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Andrew R. Platt. *One True Cause: Causal Powers, Divine Concurrence, and the Seventeenth-Century Revival of Occasionalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020. Pp. xii + 384. Cloth, \$85.00.

On an old narrative, dating back to Leibniz and developed in nineteenth-century historiography, occasionalism was revived in the early modern period as an *ad hoc* response to the problems of mind-body union and interaction arising from Descartes's metaphysics. According to Leibniz, Descartes gave up the struggle, leaving his disciples to iron out this most scandalous of wrinkles in his system. A line of followers—Clauberg, Geulincx, La Forge, Le Grand, Arnauld, Cordemoy, and above all, Malebranche—dusted off the old, discredited doctrine of occasionalism in order to deal with the question of how unextended minds could interact with extended bodies. Plainly stated, the solution was as dissatisfying to Leibniz as it has been to most undergraduates since: my mind and my body do not really interact. Instead, typically, whenever my toe bangs into a door, God produces a pain sensation in my mind. And, typically, whenever I decide to raise my left arm, God creates a motion in the corresponding part of my body such that it rises. God is the only true cause of any event. Creatures provide mere occasions for God to exercise his causal power.

In the past forty-odd years, this story has been effectively challenged. Gary Hatfield and Daniel Garber argued that, apart from any considerations of mind-body relations, occasionalism is already entailed by Descartes's physics. Janet Broughton further argued that Descartes himself eventually abandoned the view that the body acts on the mind. Resisting occasionalist readings of Descartes, Michael Della Rocca, Dennis Des Chene, and Helen Hattab proposed concurrentist readings, on which Descartes remains closer to the dominant scholastic position that God and creatures are co-causes of finite effects. Meanwhile, a rich body of scholarship on Descartes's followers has revealed the diversity of motivations and strategies that led them to occasionalism. This literature makes it clear that occasionalism was a family of interestingly different positions,

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rather than a single, caricature view of God as puppeteer. Thomas Lennon, Steven Nadler, and Tad Schmaltz, among others, have shown, in particular, that the mind-body problem plays little to no role in Geulincx's, La Forge's, Cordemoy's, or Malebranche's arguments for occasionalism. Rather, they are led to occasionalism by more general considerations rooted in Descartes's substance-mode ontology and his causal principles. In just the last few years, several edited volumes have appeared on Descartes and occasionalism, including *Chemins du cartesianisme* (Del Prete and Carbone, eds., 2017), *Occasionalism: From Metaphysics to Science* (Favaretti Camposampiero, Priarolo, Scribano eds., 2018), and the massive, fifty-essay *Oxford Handbook of Descartes and Cartesianism* (Nadler, Schmaltz, and Antoine-Mahut, eds., 2019). Research on Descartes and Cartesianism has perhaps never been so vibrant.

Andrew Platt's fine monograph synthesizes a large swath of this scholarship to articulate some of its key lessons. It is divided into two parts. The first presents a very helpful analysis of historically plausible varieties of occasionalism in the context of later scholastic theories of cause, efficient causation, powers, and God's causal relation to the world (Chapter 1); two chapters (2 and 3) on occasionalist and concurrentist readings of Descartes' physics and the mind-body problem (Platt sides with the latter camp on both issues); and a chapter (4) on the German "Cartesian-Scholastic" (to use Josef Bohatec's label) Clauberg's non-occasionalist solution to the mind-body problem. Platt's main thesis in Part I is that, "there was more than one way for Descartes's followers to interpret and develop his philosophical views," so that occasionalism should not be seen as inevitable or logically forced upon them (7–8). Part II also consists of four chapters, one each on four Cartesian thinkers who developed versions of occasionalism: Geulincx, La Forge, Cordemoy, and Malebranche. These chapters address a question that naturally arises from the first part: why did so many of Descartes's followers turn to occasionalism, if it was not a forced move? Platt contends that these authors' arguments for occasionalism "are compelling only against the backdrop of their broader theoretical aims" (8). For him, these figures should be seen as trying to complete the system of Cartesian philosophy,

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by adding the leaves that were missing from the branches of the Cartesian tree of knowledge. Platt highlights Geulincx's ethical motives relating to humility in the background to his occasionalist arguments; in La Forge's "one-way" occasionalism (i.e., occasionalism about body-to-mind causation, but not about mind-to-body causation), an emphasis on Descartes's epistemological thesis that the mind is better known than the body; and in Cordemoy, problems specific to body-body interaction in physics. Fittingly, the book concludes with a chapter on Malebranche, whose name is most closely associated with early modern occasionalism. As with the other Cartesians, Platt argues that Malebranche's occasionalism is not "a logical result" of following Descartes's thought, but that he was "motivated to endorse and defend occasionalism in the way he did because of how it cohered with his overall theory of the world" (302–3).

To advanced scholars of Cartesianism, much of this should be familiar. The main thesis of the book, that occasionalism was not an inevitable consequence of accepting core features of Descartes's philosophy, is by now well-established. The individual chapters fill in helpful details, but do not always advance the conversations in significant respects. The chapters on Descartes's occasionalism accurately review arguments on both sides of the debate, and defend modified versions of prominent anti-occasionalist interpretations. The robust interactionist reading of Clauberg is original but, at least in my opinion, sits uneasily with the text. The chapters in Part II rest on the foundations laid by Nadler, Lennon, Ott, Schmaltz, Sangiacomo, and others. Platt's careful contextualization of the occasionalist arguments of Geulincx, La Forge, and Cordemoy in light of their ethics, epistemology, and natural philosophy is certainly a valuable contribution, but the main thesis, that their motivations are more systematic than a narrow interest in the mind-body problem would suggest, is not especially surprising.

Nevertheless, the book is an outstanding introduction to seventeenth-century occasionalism. Its principal virtue is to present a detailed, unified account of the development of causal theories from Descartes to Malebranche. In addition, it goes beyond the well-studied contexts of Cartesian physics and cosmology to examine the ethical and epistemological

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implications of occasionalism. And it does so clearly and rigorously, deftly weaving together an impressive range of primary and secondary sources without losing sight of the core conceptual issues. The “pastiche reconstruction” (author’s phrase) on pages 177–81 of the leading research on the path from a scholastic distinction between natural and intellectual agents to Malebranche’s conclusion that God is the only causal agent exemplifies the philosophical merits of the book. Platt’s monograph would be well worth the time of anyone looking for an advanced guide to the study of Cartesian occasionalism. It comprehensively presents the case for viewing occasionalism as part of a complex and sophisticated research program, whose proponents held varied motives and deployed a range of arguments.

A minor quibble: the book is poorly copy-edited. While we are all used to the odd typo, this book is riddled with misspellings (including of names and in quoted texts), missing indentations, repetitions, and so on. The header for Chapter 7 is only the most egregious. One expects better from Oxford University Press.

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