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OXFORD PHILOSOPHICAL CONCEPTS

Efficient Causation

A HISTORY



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CHAPTER SEVEN

Efficient Causation in
Malebranche and Berkeley*Lisa Downing*

In the early modern period, explicit consideration of how causation itself should be understood and characterized is fairly rare, and this despite the fact that questions about the causal structure of the world are being asked with a new urgency and are receiving new answers. Two figures who cannot entirely ignore this question, however, are Nicolas Malebranche and George Berkeley. And this is for an obvious and pressing reason: for both of them it is an important component of their metaphysics that the domain of real causes is severely restricted. More specifically, they both hold that, appearances to the contrary, ordinary physical objects are not efficient causes. Note that in doing so they are not just contravening what we might reasonably take to be common sense (though Berkeley will disagree). They are maintaining that what was becoming a paradigmatic example of efficient causation—body-body causation at impact—is in fact not that at all.

On some prominent recent interpretations of each philosopher, they accomplish this restriction by maintaining that only volitions, or beings with wills, are legitimate *candidates* to be efficient causes. Although these interpretations are well-motivated, it is a central concern of this essay to argue against them. In doing so, we will arrive at a better understanding of how each of their views of causation are and aren't inflected by their metaphysics of mind and body. I will argue that neither Malebranche nor Berkeley rules out corporeal causes by fiat. More specifically, they do not rule out corporeal causes by simply appealing to a notion of efficient causation that is inflected with finality and which therefore allows only volitions to be causes. Other things being equal, this is surely the more charitable interpretation: it ought not to turn out to be a simple category mistake to suppose that bodies (particles, billiard balls) are genuine causes. To assume that it is would be to ignore some of the most significant metaphysical issues raised by the new science, with which both philosophers were actively engaged. In fact, we will see that Malebranche sees impact as a serious challenge (or, at any rate, he is brought to so see it by Fontenelle's critique of occasionalism), and is thoroughly engaged with it, though it turns out to be a persistent trouble spot in his philosophy. Indeed, I will argue that the seventh of the *Dialogues on Metaphysics and Religion* is productively viewed as being *built around* the goal of disproving body-body causation at impact.

Although Berkeley engages less with the question of the status of impact, this is not because impact isn't a *candidate* for causal efficacy, but because he holds that his idealism can make short shrift of any such pretensions on its behalf. Indeed, the more difficult problem for Berkeley's system is to expand the domain restricted by Malebranche so as to allow that finite spirits may be causally efficacious. And the controversial interpretive question is whether Berkeley *rules in* volitional causes by a kind of fiat, declaring that (regular) sequences with volitions as antecedents are causal. Although there is evidence that Berkeley formulates something like this *regularity-plus-volition* view in his notebooks, I argue, contra

Kenneth Winkler,¹ that he does not retain this account in his published works, and that on the whole this is a good thing. Rather, Berkeley's return to a more traditional conception of spirit as substance is accompanied by a return to a more traditional conception of power, which thus requires him to justify its application to finite spirits. However, Berkeley diverges importantly from his predecessors when it comes to his treatment of force or *vis*, a move which reflects his important engagement with the Newtonian science of the early eighteenth-century.²

I. MALEBRANCHE

1.1 *The Volitional/Cognitive Model*

Why might one think that Malebranche restricts causation to the domain of the minded or willed? We begin with an argument that has been receiving considerable attention lately, despite a history of relative neglect. Let's call it the Knowledge Argument.³

For how could we move our arms? To move them, it is necessary to have animal spirits, to send them through certain nerves toward certain muscles in order to inflate and contract them, for it is thus that the arm attached to them is moved. . . . Therefore, men will to move their arms, and only God is able and knows how to move them. . . . There is no man who knows what must be done to move one of his fingers by means of animal spirits. How, then, could men move their arms? (OCM 2:315/LO 449–50)

There are two obvious questions to ask about this argument: (1) What is its intended scope? That is, how "local" is this argument?⁴ And (2)

¹ Winkler 1989, 107.

² An engagement which, as we will see, also helps to explain the absence of special concern with impact.

³ Ott 2008 calls it the epistemic argument; Lee 2008b calls it NK for "no knowledge"; Nadler does not label it in the 1999 paper that deals centrally with it. See also OCM 7:148–51.

⁴ This use of the term is borrowed from Lee 2008a.

why does Malebranche take it to be a good argument? My focus will be on the first, but addressing the second will help us with the first.

The argument as formulated applies against mind-body causation, purporting to show that we could not be the causes of our own bodily movements. Steven Nadler has made a case for the claim that Malebranche may have intended the argument to have a wider scope⁵ and to rule out corporeal causes on the grounds of their lack of knowledge, for Geulinx and some Islamic occasionalists apply the argument more broadly, and one passage from Malebranche's *Conversations Chrétiennes* suggests this reading.⁶

But how could this principle, taken generally, be justified? That is, why suppose that the cause must have knowledge of the effect? Nadler suggests, as backing for this "epistemic condition," the broad thesis that Malebranche might take volitional agency as paradigmatic of causality (1999, 270). Walter Ott has more recently taken a related line, but pushed it harder.⁷ Ott views the knowledge argument as symptomatic of (and rationalized by) a general principle that lies behind most of Malebranche's reasoning about causation. Malebranche, Ott argues, "accepts the scholastic requirement of *esse-ad*" (2008, 181), that is, he holds that a cause must be intrinsically directed at its effect. On Ott's interpretation, Malebranche holds that this *esse-ad* requirement amounts to requiring intentionality, a feature only minds possess (2008, 167). Further, he holds that the only way to satisfy this requirement is via the identity of volitional content with effect.⁸ Ott sums up the import of this requirement as the "cognitive model of causation" (2009, 81).

This controversial and interesting interpretive claim is supposed to be justified by its plausibility in the seventeenth-century context and by the explanatory work it can do. *Esse-ad* is supposed to tie together

⁵ Nadler (1999, 267) characterizes this reading as "tempting" but notes that Malebranche's texts do not strongly support it.

⁶ Nadler 1999, 268; OCM 4:15–16.

⁷ In Ott 2008 and the stimulating and rich Ott 2009.

⁸ See also Ott 2009, 81–82, 97–100.

and rationalize several of Malebranche's arguments, explaining why Malebranche is so quick to suppose that finite things, particularly bodies, could not provide the right sort of connection. I will argue, however, that the "volitional/cognitive model of causation" interpretation can in fact do very little of this explanatory work.⁹

Ott sets up a puzzle concerning Malebranche's notorious No Necessary Connection (NNC) argument,¹⁰ which is the centerpiece of his defense of occasionalism in the *Search after Truth*. In 6.2.3, Malebranche asserts that we can find a necessary connection only between God's (omnipotent) will and its effects, and concludes, on this basis, that only God is a true cause (OCM 2:316/LO 450). Ott rightly asks: why does Malebranche suppose that finite things could not ground necessary connections? The answer, according to Ott, is that it is obvious because it involves a kind of category mistake (2008, 178). This interpretation, however, severely distorts the intended structure and standing of the argument. If Ott were right about the assumptions grounding the argument, then NNC would not be a self-standing argument for occasionalism.¹¹ For Ott's *esse-ad* principle suggests that souls, unlike bodies, are excellent *candidates* to be genuine causes!¹² Thus, the argument would require immediate supplementation in order to secure the conclusion that God is the only true cause. Ott notes that finite minds, "lacking omnipotence, cannot live up to the demands that Malebranche places on causes" (2008, 167, 183; 2009, 81). An omnipotence requirement, however, easily secures Malebranche's occasionalist conclusion, leaving *esse-ad* with no work to do in explaining/supporting the argument.¹³

9 Several of my criticisms here overlap with points made in Lee 2013. Our essays were developed and written entirely independently, however.

