

Leibniz: Creation *and* Conservation *and* Concurrence*

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Abstract

In this paper I argue that the hoary theological doctrine of divine concurrence poses no deep threat to Leibniz's views on theodicy and creaturely activity even as those views have been traditionally understood. The first three sections examine respectively Leibniz's views on creation, conservation and concurrence, with an eye towards showing their systematic compatibility with Leibniz's theodicy and metaphysics. The fourth section takes up remaining worries arising from the bridging principle that conservation is a continued or continuous creation, and argues that they can be allayed once two readings of the principle are distinguished. What emerges from the discussion as a whole is, I hope, a clearer picture of Leibniz's views on the nature of monadic causation, his understanding of the relationship between divine and creaturely activity, and his position with respect to later medieval and early modern debates over secondary causation.

*Introduction*¹

Most theistically minded philosophers in the later medieval and early modern periods insisted that the ordinary development of the world depends on God's efficient causal influence in at least three distinguishable ways. First, the world depends on God for creation itself, for its coming into being. Second, the world depends on God for its continued existence, for, as we might put it, its staying in being. Third, the production of any effect by a creature within the order of nature requires an additional act of assistance on God's part known as "divine concurrence." Any non-miraculous change within nature – from the growth of an acorn, to the fall of a leaf – was thus thought to ultimately rest upon at least three conceptually distinct levels of dependence: divine creation, divine conservation, and divine concurrence.

There is no dispute that Leibniz explicitly commits himself to the traditional theological doctrines of creation, conservation, and concurrence. What is more controversial is how those doctrines are to be understood in connection with his views on theodicy and the metaphysics of created substances. The dependence emphasized by traditional theological doctrine, as well as by Leibniz's Augustinian

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view that God alone is the immediate source of all is truly *real* in the world, seems to push him towards an occasionalist position with respect to secondary agents. Leibniz's insistence that created substances are genuine active sources of change and development, as well as his suggestion that sin arises from the free choices of creatures, however, seems to push him towards a mere conservationist, or even a deist view of creaturely activity.² Although there has been no shortage of ingenuity in previous attempts to reconcile Leibniz's views on theological doctrine, theodicy and the metaphysics of created substance, none has I think proven really satisfying. On the one hand, readings that would attribute only negative, formal, or final causality to creatures have failed to do justice to Leibniz's commitment to the activity of created substances and their positive role in sinful actions.³ On the other hand, readings that have taken more seriously Leibniz's commitment to creaturely activity haven't made it sufficiently clear how that activity is to be reconciled with creaturely dependence and a privation account of sinful actions.⁴

In what follows, I would like to suggest – contrary to current consensus – that the traditional theological doctrines concerning creaturely dependence which Leibniz embraces pose no deep threat to his views on theodicy and creaturely activity even as those views have been commonly understood. The paper itself falls into four main sections. The first takes up Leibniz's views on creation, paying special attention to his twin aims of showing that God is neither morally nor physically responsible for the initial imperfections of the world, as well as to the thesis that through creation God brings into existence genuine secondary causal agents. The second turns to Leibniz's understanding of the doctrine of divine conservation, focusing on the compatibility between God's (immediate *per se*) conservation of creatures and the possibility of change within the order of nature. The third considers Leibniz's views on concurrentism, with special care being given to the question of how God and creatures might be thought to act together in bringing about creaturely effects, and how God's role in bringing about those effects within the order of nature is to be reconciled with the demands of Leibnizian theodicy. Finally, the fourth section takes up worries arising from the bridging principle that conservation is a continued, or continuous, creation. It argues that once two readings of the principle are distinguished, it becomes apparent that Leibniz rejects for good reason a strong and dangerous version, while accepting a weak but innocuous version. What emerges from the discussion as a whole is, I hope, a clearer picture of Leibniz's position on the nature of monadic causation, his understanding of the relationship between divine and creaturely activity, and how his views fit into the context of later medieval and early modern debates over concurrentism, mere conservationism, and occasionalism.

