that underlies our free volitional activity, but, as the previous *Prémotion* passage showed, the possession of such a power is consistent, at least for Malebranche, with an occasionalism toward the productive causal power that produces real modifications. In the following passage, again from the *Prémotion*, Malebranche nicely summarizes the view:

I hold, then, that although the soul, as free and active, is the true cause of its acts, although it is the unique immediate cause of the consent it gives or refuses to give to the physical motives that anticipate and solicit the soul; nevertheless the soul is not the efficacious cause of any real change that happen to it, just as it is not the real cause of what happens in its own body as a consequence of its volitions (*OCM XVI 43*)⁴²

Now we will naturally wonder whether the second, volitional power of consent or its suspension can be a *real* power without bringing about some kind of change in the real modifications of the soul. For it seems natural to think that if consent or suspension of consent to a particular good is a genuine state of mind, and if we are causally responsible for this act, then there will be a real modal difference between the consent to a particular good and the suspension of consent to it. But if there is a real modal difference resulting from how we exercise our volitional power, it seems difficult to deny that we have some productive power, despite Malebranche's denial. Kremer has argued that for Malebranche "a person's coming to consent or ceasing to consent to a particular object is not a real change in the person",⁴³ and I am inclined to think that he was right in attributing this view to Malebranche. We can certainly see why

⁴² This translation is Kremer's. See Kremer, "Malebranche on Human Freedom," 211.

⁴³ Kremer, "Malebranche on Human Freedom," 210–213.

Malebranche might have been motivated to hold such a view, since the claim that the volitional power is a genuine causal power would make the power thick enough to do the job of underpinning our causal responsibility, while the claim that the effects of this power are not real changes of real modifications renders it thin enough for Malebranche to retain his overall occasionalism with regard to souls and their real modifications.⁴⁴

This, of course, is not to say that I agree with Malebranche. The biggest obstacle for me at this point is not being able to see how there is no real change in a person, when this person is exercising genuine powers in opposite ways. Still, as I stated at the beginning of the paper, whether or not Malebranche is ultimately successful in coming up with a viable account of how we can be volitionally active while also maintaining a robust occasionalism about souls is not the central concern of this paper. What I hope to have shown is that there is good reason to think that Malebranche himself had thought that, by endorsing the CCC argument as his main argument for occasionalism, he could overcome the second critical problem facing his previous argument for occasionalism, the NNC argument. The NNC argument has a stipulative, restrictive notion of genuine causation built into it so that no matter how one conceives of our free volitional activity, insofar as our free volitions are fall short of being necessarily efficacious, our souls can't be genuine causes of our sinful acts of will. In contrast, the CCC argument does not in any way

⁴⁴ Another way to raise issues with Malebranche's model here would be to quibble with this understanding of a mind with non-real modes, but I think that debating the merits of Malebranche's philosophical psychology is somewhat besides the point. As long as there are good reasons for holding this view that thinking substances are not exhausted by their "real" modes, reasons that might be grounded in a fundamental aspect of Malebranche's philosophical psychology, then the suggestion does not seem simply *ad hoc*. One way in which Malebranche supports his differentiation of minds from bodies is by his claims that we do not have clear knowledge of the soul, that our inner sensation gives only confused knowledge, and that it is impossible for any human being to understand the nature of freedom. For instance, in the *Prémotion*, Malebranche claims "we cannot explain ourselves on this matter [human freedom] clearly, but we can do so only by metaphor"(OCM XVI 29). Also in the *Réponse à la Dissertation*, "[s]ince I know my soul only by inner sensation ... I say it is not possible [to explain the will and freedom more clearly than I have just done]. If you find that the terms 'rest', 'movement', 'impression', 'consent', 'efficacy', 'power' etc., are obscure and metaphorical, as indeed they are, that is because we do not have a clear idea of the soul" (OCM VII 568). Such statements clearly support the reading that for Malebranche there is a clear asymmetry in our understanding of souls and bodies, which in turn might be due to the very different natures of these substances. Simply put, souls are opaque and only allow limited access, while bodies are fully transparent and allow full access to their nature. For more on Malebranche's claim about our limited knowledge of the nature of the soul, see Schmaltz, *Malebranche's Theory of the Soul*, 233 and Kremer, "Malebranche on Human Freedom," 196.

stipulate a singular criterion of genuine causation. What it does is simply state that insofar as the real modifications of souls and bodies are concerned, God is their unique productive cause. This way of putting the main claim of occasionalism leaves room for another power, unique to souls, which underlies our free volitional activity. In this way, the CCC argument is consistent with a framework that allows a nuanced distinction of different causal powers, a framework the NNC argument in principle cannot permit.