10 I take the abbreviation from Lee 2008b and Ott 2008, both of whom cite Nadler 1996 for the phrase.

11 Ott acknowledges this, somewhat obliquely, at 2008, 182. My objection here is related to Nadler's (2011, 185) point contra Ott that NNC and the epistemic argument are distinct arguments.

12 This issue is oddly ignored at Ott 2008, 181 (see also Ott 2009, 97).

13 This point is also made in Lee 2013, 112. Ott notes that the intentionality requirement is necessary but not sufficient (2008, 103). But omnipotence is certainly sufficient. This leaves us with no interpretive evidence here for the necessity of the intentionality requirement.

There is a general difficulty apparent here with Ott's strategy. Ott purports to explain why Malebranche thinks it simply makes no sense to attribute power to creatures (2008, 181). But he can't explain why this should apply generally to creatures, as Malebranche emphasizes in the *Search* (OCM 3:204/LO 658), rather than merely to bodies. This reflects a structural problem with Ott's interpretation if it is proffered as a general key to Malebranche's arguments: *Esse-ad* is asymmetrical in its implications for mind and body, but Malebranche's conclusions about causal inertness are very often symmetrical: both mind and body are to be shown to lack any causal power.

In addition, Ott's principle offers no insight into the Knowledge Argument, as applied to minds. A traditional understanding of the Knowledge Argument has Malebranche assuming, fueled by Cartesian dualism, that what a mind causes it causes by will. And the will cannot be blind; that is, the agent must cognize relevantly: roughly, she must know what she is willing.¹⁴ Thus, where we lack the required knowledge (of nerves and muscles and animal spirits), we cannot cause by will. Ott criticizes this interpretation of the argument, arguing that it cannot explain why this piece of ordinary knowledge isn't sufficient to meet the knowledge requirement: I know that what I want is for my arm to move.

In fact, to understand the epistemic argument we need to invoke the point I have been pushing toward concerning NNC: Malebranche requires that causes and effects be linked by the content of a volition. Now, in the case of chain volitions, the requisite link obviously does not obtain. For what the physiology shows us is that the connection is not *volition-arm moving*, but *volition-brain event x-etc.-arm moving*. And without including the brain event in the content of the volition, that volition cannot be efficacious simply because the p-volition and the alleged effect are not identical. (185)¹⁵

14 For a nice discussion of this doctrine, see Winkler 1989, 207–16.

15 See also Ott 2009, 99.

But here it is the claim about what the physiology tells us about where “the connection” lies that is doing all the work in supporting the argument. If Ott can hold that the content of the volition must include the brain event, then the defender of the traditional interpretation can equally well hold that the agent must know what is required to be willed, namely the brain event.¹⁶ So we’ve been given here no reason to prefer Ott’s *esse-ad* interpretation to the traditional one.

Further, Ott’s stress on *esse-ad* here threatens to leave Malebranche without an argument against mind-mind causation. That is, it would seem that when I will to imagine a unicorn, I can get the connection between volitional content and world that, according to Ott’s interpretation, is needed for causation.¹⁷ Here again we can find a general moral to draw: The directedness being invoked as *esse-ad* is some sort of aboutness. But when I will to imagine a unicorn, although there is (arguably) an appropriate aboutness, we don’t have a causal connection, according to Malebranche, nor is it clear that we are any closer to having a causal connection.

There is, admittedly, some remaining work that Ott’s thesis does seem suited to do. A better motivation for the thesis is its ability to explain Malebranche’s peculiar “man of my armchair” argument:

Well, suppose then that this chair can move itself. In what direction will it go, with what speed, and when will it decide to move itself? Give it then an intelligence as well, and a will capable of determining itself. In other words, create a human being out of your armchair. Otherwise this power of self-motion will be useless to it. (OCM 12:155 / SJ 110–111)

¹⁶ That is, Ott’s claim that the content of the volition must include the brain event is no better supported than the traditional claim that the agent must know the brain event. Ott’s claim can be challenged by asking: Why isn’t it enough that the content includes the movement? (Just as the traditional claim can be challenged by asking: Why isn’t it enough that I know that I want my arm to move?) The crucial and controversial assumption that both interpretations are making is that the mind would have to cause the first item in the causal sequence on the side of body.

¹⁷ A similar point is made in Lee 2013, 114.

Ott’s interpretation here seems attractive, in that rather than supposing that Malebranche is inappropriately assessing bodies with a mentalistic paradigm, he has Malebranche instead relying on a deeper assumption, one which was natural in the scholastic context. I submit, however, that this interpretive strategy leaves Ott with a dilemma. Either (1) *esse-ad* is itself a mentalistic paradigm, in which case employing it without real argument simply begs the question against body-body causation,¹⁸ or, (2), if not, that is, if the requirement is simply of a sort of topic-neutral directedness that wills happen to exemplify, then *argument* would be required to show that bodies could not have such directed powers. But no such argument is forthcoming from Malebranche. This is to suggest a way in which the *esse-ad* interpretation is uncharitable.

But perhaps the most serious problem with *esse-ad* is a plain textual one: Malebranche never invokes the principle, nor argues for it, even in the one context where it would be the most directly relevant, namely, in arguing that bodies are not genuine causes at impact, an issue on which he was directly challenged by Fontenelle.¹⁹ I turn back now to the question of what Malebranche *does* say, during the course of which we will return to the armchair argument.

1.2 Malebranche on Body-Body Causation and Impact

What does Malebranche have to say about impact? In the *Search after Truth*, he often seems to be skirting the question. This is especially true in 6.2.3, his official presentation of his occasionalism in the book. As already noted, Malebranche’s focus in the *Search* is on his NNC principle. Before articulating that principle, he provides a remarkably quick setup:

It is clear that no body, large or small, has the power to move itself. A mountain, a house, a rock, a grain of sand, in short, the tiniest

¹⁸ That (1) is what is true of the interpretation, rather than (2), is suggested by the label “the cognitive model of causation.”

¹⁹ As Ott (2008, 182) acknowledges.

or largest body conceivable does not have the power to move itself. . . . Thus, since the idea we have of all bodies makes us aware that they cannot move themselves, it must be concluded that it is minds which move them.^a But when we examine our idea of all finite minds, we do not see any necessary connection between their will and the motion of any body whatsoever.