Divine Creation

In the preface to the *Theodicy*, Leibniz emphasizes that “concerning the origin of evil in its relation to God, I offer a vindication of his perfections that shall extol not less his holiness, his justice and his goodness than his greatness, his power and his independence” (T, preface/H 61). The distinction drawn here between what we might call – following Leibniz’s cue – “the moral problem of evil” and “the physical problem of evil” is an important, if generally overlooked, thread in Leibniz’s theodicy.⁵ Resolution of the moral problem, Leibniz tells us, requires explaining “how evil has a source other than the will of God, and that one is right therefore to say of moral evil that God wills it not, but simply permits it” (T, preface/H 61). Resolution of the physical problem, on the other hand, requires showing “how it is possible for everything to depend upon God, for him to co-operate in all the actions of creatures, even, if you will, to create these creatures continually, and nevertheless not to be the author of sin” (T, preface/H 61). As should become more apparent in what follows, it is a central aim of Leibniz’s theodicy to provide responses to both versions of the problem of evil at each level of creaturely dependence.

The broad outline of Leibniz’s solution to the moral problem of evil in connection with creation is familiar enough. First, he maintains that God, through his omniscience, comprehends all possible worlds. Indeed, one might think of a possible world for Leibniz simply as an exhaustive concept in the divine intellect fully describing a way in which a world could be made. Second, Leibniz holds that having understood all the possible ways of creating a world, God’s infinite goodness leads him to select the objectively best of all possible worlds for creation. Although this decision on God’s part follows with a moral necessity, Leibniz claims that it is nonetheless not only free but even contingent, and thus worthy of moral approval. Third, given that God has created the best of all possible worlds, Leibniz insists, he cannot be morally faulted for what might be thought to be its global or local imperfections. Although as a created entity, the perfection of the world as a whole must fall short of the absolute perfection of God himself, it would be unjust to fault God for not doing the impossible, and thus for not having created a better world than the actual world. Whatever limitations the actual world might have, it can thus be said that God does not will them, but rather permits them, it being impossible to create any world better. Likewise, although the world contains a variety of local imperfections – e.g. droughts, diseases, and sinful agents – it would be unjust to fault God for creating such things given that they are essential elements of the best of all possible worlds. Once again, we may say that God does not, for example, will the existence of disease *per se*, but rather merely permits it because disease is an essential feature of the best of all possible worlds.

Beyond maintaining that God creates the best of all possible worlds, Leibniz also insists that, strictly speaking, God creates only what is good, positive, or active in the world. The essential limitations, or imperfections, of finite beings are thus to be understood along Augustinian lines as mere privations or absences of greater goodness. Thus, for example, in a short piece from 1695, Leibniz tells us:

The Platonists and Saint Augustine himself have already shown us that the cause of good is positive, but that evil is a defect, that is, a privation or negation, and consequently arises from nothing. . . . you would admit that all created things are limited, and that their limits, or their *non plus ultra* if you wish, constitute something negative. . . . they are bounded or imperfect by virtue of the principle of negation or of nothingness they contain, by virtue of the lack of an infinity of perfections in them, which are only a nothingness with respect to them. (Grua 364/AG 114; see also T 20/H 135f, T 29-30/H 140-141, T abridgement, answer to objection 5/H 384)

The theses that imperfection is a privation of goodness, and that God directly creates only what is positive in the world, naturally have important and recurring roles to play in Leibniz's larger theodicy. Most immediately for our concerns, however, they provide Leibniz's solution to the physical problem of evil in connection with the doctrine of creation.⁶ For they allow Leibniz to maintain that even in creating essentially limited and imperfect creatures, God strictly speaking creates only what is positive and good in them, and thus is not the immediate source of their limitations and imperfections. To put it a bit crudely, by Leibniz's lights, it has been shown how God can both be the original source of all that exists, and yet not be the original source of evil itself.

In connection with his understanding of the doctrine of creation, it should be worth noting that according to Leibniz's mature metaphysics, the world which God brings into existence is constituted, at its deepest level, by infinitely many active, mind-like, created substances, or "monads." Leibniz famously maintains that each monad is causally isolated from all other monads; they have, as he puts it, no windows through which the genuine causal influence of other creatures might pass (Mon 7/AG 214). Nonetheless, he also holds that each created substance is a genuine secondary cause, which produces within itself each of its future states in accordance with its own "law of the series." Indeed, he insists that "every simple substance (that is, every true substance) must be the true immediate cause of all its actions and inward passions; and, speaking strictly in a metaphysical sense, it has none other than those which it produces" (T 400/H 362, see also T 65/H 158). The created world for Leibniz is thus, at root, an elaborate collection of "spiritual automatons" unfolding within the order of nature in perfect harmony with one another (T 52/H, see also Mon 18/AG 215, G 2:47/L 495).