6. Why Not a Similar Move for the NNC argument?

The last pressing question at this point concerns my claim that the NNC argument in principle cannot permit this distinction of causal powers. Is it really the case that Malebranche could not have made a similar move in deploying the NNC argument? We know that Malebranche clearly expresses in the *Search* his commitment to the two views that (1) we act freely and are responsible for our actions, and (2) the NNC applies to souls as well as bodies. So why didn't Malebranche simply respond to his critics by saying that the NNC argument is only applicable to productive causes and that there are non-productive powers of the soul that do not fall under its scope?⁴⁵

In the remaining portions of the paper, I will address this objection to what I have argued as the second reason as behind Malebranche's shift. First of all, we do know Malebranche didn't provide such a response, and the question is why. If such a move was available, why did he rather prefer to omit the NNC argument as early on as the *Elucidations*? Though there is no direct textual evidence, I don't think it is unreasonable to think that there was a good reason behind Malebranche's reluctance to take this path. In my view, Malebranche well appreciated the fact that reducing the scope of the NNC argument in this way would have drastically diminished its dialectical pull.

⁴⁵ I thank Robert Adams for pressing me on this point.

Let's step back for a moment and reconsider the NNC argument without attending to the problems I have discussed. As I have suggested, considered in itself, I think there is something definitely attractive about the reductive analysis of causation that is at the center of the NNC argument, which says that causation just consists in necessary connections. The intuitive pull of this analysis seems to be closely related to why many of our contemporaries have typically found rather convincing the Humean idea that we have no conception of what a causal connection would be, if it is not a necessary connection. Moreover, consider the historical context mentioned earlier. Compared to the traditional myriad of the four Aristotelian causes, all irreducibly distinct, the conception of cause that is presented in the NNC argument is refreshingly simple and to the point. We finally have an alternative to the confusing mishmash of formal, material, efficient, and final causes, one that really seems to pick out what causal relations are.⁴⁶ In other words, if there is anything going for the NNC argument, it is the bold and elegant simplicity of the reductive analysis that all genuine causal relations are just necessary connections. So what happens if Malebranche makes the move suggested earlier, narrowing the scope of the central claim to make room for human volitional activity? What if, after presenting the NNC argument, Malebranche were to have professed that, in fact, things are a little more complicated and, unfortunately, there is more than one type of cause? This would hardly be different from giving with one hand and taking away with the other. In other words, the restriction of the scope of the conception of cause as necessary efficaciousness would just amount to a concession reveal that there are irreducibly different types of causes after all. But then the bold, elegant simplicity of the reductive analysis of causation, the most attractive feature of the NNC argument itself, is lost, and we're back to the picture of distinct types of causes all uncomfortably living under a single roof.

⁴⁶ We are familiar with the overall trend within early modern philosophy to reject formal and final causation as genuine types of causation, with Leibniz perhaps being the sole exception. I am suggesting that Malebranche's NNC argument is another expression of this trend.

Does the CCC argument not face a similar fate, when Malebranche has to concede that God's continuously recreating the world is not the only type of real causal activity? I think not, because the overall argumentative strategy of the CCC argument does not incorporate a reductive analysis of causation in general. The CCC argument, in other words, never starts out with the promise of providing a unified, reductive analysis of what causation itself is. The focus is rather on the way in which divine causation relates to the creation and conservation of the world, and nowhere is there a suggestion about tooling us with an unified conception of causation along the way. Of course, the examination of the mode of divine causal involvement does lead to the conclusion that God is the only productive cause, but this claim doesn't seem to lose its persuasiveness in the face of the revelation that productive causation is not the only type of causation. Rather, it is exactly what Malebranche had wanted in espousing occasionalism and human volitional activity.

Some brief concluding remarks. In this paper, I have tried to argue that the CCC argument has a definite advantage in dealing with two critical problems facing his previous argument for occasionalism, the NNC argument. The NNC argument is not only founded on a stipulative notion of causation unlikely to be accepted by Malebranche's main opponents, but also in deep tension with a framework that distinguishes different types of causal powers, a distinction critical to Malebranche's project of reconciling his occasionalism with his views of free volitional activity. The CCC argument, in contrast, has a dialectical advantage in not presenting an unacceptable conception of causality off the bat. Rather, its core premise, the continuous creation thesis, is one that the main opponents of occasionalism are committed to as well. Moreover, the CCC argument, in avoiding the promise of providing a reductive analysis of causation in general, allows for a delicate distinction of causal powers. Malebranche needs this framework to reconcile his robust occasionalism with his commitment to our free volitional activity, and the CCC argument fits in nicely with this framework by making clear which modifications of the soul are subject to divine creative activity and which aren't. These are the reasons I think Malebranche's argument for occasionalism from the thesis of continuous creation is his most

powerful argument. Given these reasons, it is no wonder why the NNC argument fades away in his later works as the CCC argument emerges as his main argument for occasionalism, or so I have argued.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ The earliest ancestor of this paper is the first chapter of my dissertation “Leibniz on Individual Substances and Causation: An Account of Divine Concurrence” (Yale University, 2001). Subsequent versions of the paper were also presented at an American Philosophical Association Pacific Division Meeting, the Midwest Seminar in Early Modern Philosophy at Miami University, and the Ohio State University. I thank the audiences for their questions and comments. I also thank Robert Adams, Marilyn Adams, Michael Della Rocca, Dennis Des Chene, Joe Levine, David Sanson, Tad Schmaltz, William Taschek and two anonymous referees of the *Journal*. Lastly, I thank the National Humanities Center and the Josephus Daniels Fellowship for supporting my research in writing this paper.