^aSee the seventh *Dialogue on Metaphysics* and the fifth of the *Christian Meditations*. (OCM 2:312–13/LO 448)

Malebranche trades here, as he often does, on the uncontroversial point that a Cartesian body cannot set itself into motion, while ignoring the more difficult and pressing question of whether such bodies can move each other. He next observes that finite minds lack any necessary connection to bodily motion. When we turn to God, we realize that here and only here can we find the desired connection. Having drawn the occasionalist conclusion from NNC, Malebranche then amplifies it, and *applies* it briefly to the case of impact:

We must therefore say that only His will can move bodies if we wish to state things as we conceive them and not as we sense them. The motor force of bodies is therefore not in the bodies that are moved, for this motor force is nothing other than the will of God. Thus, bodies have no action; and when a body that is moved collides with and moves another, it communicates to it nothing of its own, for it does not itself have the force it communicates to it. (OCM 2:313/LO 448)

Finally, he calls on the knowledge argument in order to forestall any backsliding in favor of causation by human minds.

We can gather from this section (and other places in the *Search*) that Malebranche has a specific model for what would be required for one body to efficiently cause the motion of another via impact. The first body (A) would have to be the bearer of its moving force, and it would

have to transfer that moving force to body B at impact. This leaves us with two questions: (1) What is moving force? (2) How do we know that bodies can't possess that moving force?

As for (1), a body's moving force, for Malebranche, is the force/cause responsible for its continued motion. That moving force, Malebranche consistently holds throughout all his works, is God's will. But how do we know that bodies themselves can't possess that moving force? In the argument above from 6.2.3, the official answer is that we have already concluded, from NNC, that God is the only true cause. (One might think that Malebranche is tempted to answer (2) via the ambiguous "no body has the power to move itself." This would be unfortunate, however, since, as just observed, only the principle—no body has the power to set itself into motion—is uncontroversial, but this doesn't suffice to answer (2).)

At this point we can identify at least two deep problems with Malebranche's treatment here, problems which were pressed by Malebranche's contemporaries. The first was powerfully made by Fontenelle, in his *Doutes sur le système physique des Causes occasionnelles*, published anonymously in Rotterdam in 1686. The core of Fontenelle's case is an attempt to use Malebranche's NNC argument against him by locating a necessary connection between impact and motion. He argues that given the Cartesian premise, affirmed by Malebranche, that impenetrability belongs to the nature of body as a consequence of extension, Malebranche must admit a necessary connection between impact and change of motion. Fontenelle constructs a thought experiment in which two bodies in motion encounter each other *before* God has made his decree about what he will do on the occasion of impact, and demands: What then will happen, since the impenetrable bodies cannot simply continue in their motion?²⁰ Fontenelle's challenge, then, asserts that the nature of bodies can ground a necessary connection between impact and change of motion. Thus, if causation is necessary

²⁰ See OCF 1:619.

connection, Malebranche must admit that bodies could be true causes via impact.

A different and more basic worry might be raised by questioning Malebranche's moving force model: Why suppose that there is such a thing as moving force? That is, Malebranche's conception of moving force seems to presuppose a misunderstanding or rejection of inertia. That this is so seems undeniable from 6.2.9:

I conceive only that bodies in motion have a motor force [*force mouvante*], and that those at rest have no force for their state of rest, because the relation of moving bodies to those around them is always changing; and therefore there has to be a continuous force producing these continuous changes, for in effect it is these changes which cause everything new that happens in nature. But there need be no force to make nothing happen. (OCM 2:431 / LO 517)

Malebranche argues here that motion, unlike rest, is a continuous change which requires a continuous force or cause. This goes against a fully modern understanding of motion as an inertial state. But of course this understanding was an achievement and, as is well-known, Newton himself could not have agreed with a characterization of inertial motion as motion under no forces, using, as he does, the notion of a *vis insita* of matter.²¹ It is instructive to observe here Samuel Clarke's Newtonian presentation of Malebranche's error as he understands it:

In reality, the Force or Tendency by which Bodies, whether in Motion or at Rest, continue in the State in which they once are; is the mere Inertia of Matter; and therefore if it could be, that God should forbear willing at all; a Body that is once in Motion, would move on for ever, as well as a Body at Rest, continue at Rest for ever. And the Effect of this Inertia of Matter is this, that all Bodies resist in proportion to

²¹ Newton 1999, 404.

their Density, that is, to the Quantity of Matter contained in them; and every Body striking upon another with a given Velocity, whether that other be greater or less, moves it in proportion to the Density or Quantity of Matter in the one, to the Density or Quantity of Matter in the other. (Rohault 1987, 1:41-42)

Clarke holds that the mere inertia of matter grounds both its continued motion and causal interaction at impact.²²

Malebranche became aware of the first problem, since Fontenelle published it and Bayle publicized it. It's not clear that he is ever aware of the second. Nevertheless, in the end, Malebranche offers a deep metaphysical answer to both problems that serves to justify not just his claim that bodies cannot possess motive force but also his more general claim that only God can cause the motions of bodies.²³ Malebranche's initial grapplings with Fontenelle's problem can be found in his anonymous *Réflexions*²⁴ (attributed to Malebranche by the editors of his *Œuvres Complètes*). I will argue, however, that his most considered response is in Dialogue VII of his *Dialogues on Metaphysics and Religion*, where, unlike in the *Search*, he highlights the problem of impact, as well as discussing Fontenelle's scenario.²⁵

The core of his solution can in fact be discerned in the *Search*, in an analysis of motion he gives in more than one place: God "puts [a body] in motion by preserving it successively in several places through His simple will" (OCM 2:428/LO 515), thus, the motive force of bodies is always God's will.²⁶ In the *Méditations chrétiennes et métaphysiques*

²² Further, it is clear from Clarke 1738, 2:697, that Clarke holds that inertia is a power that derives from matter's passive nature.

²³ This second claim is more general in that it doesn't presuppose the motive force model.

²⁴ *Réflexions sur un livre imprimé à Rotterdam 1686, intitulé, Doutes sur le système des causes occasionnelles*, OCM 17-1.

²⁵ There are good reasons to privilege Malebranche's occasionalist arguments in the *Dialogues*: he footnotes Dialogue VII in both the sixth edition of the *Search* (OCM 2:312-13/LO 448) and in the *Méditations chrétiennes* (third and fourth editions, OCM 10:49). And, of course, unlike the *Réflexions*, he attaches his name to it.

²⁶ See also OCM 3:208/LO 660.

(1683), this is broadened into a recognizable version of his well-known argument from continued creation, which has as its consequence that it is impossible for either bodies or minds to move bodies. In the anonymous response to Fontenelle, Malebranche gestures at continued creation, rejecting Fontenelle's supposition that bodies could be in motion before the decree of God (OCM 17-1:580) and reminding him that everything is a continual effect of God (OCM 17-1:580).²⁷ But the argument is presented in its full force only in Dialogue VII. And in Dialogue VII the argument is targeted directly against impact; indeed, it is easy to see the dialogue as being built around the task of replying definitively to Fontenelle.

Malebranche begins by reinforcing the reader's understanding of Cartesian body: It is extension alone, and so its properties "can consist only in relations of distance" (OCM 12:150/SJ 106). This is first used as a basis to argue against body-mind causation, via the claim that a power to act on a mind could not be a relation of distance. Next we get the now-familiar armchair argument. Here again, Malebranche is making a point that few would challenge: bodies can't initiate new motion, can't put themselves into motion. He drives home this thesis with the suggestion that creating new motion, because we can see no other way for a particular result to be determined, would seem to require attributing something like choice to the body, which would then require will and intellect. Following this review, Malebranche has his character Aristes pointedly raise the very issue that earlier treatments sought to finesse: "Remember, Theodore, you have to prove there is a contradiction in bodies acting upon one another."²⁸ Theodore (Malebranche's spokesperson) immediately undertakes to demonstrate this very point, which leads straight to an extended presentation of the argument from continuous creation.