The importance of the thesis that monads are genuine secondary causes – that they are active, productive, causes of their own internal states – cannot be emphasized too strongly. It touches, in one way or another, on almost every aspect of Leibniz’s larger philosophical system. It is central, for example, to his account of creaturely freedom, and through creaturely freedom to his free will theodicy (e.g., T 288/H 302f). He takes it as a necessary condition for the very existence of created *substances* (G 4:509/AG 160) and thus it is in turn related to both his rejection of Spinozism (e.g., T 393/H 459f) as well as Occasionalism (e.g., G 4:483-4/AG 143). The thesis that creatures are active, endogenous, sources of activity is even connected to his mature views in physics through the claim that the forces required for natural philosophy must have an intelligible basis in the activity of true substances at the metaphysical ground floor (e.g., G 2:69-172/AG 171-173), as well as to his promise to preserve the entelechies of Scholastic philosophy (e.g., DM 18/AG 51f, NE 169ff). It is thus absolutely crucial for the tenability of Leibniz’s larger project that God’s act of creation be understood as bringing into existence genuine secondary causes, rather than as bringing into existence merely passive natures, occasional causes, or – if there is any difference – loci of reasons for God’s further causal activity.⁷ If the doctrine of divine creation were inconsistent with the existence of genuine secondary agents capable of producing their own effects, much of Leibniz’s elaborate philosophical system would simply collapse.

It is therefore a potentially very serious worry that the ability of creatures to produce their own effects within the order of nature might seem to be in tension with the traditional view that the power to create belongs to God alone. Scholastic philosophers commonly spoke to this concern by distinguishing two different senses in which something might be said to be “created.” Creation in the strictest sense was taken to involve the bringing into existence of an entity *ex nihilo*, and creation in this sense positively precluded acting on an already existing subject, or realizing some already existing potentiality.⁸ In the Christian tradition, it was creation *ex nihilo* which was held to belong to the providence of God alone.⁹ Strict creation was thus distinguished from what we might call *production* within the order of nature – a leaf’s turning from green to red, a pair of rabbits conceiving a bunny, or an artist’s throwing a flower pot. The production of ordinary effects within the order of nature was taken to necessarily involve acting upon an already existing subject, of realizing some already present potentiality.¹⁰ “Creation” of effects in this loose sense was held to be appropriate not only to God but to creatures as well. For the scholastics, God’s act of creation thus was not viewed as a rival to creaturely production within the order of nature, but rather a necessary condition for it: God’s act of creation brings into being the active and passive powers of creatures which then unfold within the order of nature “producing” effects within

the natural world.¹¹

Although Leibniz denies that creatures exert direct causal influence upon one another, his response to the apparent tension between divine creation and creaturely production is not otherwise much different from that of his scholastic predecessors. He similarly maintains that creation in the strict sense involves God's bringing entities into existence literally from nothing, while "production" of effects within the order of nature involves creatures changing or modifying already existing subjects. Thus, for example, in the *Theodicy*, Leibniz writes (with a little impatience):

As for the so-called creation of the accidents, who does not see that one needs no creative power in order to change place or shape, to form a square or a column, or some other parade-ground figure, by the movement of the soldiers who are drilling; or again to fashion a statue by removing a few pieces from a block of marble; or to make some figure in relief, by changing, decreasing or increasing a piece of wax? The production of modifications has never been called creation, and it is an abuse of terms to scare the world thus. God produces substances from nothing, and the substances produce accidents by the changes of their limits. (T 395/H 360, see also T 32/H142)

Thus, like the Scholastics, Leibniz maintains that strict creation and annihilation of substances belongs to the purview of God alone. In creating a secondary agent, God produces it from nothing in accordance with an idea in the divine intellect, and, in annihilating it, would reduce it once again to nothingness. Creation in this strict sense is distinguished from the production of creaturely states within the order of nature. The changes which take place within monads are not to be understood as creations from nothing, but rather as modifications of what already exists in the monad, as the realization of the potentialities a monad has in virtue of its divinely created nature.

Leibniz's account of divine creation sketches the first way, as it were, in which the created world depends on God's causal activity. Put simply, without God's efficient act of creation, the world and the causal order which it encodes would never come into being at all. Although there are interesting wrinkles in Leibniz's story, there is nothing in his adoption of this traditional theological doctrine that suggests a deep tension with either his two-part theodicy or his distinctive monadic metaphysics. By maintaining that God creates the best of all possible worlds, and indeed directly creates only what is good, positive, and "real" in the best of all possible worlds, Leibniz shields God from any charge of wrongful behavior with respect to his initial act of creation. By holding that God creates genuine secondary agents that contribute to the production of their own effects within the order of nature, Leibniz distinguishes his own position (most importantly for our concerns) from the occasionalism of Malebranche. The next section will suggest that es-

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essentially the same considerations invoked here in showing how Leibniz's mature views on theodicy and metaphysics may be reconciled with the doctrine of divine creation, may also be used to show how his mature views may be reconciled with the doctrine of divine conservation.

Divine Conservation

Most theists in the late medieval and early modern eras maintained that the world depends on God's causal activity not only for its initial creation, but also for its continued existence. To invoke a frequently used analogy, they held that just as the rays of the sun would cease to exist immediately upon its extinction, likewise creatures would immediately fall out of existence without God's continual support. Naturally, a wide variety of arguments were marshaled in defense of this traditional view.¹² Perhaps the most central line of support, however, derived from the intuition that any entity which depends on God by its very nature for its coming into existence, must also thereby depend on God by its very nature for its staying in existence. Thus, for example, Suarez takes it as ultimately undeniable that "the very same deficiency that is found in a creature's *esse* at the first moment at which it comes to be – namely, its inability to exist without the action of another – is found in the creature for as long as it endures in *esse* . . . since it is precisely because of its own *esse*, and precisely insofar as it is a creature, that it needs God's influence in order to exist, it needs that same influence for as long as it exists."¹³

In developing the doctrine of divine conservation, Scholastics distinguished between an entity's immediate, *per se* conservation, and its mediate, *per accidens* conservation.¹⁴ The difference between these two species of conservation is essentially parallel to the difference between creation *ex nihilo* and what we called above "production" within the order of nature.

Immediate, *per se* conservation was held to belong to the providence of God alone, and Suarez describes it as "the persistent inpouring of that very *esse* which was communicated through the production of [the entity]."¹⁵ It is conservation in this sense which was held to be necessary for the preservation of absolutely every created being – including so-called "incorruptible" beings such as the celestial bodies and immaterial souls – and was furthermore thought to be necessary for them simply in virtue of their status as created, dependent entities. The conservation of an entity in this sense thus precludes its being deprived of the original being given to it through *ex nihilo* creation; a flower pot, for example, completely and successfully conserved in this way thus could not suffer genuine annihilation.

Mediate, *per accidens* conservation, on the other hand, was held to fall under the purview not only of God but of creatures as well. Conservation in this sense was

held to typically involve one or more creatures contributing to the prevention of the corruption of another creature within the order of nature. So, for example, an umbrella might mediate conserve a flame by shielding it from the rain, or a mother hen might mediate preserve her baby chick by protecting it from predators. Since “incorruptible beings” were thought to be immune to destruction by their fellow creatures, they were held not to require mediate, *per accidens* conservation for their continued existence. Conservation in this sense thus precludes corruption or alteration within the order of nature; a flower pot, for example, that is completely and successfully conserved in this way would be protected, as it were, from suffering (say) painting or chipping.

It is important to note that even when a creature is not completely conserved in the mediate sense, it may still enjoy immediate conservation. A flower pot that is painted undergoes change within the order of nature, and yet its changing color does not entail that the original being given to it through *ex nihilo* creation is not preserved by God. Likewise, a lump of copper might undergo change as it is transformed from a vase to a bowl, and yet the original being provided by God at the moment of its *ex nihilo* creation might persist through such alterations. In thinking about the doctrine of divine conservation, it may therefore be helpful to conceive of it as analogous to the conservation of energy rather than the conservation of a particular organism or artifact. For just as the suggestion that the total energy of the world is conserved does not imply that it does not convert from, say, potential to kinetic energy, so too the suggestion that God conserves the original being of creation should not be taken to imply that creation itself does not undergo alteration or change within the order of nature.