²⁷ Thus I disagree with Nadler's assessment of Malebranche's response as missing Fontenelle's point (and here I agree with Schmaltz 2008b). See Nadler 2000, 119. I hold, on the contrary, that Malebranche is pointing to the right factor (continued dependence on God) in the *Reflexions*, and that he fills out this line of argument effectively in Dialogue VII.

²⁸ OCM 12:155/SJ 111, my emphasis.

There are two main parts to the argument: The first is to argue that the correct conception of the continued dependence of the created world on God establishes that that creation does not cease. Conservation/preservation is simply a continuous creation:

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. . . . [I]n God creation and conservation are but a single volition which, consequently, is necessarily followed by the same effects. (OCM 12:156–57/SJ 112)

Malebranche bolsters this account by arguing that the alternative would make God incapable of annihilating the world, since it would require him to positively will nothingness (rather than simply ceasing to will existence), which is incompatible with his attributes.

The second half of the argument draws out the consequences for finite causation in general and body-body causation in particular:

Creation does not pass, because the conservation of creatures is—on God's part—simply a continuous creation, a single volition subsisting and operating continuously. Now, God can neither conceive nor consequently will that a body exist nowhere, nor that it does not stand in certain relations of distance to other bodies. Thus, God cannot will that this armchair exist, and by this volition create or conserve it, without situating it here, there, or elsewhere. It is a contradiction, therefore, for one body to be able to move another. Further, I claim, it is a contradiction for you to be able to move your armchair. Nor is this enough; it is a contradiction for all the angels and demons together to be able to move a wisp of straw. The proof of this is clear. For no power, however great it be imagined, can surpass or even equal the power of God. (OCM 12:160/SJ 115–16)

It is clear that Malebranche intends this as a general argument that nothing other than God himself can be an efficient cause of the motion of a body. If all the angels and demons together cannot move the second billiard ball, then the first billiard ball certainly cannot.

Nevertheless, Malebranche goes on to directly engage with Fontenelle's argument, and, in particular, to address the question of necessary connection. The issue of necessity is raised twice:

[O]ne body cannot move another without communicating its motive force to it. But the motive force of a moving body is simply the will of the creator who conserves it successively in different places. It is not a quality that belongs to this body. Nothing belongs to it except its modalities, and modalities are inseparable from substances. Therefore bodies cannot move each other, and their encounter or impact is only an occasional cause of the distribution of their motion. For as they are impenetrable, it is a kind of necessity that God, whom I suppose to act always with the same efficacy or quantity of motive force, as it were imparts to the body so struck the motive force of the body which strikes it, in proportion to the magnitude of the impact but according to the law that, when two bodies collide with each other, the stronger one or the one transported with the greater force must overcome the weaker one, and make it rebound without receiving anything from it. (OCM 12:162/SJ 117)

And a few paragraphs later, Theotimus raises Fontenelle's scenario, on which body A moves into contact with body B, before God has established the laws of the communication of motion:

Aristes: Wait a minute, Theotimus. What are you proving? Given that bodies are impenetrable, it is necessary that at the moment of impact, God determines His choice in the matter you have confronted me with. That is all; I failed to note this. You do not prove at all that a moving body can, by means of something belonging to

it, move another body which it encounters. If God had not yet established the laws of the communication of motion, the nature of bodies—their impenetrability—would oblige Him to make such laws as He deemed appropriate. . . . But it is clear that impenetrability has no efficacy of its own, and that it can merely provide God, who treats things according to their nature, with an occasion to diversify His action without altering anything in His conduct. (OCM 12:164/SJ 118–19)

A correct understanding of the metaphysics of the created material world is supposed to make clear to us that *even if* there is a necessary connection between impact and change of motion, and even though that necessary connection can be traced back to the impenetrable nature of bodies, bodies still can't be efficient causes of each other's motion. And that is because each body, in being conserved by God, is continually created by God, which requires, as at the initial creation, that the body be put in a particular place. But of course, if we specify the locations of bodies over time, we have specified their motions as well. If, following Fontenelle's scenario, God had somehow brought bodies into existence and set them in motion before determining the laws of impact,²⁹ then, as Malebranche states, all that follows is that he would have to make a decision about what happens at impact.³⁰

1.3 Implications of Continuous Creation

Like most commentators,³¹ I think that Conservation is but Continuous Creation (CCC)³² is a powerful argument for occasionalism, if

²⁹ Surely this could not happen, given that God does not change.

³⁰ Thus, it doesn't matter to *this* argument whether or not divine choice is involved in determining the laws of impact. Even if impenetrability somehow dictated exactly one outcome, it would still be the case that it is God giving location to every body at every time.

³¹ See Nadler 2000, 126; Pyle 2003, 111; Lee 2008a, 553. But see Winkler 2011, 300–302, and McDonough 2007, 50–53, among others, for arguments that the occasionalist conclusion need not follow from the version of continuous creation actually held by Leibniz.

³² I borrow this abbreviation from Lee 2008b.

one accepts the strong premise that conservation is not distinct from creation. And this premise secured wide acceptance, at least verbally, in Malebranche's time.³³ Further, I have argued that it is an effective response to Fontenelle. What might we conclude from the fact that this is the core of Malebranche's response in the *Dialogues*?

First, Malebranche declines to extend or elaborate his only candidate for an *analysis* of efficient causation, that is, necessary connection. He admits that "a kind of necessity" obtains in impact, but neglects to say which kind, or to explicitly distinguish it from the necessity that obtains between God's will and its effects. Rather, he trumps such considerations by bringing in the CCC.

If, despite Malebranche's reticence, we seek to extend an analysis on his behalf, we might conclude that Malebranche holds that a necessary connection is necessary for a relation of efficient causation to obtain, but not sufficient. As for what further is required, Malebranche gives us little guidance, apart from this example: It is God who is efficacious here in impact, God who is doing the work of causing motion; impenetrability acts only as a constraint on his operation. Demoting necessary connection to a necessary condition, however, does not obviously threaten anything that Malebranche actually cares about, as long as he can retain the occasionalist result that God is the only true cause. He does not, after all, actually *claim* to give an analysis of efficient causation.

Sukjae Lee (2008a) has suggested that there is a transition in Malebranche between an earlier inclination to rely on the NNC argument, and a later tendency to emphasize the CCC argument. I want to agree with him, but to argue that there exists an explanation for this that is considerably simpler than the one he offers.³⁴ Malebranche holds that Fontenelle's case at least threatens to provide a counterexample to the claim that we can see a necessary connection only between God's will

33 Both Descartes and Leibniz affirm it, though Samuel Clarke explicitly dissents from it in his correspondence with Leibniz. See Descartes' *Principles* II.42 (AT 8:66), Leibniz's *Theodicy* sects. 385–86 (Leibniz 1985, 355–56), and Clarke's fourth reply to Leibniz, section 30 (Clarke 1738, 4:627).