Leibniz shares the intuition of his predecessors that just as creatures by their very nature depend on God for their initial creation so too by their very nature they depend on God for their continued existence. Invoking the familiar analogy to the sun, he writes in *Causa Dei*:

Actual beings depend upon God for their existence as well as for their actions, and depend not only upon his intellect but also upon his will. Their existence depends upon God, since all things have been freely created by God and are maintained in existence by him. There is a sound doctrine which teaches that this divine preservation in existence is . . . comparable to the rays continually emitted by the sun . . . (9)

Like his predecessors, Leibniz thus commits himself to the view that creatures depend no less on God for their continued existence than they do for their initial creation, and he insists that “we must bear in mind that conservation by God consists in the perpetual immediate influence which the dependence of creatures demands” (T 27/H 139). Leibniz also shares the view of his predecessors that what requires

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divine conservation is in effect fixed by one's account of creation. Precisely all and only those entities which God brings into being *ex nihilo* will require (at least) God's immediate conservation in order to continue to exist. When applied to Leibniz's mature metaphysics this entails that for their continued existence, God must immediately conserve the active, positive natures of created substances, which he brings into being *ex nihilo*.

Significantly, however, God's immediate, *per se* conservation of creatures does not preclude - any more for Leibniz than for his scholastic predecessors - the possibility of change within the order of nature. In fact, Leibniz explicitly insists that God's preservation of substances is perfectly consistent with the unfolding, or development of those substances within the order of creation:

. . . I maintain that all Souls, Entelechies or primitive forces, substantial forms, simple substances, or Monads, whatever name one may apply to them, can neither spring up naturally nor perish. And the qualities or derivative forces, or what are called accidental forms, I take to be modifications of the primitive Entelechy, even as shapes are modifications of matter. That is why these modifications are perpetually changing, while the simple substance remains. (T 396/H 360f)

The traditional contrast between immediate, *per se* conservation, and mediate *per accidens* conservation thus corresponds in Leibniz's system to a contrast between God's conservation of the fundamental, active natures of substances essential to their continued endurance, and the preservation of particular modifications, or "states," of monads which are continuously changing according to each substance's own 'law of the series.'" In short, divine conservation preserves that which God immediately creates, while creaturely "conservation" preserves that which creatures immediately "create."

Perhaps not surprisingly, Leibniz himself is generally less concerned with articulating the then widely held doctrine of divine conservation, than he is in showing that it presents no deep difficulties for his solution to the problem of evil. And, in fact, he quite reasonably suggests that essentially the same considerations already adduced to show that God is neither morally nor physically responsible for the local imperfections brought into being through creation, also show why God is neither morally nor physically responsible for the local imperfections made possible through divine conservation. Thus taking up the charge of moral responsibility in connection with the doctrine of divine conservation, Leibniz writes:

The objection will be made that God therefore now creates man a sinner, he that in the beginning created him innocent. But here it must be said, with regard to the moral aspect, that . . . the same reason that has made him create man innocent, but liable to fall, makes him re-create man when he falls; for God's knowledge causes the future to be for him as the present, and prevents him from rescinding

the resolutions made. (T 28/H 139f; see also T 390-391/H 358-359) Leibniz's response here is a natural extension of his response to the moral problem of evil in connection with the doctrine of divine creation. In that case, as we have seen, the charge of moral culpability is addressed primarily by arguing that God freely creates the best of all possible worlds. But given divine omniscience, how the world plays out is part of the divine "calculation" as it were as to which is in fact the best of all possible worlds. If the world's being the best overall is a sufficient reason for creating Judas who will sin, then it is also a sufficient reason for conserving Judas when he does sin. Leibniz thus plausibly sees his familiar solution to the moral problem of evil as covering not only the act of divine creation, but also the act of divine conservation.

Leibniz's solution to what he sees as the "physical" problem of evil in connection with the doctrine of divine conservation similarly rides piggyback on the account he has already offered in connection with the doctrine of divine creation. As we have seen, Leibniz maintains that God immediately creates only what is positive, good, and real in creatures, with their limitations and modifications arising as a consequence of the finitude of their perfection. Likewise, he maintains that God immediately conserves only what is positive, good, and real in creatures, and only indirectly conserves the limitations and modifications arising as a result of the unfolding of their finite natures:

God produces the creature in conformity with the exigency of the proceeding instants . . . and the creature operates in conformity with that nature which God conveys to it in creating it always. The limitations and imperfections arise therein through the nature of the subject, which sets bounds to God's production; that is the consequence of the original imperfection of creatures." (T 388/H 358)

Here the analogy to the conservation of energy might again prove helpful. We might think of God as directly creating all the energy in the world in its various different forms – potential, kinetic, electro-magnetic, etc. – at the moment of creation, and thereby indirectly creating its limitations. God's conservation of that energy, as we have seen, is consistent with its altering and changing from one form to another in accordance with the laws of nature. But although God will conserve the total energy of the world as it progresses through its various modifications, there is no more need to suppose that he *directly* conserves its subsequent limitations than there was to suppose that he *directly* creates its initial limitations. To return to the theodicy case, Leibniz may thus maintain that, strictly speaking, God neither creates the limitations of creatures, nor conserves those limitations, even if those limitations are a necessary consequence of what God does, strictly speaking, create and conserve. Following the Augustinian tradition, Leibniz may therefore insist that, considered rightly, God does not really conserve the limitations or imperfec-

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tions of creatures, these being merely privations or absences of the perfections that God does conserve.

Leibniz's account of divine conservation thus suggests a second way in which the created world depends on God's causal activity. Just as creatures by their very nature depend on God for their coming into being, so too they depend on God for their continued existence – for their staying in being. By drawing on the same resources already invoked in his creation theodicy, Leibniz makes at least a plausible case that God is neither morally nor physically responsible for the local imperfections of creatures. God is no more to be morally faulted for the preservation now of a sinner, than he is for the initial creation of that in-the-future sinner. Nor is he any more to be physically faulted for immediately preserving the active natures of created substances and thereby indirectly conserving their imperfections, than he is to be faulted for immediately creating what is positive in creatures and thereby indirectly bringing into being their limitations. Furthermore, since what God preserves are genuine secondary causes – and not mere occasions for divine activity within the order of nature – his commitment to divine conservation is likewise at least *prima facie* consistent with his mature metaphysics of actively unfolding monads, and his rejection of occasionalism. Leibniz's adoption of the traditional view that the continued existence of the world depends on divine conservation thus would appear to present no special difficulties for either his considered theodicy or his mature metaphysics. We are now in a position to see if the same can be said of his commitment to the doctrine of divine concurrence.

Divine Concurrence

Although it is easily forgotten today, most theistically minded philosophers in the medieval and early modern eras held that for creatures to bring about their customary effects within the order of nature, it is necessary for God not only to create and conserve creatures, but also to assist or “concur” in their productive activities. A wide variety of arguments were offered in support of positing this additional level of creaturely dependence. Suarez, for example, suggests the following relatively straightforward argument from analogy:

Just as God can deprive a created entity of its *esse* merely by withholding his action, so too he can deprive a created entity of its natural action merely by withholding his concurrence; therefore, just as from the former power one may evidently infer an immediate dependence in *esse*, so too from the latter power one may infer an immediate dependence in the action itself.¹⁶

Although arguments for concurrentism grounded in natural reason thus often attempted to show that the same considerations that led to the doctrine of divine

conservation also entail the doctrine of divine concurrentism, perhaps the most compelling arguments in medieval and early modern times were rooted in considerations of piety. Thus, Suarez, for example, concludes his arguments in favor of concurrentism with “the best argument: This manner of acting in and with all agents pertains to the breadth of divine power, and on God’s part it presupposes a perfection untainted by imperfection . . . therefore, this general influence should not be denied to God.”¹⁷

In suggesting that God and creatures generally act together to bring about effects within the order of nature, concurrentists sought to steer a middle course between the rival doctrines of “mere conservationism” and “occasionalism.”¹⁸ On the one side, mere conservationists held that having created and conserved creatures complete with their own active and passive causal powers, those creatures require nothing further on God’s part in order for them to bring about their customary effects within the order of nature. So for example, mere conservationists held that if God creates and conserves a fire complete with its causal powers, the fire requires no further assistance in order to (say) boil a pot of water. On the other side, occasionalists held that just as God is the sole and complete efficient cause of creatures and their natures, so likewise he is the sole and complete efficient cause of effects produced within the order of nature. They thus held, for example, that the fire under the pot is not, strictly speaking, an efficient cause of the water’s boiling at all, but merely an occasion for God himself to directly cause the water to boil.

The attempt by concurrentists to steer a middle course between mere conservationism and occasionalism faced three central challenges. The first is to provide an account of the nature of the cooperative *action* performed by God and his creatures in concurrently producing an effect. One available view here is that God concurs only *mediately* with a creature by giving it some additional powers or capacities to act. As Suarez had pointed out, however, such a picture of cooperative action threatens to collapse any meaningful distinction between concurrentism and mere conservationism. For since the mere conservationist and the concurrentist agree that God must directly create and conserve all the causal powers of creatures, if divine concurrence were to involve nothing more than the creation and conservation of (additional) creaturely powers, it would be hard to see any substantive point in the concurrentist’s insistence on a further or additional level of creaturely dependence.