34 Of course, there could be more than one explanation for this phenomenon.

and its effects. His response is not (primarily) to develop his account of necessity, or of the causal relation, but to wheel out the CCC.

The strength and effectiveness of the CCC does, however, raise concerns for two things that Malebranche clearly does care about: freedom and the status of created beings. The best way to raise the issue of freedom is to raise a more basic question: What is the scope of application of the CCC? It is noteworthy that its official intended application is always to the motion of bodies: nothing other than God can move bodies. Nevertheless, it seems obvious that the argument must be applicable to minds as well.³⁵ For the motivating intuition behind the argument, surely, is that creation must be fully determinate: in the case of bodies this requires (at least) that their size, shape, and location be settled; in the case of minds it must require that all the modes of these substances be specified.

Malebranche explicitly considers this extension of the CCC in a long passage added to the 1st Elucidation only in the sixth edition (1712) of the *Search*:³⁶

The most common and apparently strongest objection that can be made against freedom is the following. Conservation, you will say, is nothing but continued creation on God's part, i.e., the same constantly efficacious will. Thus, when we speak or walk, when we think and will, God makes us such as we are—He creates us speaking, walking, thinking, willing. If a man perceives and tastes an object, God creates him perceiving and tasting this object; and if he consents to the impulse that is excited in him, if he rests with this object, God creates him stopping at and resting with this object. God makes him such as he is at that moment. He creates in him his consent in which he has no greater role than do bodies in the motion that moves them.

35 As Pyle holds (2003, 111) and Nadler argues (1998, 222).

36 That the passage is a late addition, and thus surely responds to reactions to Malebranche's response to Fontenelle, is little remarked on. Nadler (2000), Schmaltz (2008b), and Lee (2008a, 554) do not discuss it.

I answer that God creates us, speaking, walking, thinking, willing, that He causes in us our perceptions, sensations, impulses, in a word, that He causes in us all that is real or material, as I have explained above. But I deny that God creates us as consenting precisely insofar as we are consenting or resting with a particular good, whether true or apparent. God merely creates us as always being able to stop at such a good, whether true or apparent. (OCM 3:30–31/LO 554)

Malebranche responds to the concern that the CCC threatens freedom by maintaining that God creates us not *stopping* at a particular good, but rather *able* to stop at it. However, this seems to create space for Fontenelle to object that God, then, should be able to create bodies not stopping or moving, but, rather, *able* to stop or move, depending on the actions of other bodies. And, indeed, this seems to be just what Fontenelle wants to maintain when he writes that creatures cannot change a determined action of God but could change an “undetermined, indifferent” one, “such as that by which he conserves so much motion in each particular body” (OCF 1:636).

The different treatments accorded to the motion of bodies and the consent of mind are supposed, of course, to hinge on the different statuses of motion and consent—consent is not a mode, is nothing physical or real, whereas motion is fixed by a sequence of locations, which creation cannot leave undetermined. It is difficult, however, not to worry that there is something stipulative in all of this.

A second concern about the implications of the CCC is harder to formulate, but perhaps deeper. Given that bodies are continually generated by God, in a way that deprives them of any causal efficacy, do they qualify as substances with natures at all? We could pin this worry down further by asking about the status of impenetrability for Malebranche: Andrew Pyle (2003, 127) has suggested that on the occasionalist account, “What it is for bodies to be impenetrable is simply for God to have established certain rules for His continuous re-creation of

bodies and the re-distribution of the modes of local motion.” This does not seem to have been Malebranche’s actual view, however, as Tad Schmaltz (2008b, 306) has observed. Rather, Malebranche holds, as Descartes did, that impenetrability follows from the extended nature of bodies. It is unclear, however, how to make sense of this claim in the context of the CCC, where the physical world is continually and wholly dependent on God’s causal power, and, in particular, all facts about position and motion are fixed by him. For a body to be impenetrable by nature is for something about *it* to prevent other bodies from spatially overlapping with it: surely this is to attribute an efficient causal power to the body.³⁷ Since we cannot be doing that on Malebranche’s considered view, it would seem that Pyle’s account of impenetrability is the best available to Malebranche.³⁸

I have argued (all too briefly) for the following theses: Malebranche does not argue for occasionalism by presupposing that causation requires volition or an intentional connection between cause and effect. On the contrary, he engages directly with the question of the causal status of impact. Body-body causation at impact is not a category mistake, but rather something that can be definitively ruled out only by consideration of God’s role as continual generator of the physical world. The metaphysics of the CCC establishes occasionalism. It also supports Malebranche’s view that the moving force of bodies is always the will of God, since there is always a cause of any body’s motion, and that cause is God. However, this same metaphysics creates tensions for

37 While it is true to say that Malebranche views it as an eternal truth that whatever is extended is impenetrable, this by itself does not suffice to solve the problem.

38 Though I argue above that CCC looks like an effective way to establish the causal impotence of bodies, even if they are impenetrable in a way that grounds necessary connections. What this suggests is that Malebranche could allow that bodies, *qua* impenetrable, have causal powers which are never actualized. This would be to say that there is something about each body which would prevent other bodies from overlapping with it, if, *per impossibile*, it were left to its own devices, rather than being continuously created. It would remain true, though, that impenetrability is never efficacious, as things are. I don’t think this suggestion eliminates all tensions, however, as (1) it does not sound like a position that Malebranche would be happy with, and (2) there is the “*per impossibile*” above to be reckoned with. Thanks to Walter Ott for provoking me to consider this issue further.

Malebranche that are clear to his contemporaries: difficulties allowing scope for freedom and genuine substancehood.³⁹

1.4 Causation, Law, and Force

One more thread should briefly be taken up here, because of its importance to post-Cartesian developments, including Berkeley and Hume. As is well known, Malebranche seeks to reconcile the apparent conflict between occasionalism and a straightforward view of the implications of natural philosophy or science.

God can absolutely do all He pleases without finding dispositions in the subjects on which He acts. But He cannot do so without a miracle, or by natural ways, i.e., according to the general laws of the communication of motion He has established, and according to which He almost always acts. God does not multiply his volitions without reason; He always acts through the simplest ways, and this is why he uses the collision of bodies to move them, not because their impact is absolutely necessary for their motion, as our senses tell us, but because with impact as the occasion for the communication of motion, very few natural laws are needed to produce all the admirable effects we see. (OCM 3:214–15/LO 663)

Thus, Malebranche highlights the importance to science of regularity or law. As we know already, however, this does not affect his notion of efficient causation, which includes necessary connection and applies only to God's will. Further, causal notions such as power or *vis* receive the same treatment—they find application only in God. As we have seen, this extends to notions that might seem to belong to physics, such as a body's "moving force," which gets glossed as the cause of a body's motion, which turns out again to be God or God's will. But the situation is more complex when we come to Berkeley.

³⁹ As Pyle (2003, 126) observes, Leibniz is an acute critic of Malebranche's difficulties in allowing for created substances.

2. BERKELEY

2.1 The Regularity-Plus-Volition Interpretation

Malebranche, of course, looms large among Berkeley's influences, as has been noticed by Berkeley's readers, both early and late.⁴⁰ This is especially evident in his notebooks,⁴¹ not just in Berkeley's explicit attempt to distance himself from Malebranche by declaring that "we move our Legs our selves" (PC 548), but also in his use of the key notion of "occasion":

S What means Cause as distinguish'd from Occasion? nothing but a Being wch wills wn the Effect follows the volition. Those things that happen from without we are not the Cause of therefore there is some other Cause of them i.e. there is a being that wills these perceptions in us. (PC 499)

An occasion, as we know from Malebranche, is the first item in a sequence, which provides a sort of cue for God, acting according to general laws, to produce (i.e., efficiently cause) the second item. For Malebranche, this first item is not a true cause, but merely an "occasional cause." Here Berkeley seems to be suggesting, *contra* Malebranche, that the word "cause" just *means* an occasion which is or involves a being with a will.

That Berkeley is here articulating something like an *account* of causation, rather than, say, just making skeptical observations about how we use the word "cause," is suggested by 699, where he seems to give an (at least partial) account of power:

S There is a difference betwixt Power & Volition. There may be volition without Power. But there can be no Power without Volition. Power implyeth volition & at the same time a Connotation of the Effects following the Volition. (PC 699)

⁴⁰ So much so that some of Berkeley's early readers dismissed him as a "*Malbranchiste de bonne foi*" (Bracken 1959, 17). Classic treatments here include Luce 1934 and McCracken 1983.

⁴¹ Berkeley's notebooks, styled by Luce and Jessop as the "Philosophical Commentaries," were generated in 1707–08 and represent a fascinating record of his early philosophical development, as well as his responses to some of his predecessors and contemporaries.

And this account of power appears to be a revision of 461, wherein power is equated with the relation between cause and effect, with the latter tied to sequences begun by volition *or* by impulse.

+ The simple idea call'd Power seems obscure or rather none at all, but onely the relation 'twixt cause & Effect. Wn I ask whether A can move B if A be an intelligent thing. I mean no more than whether the volition of A that B move be attended with the motion of B, if A be senseless whether the impulse of A against B be follow'd by ye motion of B. (PC 461)

Kenneth Winkler⁴² takes 499 and 699 in their contexts and diagnoses in them an account of causation that we might call "regularity plus volition":

an event will count as a cause if and only if (a) it is followed by another event (its effect); (b) events of the first type are regularly followed by events of the second type; and (c) the first event is a volition. (Winkler 1989, 109–10)⁴³

The notebook passages do suggest, I agree, that Berkeley is trying out a deflationary account of causation/power, based on Malebranche's notion of occasional causation, which includes elements (a) and (c). Condition (b), as Winkler admits, is not obvious from the notebooks. He justifies it (190) with the observation that in the published works, Berkeley clearly holds that regularity is crucial to our ordinary judgments about cause and effect.⁴⁴

42 In the "Cause and effect" chapter of the terrific and influential Winkler 1989. See also Winkler 1985.

43 See Winkler (1989, 108) for a judicious treatment of Berkeley's use of both thing-causes and event-causes (an ambiguity that is typical of the period).

44 Note, however, these ordinary judgments are, according to Berkeley, *mistaken* judgments (PHK 32). A somewhat better support for (b), I suggest, is the fact that the notion of occasion for Malebranche is thoroughly bound up with regularity, since God's attributes dictate that he works in general ways, according to general laws (e.g., OCM 12:160–61/SJ 116).

The most controversial question here is whether Berkeley adopts this regularity-plus-volition view of causation and retains it in his published works. Winkler holds that the answer is "yes", and motivates his interpretation in part by its being more attractive, more philosophically charitable than a traditional interpretation of Berkeley. This traditional interpretation of Berkeley, which, as Winkler (1989, 106–7) points out, can be found prominently in J.S. Mill, portrays him as a kind of halfway house to Hume, holding that our sensory or *outer* experience reveals no necessary connections but supposing that our *inner* experience reveals something more. (Hume, according to this narrative, then achieves the further insight that Berkeley missed—that inner experience reveals only sequence, just like outer experience.) On Winkler's interpretation (1989, 112), however, Berkeley is not missing or denying the Humean insight.

Winkler's interpretation also fits with and justifies the way in which Berkeley, in his central discussion of causal power in PHK 28, seems to suggest that causal activity can just be *read off* of our experience of certain kinds of sequences:

I find I can excite ideas in my mind at pleasure, and vary and shift the scene as oft as I think fit. It is no more than willing, and straight-way this or that idea arises in my fancy: and by the same power it is obliterated, and makes way for another. This making and unmaking of ideas doth very properly denominate the mind active. Thus much is certain, and grounded on experience: but when we talk of unthinking agents, or of exciting ideas exclusive of volition, we only amuse our selves with words. (PHK 28)

That is, it looks like Berkeley here is merely reporting that we *find* that appropriate ideas of imagination *always follow* volitions, and he wants to restrict activity to the volitional, which fits with the regularity-plus-volition view.

Another apparent virtue of the regularity-plus-volition interpretation is that it promises to explain and justify Berkeley's notorious contention

that we move our limbs ourselves. The difficulty for this Berkeleyan doctrine, as many scholars have pointed out, is that, given Berkeley's metaphysical views, my arm's moving can only consist in a collection of sensory ideas, which would have to be caused in me *by God*, like all sensory ideas (PHK 29, 30, 34). The regularity-plus-volition interpretation, however, seems to readily allow that my will can be a cause of my arm's moving.

The regularity-plus-volition interpretation thus has a significant textual basis and motivation. As an interpretation of Berkeley's mature views, however, its defects outweigh its advantages. To begin with, further reflection on the question of my power over my own body shows that the interpretation cannot evade the generalized problem here, which is how to reconcile the causal claim about me and *my will* with *God's* causal role. Presumably, God has a relevant volition which is also followed by a relevant idea/effect (and his volition-type is regularly followed by that idea-type). Which volition is the cause of this effect? This looks like a problematic sort of overdetermination. And this point in turn helps to highlight the deeper problem here—no subtle response can be given to this problem (along the lines, say, of concurrentism), assuming that the interpretation proposes that regularity-plus is Berkeley's analysis of causation.⁴⁵ For if this is Berkeley's analysis of causation, as seems to be suggested in the notebooks, *God's* power also can consist only in this sort of regularity-plus-volition. This is a profoundly unfortunate result for Berkeley, as it would have been for Malebranche.

A related, quite general, problem with regularity-plus-volition is that it is too successful in making the movements of my body voluntary. For that result threatens to dislodge my body from the real world and reclassify it as chimerical:

⁴⁵ Winkler, however, officially offers regularity-plus-volition as Berkeley's account of what it is to be a finite cause (112). This neglects two crucial facts, however. (1) The only textual evidence in favor of regularity-plus is evidence for it as a general account of causation, not as specific to finite as opposed to infinite causes. (2) Berkeley must hold that our grasp of God's causal power derives from our grasp of our own causal power, as he holds generally that "all the notion I have of god, is obtained by reflecting on my own soul heightening its powers and removing its imperfections" (3D 231, see also PHK 140, 3D 231–33). Thus, this restriction to the finite cannot be justified.