Another available view holds that where God concurs with a creature in producing an effect he acts *immediately* with the creature in order to bring about the effect in question. On this picture, God and the creature both act in producing a particular effect in such a way that the immediate and direct causal contribution of each is necessary and, taken together, sufficient for the production of the relevant effect.

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(This is not, of course, to suggest that God could not unilaterally bring about any possible effect through a non-concurrent action, but only to say that where God concurs with a secondary cause, his causal contribution is not sufficient in that case for bringing about the effect in question independently of the secondary cause's contribution.) Leibniz expresses his own sympathies for this picture of divine and creaturely cooperation, writing, "God's *concurrence* (even the ordinary, nonmiraculous, concurrence) is at the same time immediate and special. It is *immediate* since the effect depends upon God not only for the reason that its cause originates in God, but also for this other reason, that God concurs no less nor more indirectly in producing this effect than in producing its cause" (*Causa Dei*, 11).

Leibniz's remark helps to clarify his own position with respect to the views of his scholastic predecessors on the nature of the cooperative action involved in cases of divine concurrence. Nonetheless, we might still crave a more intuitive understanding of how God and his creatures are supposed to act together in bringing about effects within the order of nature. Towards that end, Leibniz offers as an imperfect analogy the model of a heavily laden boat being carried along by the current of a river.¹⁹ Perhaps a slightly more intuitive model along the same lines is suggested by a working electric toaster.²⁰ In both cases, we may plausibly recognize the causal influences of two "agents" working through a single, immediate action in the production of an effect. In the one case, the causal influence of the boat and of the river combine through a single, immediate action in the production of a determinate speed of the boat. In the other case, the causal influence of the electricity and of the toaster combine through a single, immediate action in the production of a "heating" or a "toasting." In both cases, the causal contribution of each "agent" is necessary to the action in question, and together they are sufficient. This is perhaps clearest in the toaster analogy: neither the contribution of the electricity alone, nor of the toaster alone, produces a heating or a toasting; it is only with the two agents causally working together that the relevant action occurs.²¹

The second, and closely related, challenge faced by concurrentists in carving out a position distinct from both mere conservationism and occasionalism is to explain how we are to think about the *effects* brought about concurrently by God and his creatures. One available view here is that the cooperative action of God and a creature must result in a necessarily conjunctive effect. So, for example, we might suppose that where God and a strongman concur in lifting a hundred pound barbell, God directly causes the raising of, say, fifty pounds, while the strongman directly causes the raising of the other fifty. Or, perhaps more plausibly, we might suppose that where God and a pair of rabbits concur to produce a bunny, God is the immediate cause of its matter, while the rabbits are the immediate cause of its form.²² In both cases, from a metaphysical point of view, the total effect is plausibly

the straightforward conjunction of two partial effects.

Although attractive in its simplicity, Leibniz's scholastic predecessors long recognized that such a picture of concurrently produced effects quickly leads to difficulties for concurrentism.²³ In his notes on a conversation with Steno, Leibniz presents an argument suggesting that the adoption of a conjunctive effect model would saddle the concurrentist with a dilemma, ultimately leading to a thoroughgoing occasionalism. We can reconstruct the dilemma if we suppose that God and a person concur in producing some conjunctive effect, call it "AB," by God's directly producing *A* and the person's directly producing *B*. We must now ask with respect to *B*, whether God concurs with the person in its production? A negative answer results in the conclusion that the person after all does produce *some* effect without God's concurrence, namely *B*, and we fall into the position of mere conservationism. A positive answer, however, threatens an infinite regress. For if in virtue of its being the effect of a concurrent cause, *B* is itself considered to be a conjunctive effect, rename it "CD," then supposing that God concurs by producing partial effect *C*, we can ask whether or not the creature produces partial effect *D* by itself. If we resist falling into mere conservationism at every step, the argument maintains, we end up falling into the other extreme of occasionalism since, as Leibniz puts it, "he who produces half the thing, and in turn, half of the remaining half, and, in turn, half of the remaining half of the preceding half – to infinity – produces the whole."²⁴