The ideas imprinted on the senses by the Author of Nature are called *real things*: and those excited in the imagination being less regular, vivid and constant, are more properly termed *ideas*, or *images of things*, which they copy and represent. But then our sensations, be they never so vivid and distinct, are nevertheless *ideas*, that is, they exist in the mind, or are perceived by it, as truly as the ideas of its own framing. The ideas of sense are allowed to have more reality in them, that is, to be more strong, orderly, and coherent than the creatures of the mind; but this is no argument that they exist without the mind. They are also less dependent on the spirit, or thinking substance which perceives them, in that they are excited by the will of another and more powerful spirit. . . . (PHK 33)

As Sukjae Lee nicely argues (2012, 548), it is clear that involuntariness is a *necessary* condition for reality, according to Berkeley's canonical account of the distinction between the real and the chimerical (PHK 29, 33, 34). If the motion of my arm is an idea efficiently caused directly by me, rather than by God, then it will be classed with ideas of imagination as chimerical, rather than as part of the sensory, real, world.

A further philosophical problem is that requirement (c), that is, the requirement that causes be volitions, seems to be arbitrary.⁴⁶ Winkler is well aware of this problem, and addresses it by suggesting that Berkeley held that volitions, because they give *ends*, confer intelligibility and are thus qualified to be causes. (And here we should be reminded of the "esse-ad" interpretation of Malebranche and its motivations.) We ought not, however, to be satisfied by this defense against the arbitrariness objection, for it, arguably, has Berkeley *conflating* efficient causation with final causation. Or, to put the point more charitably, it has Berkeley assuming, without defense or notice (and in the eighteenth century) that efficient causation requires teleology. A further difficulty

⁴⁶ Moreover, there is evidence that this was salient to Berkeley: 461 allows for bodily causes. After restricting causes to volitions in 499 and 699, Berkeley in 850 warns against the hazards of calling one idea the cause of another that regularly follows it.

with the defense is that Berkeley in fact holds that regularity in general confers intelligibility, as is clear from PHK 104-105. So if intelligible connection is all that is required, billiard balls in motion could be efficient causes.⁴⁷

And there are further *interpretive* difficulties with regularity-plus-volition. Berkeley gives an extended, centrally placed argument that bodies, since they are ideas, are inactive, and thus cannot cause our ideas:

All our ideas, sensations, or the things which we perceive, by whatsoever names they may be distinguished, are visibly inactive, there is nothing of power or agency included in them. So that one idea or object of thought cannot produce, or make any alteration in another. To be satisfied of the truth of this, there is nothing else requisite but a bare observation of our ideas. For since they and every part of them exist only in the mind, it follows that there is nothing in them but what is perceived. But whoever shall attend to his ideas, whether of sense or reflexion, will not perceive in them any power or activity; there is therefore no such thing contained in them. A little attention will discover to us that the very being of an idea implies passiveness and inertness in it, insomuch that it is impossible for an idea to do any thing, or, strictly speaking, to be the cause of any thing: neither can it be the resemblance or pattern of any active being, as is evident from *Sect.* 8. Whence it plainly follows that extension, figure and motion, cannot be the cause of our sensations. To say therefore, that these are the effects of powers resulting from the configuration, number, motion, and size of corpuscles, must certainly be false. (PHK 25)

But of course, such a proof is completely unnecessary on the regularity-plus-volition view, since an idea is just the wrong category of thing to be a cause. Worse, the argument makes no sense on that interpretation,

⁴⁷ Winkler could, of course, respond by distinguishing between *kinds* of intelligibility.

since there is nothing for “active” to mean other than “is a volition of a type regularly followed by a particular result”.⁴⁸ Nor is this a unique line of argument in Berkeley’s corpus.⁴⁹ In *De Motu* (22, 29), Berkeley argues that the sensed qualities of bodies are passive, that is, not efficient causes.⁵⁰ But again, this establishes that being active is not, for Berkeley, just *equivalent* to being or having an appropriate volition, for if that were true, no argument would be necessary.

2.2 Berkeley’s Mature View and Malebranche

If we take this as sufficient reason to abandon the volition-plus-regularity interpretation, as I think we should, this of course leaves us with the question of what to say about PHK 25, PHK 28, and Berkeley’s considered view of causal activity. In PHK 25 Berkeley argues that because our ideas are ideal, they can have no qualities that they are not perceived to have;⁵¹ they are not perceived to be active, therefore they are not active. Note that this argument does not apply to spirits on Berkeley considered view of spirits as substances. Thus, the possibility

⁴⁸ Winkler sees that PHK 25 establishes that regularity-plus-volition is not “an analysis of the meaning of the word ‘cause’” (114). His response to this problem is acute (116): “in his phenomenological argument Berkeley records not only the absence of volition but also the absence of activity. When in §28 he finds that he can excite ideas in his mind at pleasure, shifting the scene as often as he thinks fit, he is *aware* that he is active—his belief in his own activity is, as he explains, ‘grounded on experience’—but his activity is not *perceived*, because it does not present itself as an object. The manner in which volitions present themselves is difficult to clarify, but the phenomenological difference between volitions and sensations is undeniable. Our awareness of our own activity is immediate (Third Dialogue, p.232).” But surely this *is* to read Berkeley as denying, in some subtle fashion, the Humean point that inner experience reveals only sequence.

Here I think Winkler is ahead of Roberts, whose resourceful and original interpretation of Berkeley as an advocate for a sort of agent causation (2007, 2010) includes the view that causation is volition (2007, 91) and that “action,” “activity,” and “volition” are all equivalent terms (2007, 93). Again, this seems to leave Berkeley ruling out corporeal causes simply by fiat. Roberts remarks that “the materialist’s conception of causation was eliminated along with matter. They were a package deal” (2007, 115). But this neglects the fact that Berkeley offers arguments against corporeal causes that are unconnected to materialism. It is one thing to take agency as primitive. It is another to make it a category mistake to treat anything else as a possible cause.

⁴⁹ See also 3D 216.

⁵⁰ For a discussion of this argument, see Downing 1995.

⁵¹ For an interesting discussion, see Cummins 1990.

that spirits are active is not ruled out. Further, one might then take our experience of readily imagining whatever we wish as obviously confirming that activity, which would be Berkeley's point in PHK 28.

Of course, this doesn't yet answer all of our questions. The words "active" and "activity" have to mean something for Berkeley. Again we should look to Berkeley's defense of his mature view of spirits or minds. I specify "mature view" because Berkeley's notebook view of spirit, like, I contend, his notebook view of causation, is quite different from his published view. In the notebooks, Berkeley tries out an account of spirits as mere bundles or collections of ideas and volitions. He later abandons this account, perhaps because of concerns about how the bundle, or the Will and the Understanding, is/are to be unified.⁵² Instead, the end of the notebooks suggests, and the beginning of the *Principles* firmly states, a more traditional or Cartesian view of spirit/mind as substance.⁵³

A spirit is one simple, undivided, active being: as it perceives ideas, it is called the *understanding*, and as it produces or otherwise operates about them, it is called the *will*. Hence there can be no idea formed of a soul or spirit: for all ideas whatever, being passive and inert, *vide Sect. 25*, they cannot represent unto us, by way of image or likeness, that which acts. (PHK 27)

Notoriously, this leaves Berkeley with a serious epistemological problem: if I can't have an idea of spirit, how do I know that there are any, how is the term "spirit" meaningful, and why is the positing of spirits legitimate

52 See PC 841, 848, 849, 850, and McCracken 1986. It is possible to read PC 848 as a decision to conceal the bundle-theoretic account of spirit, as Muehlmann does (1992, 171, 187). Whatever we say about the notebooks, however, I think we must take the *Principles* and *Dialogues* at face value.

53 Thus I disagree strongly with Winkler's (1989, 107) claim that "there is no reason to suppose that he [Berkeley] later came to question" the regularity-plus-volition account of causation. There is good reason to suppose that Berkeley changed his mind about spirit (as Winkler acknowledges) and that his view of causal activity would have changed with it is quite unsurprising. (Furthermore, it is not even clear that change of mind would have been required, since the occurrence of a view in the notebooks does not establish that Berkeley held the view.)

when the positing of matter is, purportedly, not? Berkeley endeavors to answer all these questions by maintaining that we arrive at a notion of ourselves as minds, as one, as substances, by turning inward, by reflection.⁵⁴ This is to say that we know ourselves through conscious awareness, and this allows us to use the word "spirit" meaningfully:

I say lastly, that I have a notion of spirit, though I have not, strictly speaking, an idea of it. I do not perceive it as an idea or by means of an idea, but know it by reflexion. . . . How often must I repeat, that I know or am conscious of my own being; and that I my self am not my ideas, but somewhat else, a thinking active principle that perceives, knows, wills, and operates about ideas. (3D 233)

Such reflection, conscious awareness, must also be the source of our notion of activity, which he is committed to us having.⁵⁵ Contra Mill, the Humean "truth" was not hidden from Berkeley by a mist of natural prejudice (Winkler 1989, 107), but rather, it seems, thoughtfully denied.⁵⁶

In defending his mature view of the causal activity of spirits, he is also, of course, contradicting⁵⁷ Malebranche's contention that

54 Note that reflection for Berkeley, unlike Locke, does not supply us with more ideas.

55 In *Siris* (264, 290), Berkeley suggests that intellect, used in doing first philosophy, acquaints us with spirits and their activity.

56 I take it that the reflections above supply an obvious motivation for Berkeley's denial of the "Humean truth," i.e., Berkeley's affirmation that we have cognitive access to a causal power that transcends regularity in our own case. Without this affirmation, Berkeley has no route to "activity" meaning more than mere regularity-plus-volition, which would leave him with no way to attribute real causal power to God.

That what we find in Berkeley is, in effect, thoughtful denial of "Humean truth" is a point made beautifully by Ayers (in his introduction to Berkeley 1975, xxxvi) in relation to Berkeley's treatment of spirit.

57 I have left the question of whether Berkeley can, in the end, legitimately hold that we move our legs ourselves hanging. I endorse what I take to be the mainstream view that although Berkeley can make sense of our having control over and responsibility for our bodily actions, he cannot bill us as the efficient causes of our bodily movements. It seems that Berkeley hints at this resolution himself at 3D 237. See also Roberts' (2010, 415) suggestion about how to understand PC 548. Berkeley takes our activity with respect to ideas of imagination to be, it seems, the central example of our causal power, that which properly denominates the mind as active (PHK 28) and which allows us to understand how sensory ideas may be caused in us by an infinite spirit (3D 215). Unfortunately, space does not permit further consideration of these difficult issues.

not only are bodies incapable of being the true causes of whatever exists: the most noble minds are in a similar state of impotence (OCM 2:314/LO 449)⁵⁸

On the topic of bodies' causal inertness, however, they are in perfect agreement, despite Malebranche's apparent commitment to the material world that Berkeley denies.⁵⁹ And on the question of how to reconcile metaphysical truth with commonsense and scientific practice, Berkeley often follows the path laid out by Malebranche, emphasizing the importance of regularity to scientific explanation, and grounding the existence of regularity in God:⁶⁰

There are certain general laws that run through the whole chain of natural effects: these are learned by the observation and study of Nature, and are by men applied as well to the framing artificial things for the use and ornament of life, as to the explaining the various *phenomena*: which explication consists only in shewing the conformity any particular phenomenon hath to the general Laws of Nature, or, which is the same thing, in discovering the *uniformity* there is in the production of natural effects; as will be evident to whoever shall attend to the several instances, wherein philosophers pretend to account for appearances. That there is a great and conspicuous use in these regular constant methods of working observed by the Supreme Agent, hath been shewn in *Sect.* 31. (PHK 62)⁶¹

⁵⁸ Specifically, as was indicated above in the quotation from the 1st elucidation (OCM 3:30–31/LO 554), Malebranche holds that minds cannot efficiently cause anything real. All they can do is to direct the general impulse toward the good that God gives them, which doesn't amount to a power, but merely an ability to stop or rest.

⁵⁹ But see Downing 2005b, 209–12.

⁶⁰ Though Berkeley emphasizes that regularity need not be perfect, and he grounds it in God's goodness. For Malebranche, by contrast, God *must* act according to general volitions, and Malebranche typically refers this to divine simplicity.

⁶¹ See also PHK 105.

Ultimately, however, Berkeley pushes this in a direction that is quite un-Cartesian (and un-Malebranchian), arguing for a separation between natural philosophy and metaphysics:

In physics sense and experience which reach only to apparent effects hold sway; in mechanics the abstract notions of mathematicians are admitted. In first philosophy or metaphysics we are concerned with incorporeal things, with causes, truth, and the existence of things. [...]

Only by meditation and reasoning can truly active causes be rescued from the surrounding darkness and be to some extent known. To deal with them is the business of first philosophy or metaphysics. Allot to each science its own province; assign its bounds; accurately distinguish the principles and objects belonging to each. Thus it will be possible to treat them with greater ease and clarity. (DM 71–72)

More specifically, although Berkeley agrees with Malebranche (for nonhuman bodies at least), that there is a cause for all bodily motion and that cause is always God, he does not accept Malebranche's quick conclusion that the motive force or *vis* pertaining to bodies is simply God's will. Berkeley, by contrast, recommends that "force" be treated as a technical term in mechanics, divested of its problematic metaphysical implications (DM 17, 29, 39).⁶² This allows him to leave Newtonian dynamics, not just unharmed but untampered with.⁶³

ABBREVIATIONS

All references to Berkeley are to the Luce-Jessop edition of Berkeley's *Works* (Berkeley 1948–57). References use section numbers, except

⁶² For more detail, see Downing 2005a.

⁶³ I would like to thank David Hilbert and Matthew McCall for comments on a draft of this material. I also received much useful feedback from participants in the Workshop on Efficient Causation: The History of the Concept, University of Michigan, May 2011, especially Tad Schmaltz. Thanks also to Walter Ott for generous comments; I wish that time (and space) had permitted me to take fuller advantage of them.

for the *Three Dialogues*, which use page numbers. I use the following abbreviations for Berkeley's individual works.

PC = *Philosophical Commentaries*, that is, Berkeley's notebooks; references by section number

PHK = *The Principles of Human Knowledge*; references by section number

3D = *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*

DM = *De Motu*

S = *Siris*

AT = Descartes 1964-74

OCF = Fontenelle 1968

LO = Malebranche 1980

OCM = Malebranche 1958-84

SJ = Malebranche 1997



FIGURE 1. HILDEGARD OF BINGEN, Portrait in *Scivias*, 1151
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