It is unclear from Leibniz's notes whether the particular argument just sketched is original with Leibniz, Steno, or someone else altogether.²⁵ Given that similar concerns had been raised going back to at least Durandus,²⁶ however, the genealogy of the argument is relatively unimportant for our concerns. Its significance here lies in the fact that it provides strong evidence that Leibniz must have favored an alternative model of concurrently produced effects, one which was at any rate more widely championed by later scholastic defenders of concurrentism,²⁷ and is implied by his views on concurrent action. According to what might be called the "unified" or "whole" effect model, the effect produced by a concurrent action is to be understood as a metaphysically unified whole, as opposed to the straightforward conjunction of two metaphysically independent effects. Returning to our earlier example, the unified effect model suggests that we should think of the electricity and the toaster as cooperating in the production of a whole or entire toasting; as opposed, for example, to thinking of the electricity as producing half of the resulting toasting, and the toaster as producing the other half. Given such a model the infinite regress argument noted by Leibniz never gets off the ground since the effect produced concurrently by God and creature is not to be understood as a conjunction of two effects, *A* and *B*, one produced directly by God and one produced directly by a created agent.

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The third challenge faced by concurrentists was to offer an account as to why – if God concurs in the production of every creaturely effect – only creatures are held responsible for sinful activities within the order of nature. Leibniz’s own response to this challenge takes for granted the later scholastic view that even where God and creatures concur in producing an effect, certain aspects of that effect may properly be attributed to the creature rather than to God. So, for example, Molina suggests that when God and a fire concur in producing a heating, the fact that a heating is produced – as opposed to a cooling – is to be traced back to the fire and its causal powers. For in this case, a heating is produced rather than a cooling because God’s concurrence is “paired up” with the causal powers of fire rather than with the causal powers of water.²⁸ (Drawing on our earlier analogy, we might similarly say that the fact that a toasting occurs – as opposed to a blending or a beating – is to be traced back to the toaster and its causal powers, since in this case a toasting is produced rather than a blending or a beating because the electricity is “paired up” or “con-curs” with a toaster rather than a blender or a beater.) Likewise, Suarez suggests that when God and a free agent concur in producing a sinful action, the fact that a sinful action is produced – as opposed to a virtuous one – is to be traced back to the finite agent and its will. For in this case, a sinful action is produced rather than a virtuous one because God’s concurrence is “paired up” with a sinful will rather than a virtuous will.²⁹ In this way, a finite agent may be held to be responsible for a sinful action even when that sinful action presupposes God’s active assistance within the order of nature.

With this general scholastic view in the background, Leibniz argues more specifically that concurrence presents no special difficulties for his favored solutions to the moral and physical problems of evil.³⁰ With respect to the moral problem of God’s concurrence in sinful actions, Leibniz suggests that the same considerations that make it permissible – indeed morally obligatory – for God to create imperfect creatures, also make it permissible – indeed morally obligatory – for God to concur in their activities.³¹ The moral reasons that led God to create (say) Judas, also lead him to concur in Judas’s sinful activities. God could, of course, prevent creatures from sinning by withholding his causal assistance, but only at the cost of violating his perfect duty to create the best of all possible worlds; he would be like a soldier who prevents his friend from committing a minor offense at the cost of abandoning his own post in a time of danger (*Causa Dei*, 66; see also Summary IV/H 382f).

Leibniz’s solution to the physical problem of God’s concurrence in sinful actions is, I think, equally straightforward although it is admittedly sometimes obscured by his trying to do too many things at once.³² If we set aside for the next section complexities arising from the principle that conservation is a continued creation, the core idea again is simply an extension of the solution he provides in connection

with creation. As we saw earlier, with respect to the order of creation, Leibniz maintains that the physical problem of evil is addressed by insisting that God's causal contribution is intrinsically good, and evil only to the extent that is necessarily limited in conformity with the requirements of a finite creation. In the final analysis, the physical evil of creation is understood along Augustinian lines as a mere privation of further perfection, and the physical problem of evil is reduced to the moral problem of why God creates imperfect creatures at all. When we turn to the order of nature, we are no longer concerned with creation strictly speaking, but rather the production of creaturely accidents (T 395/H 360). In keeping with his insistence that creatures are genuine active secondary causes, as well as the demands of concurrentism, Leibniz insists that there "is nothing to prevent the creature's co-operation with God for the production of any other thing: and especially might this concern its inward operation, as in the case of a thought or a volition . . ." (T 391/H 359). But here, as before, Leibniz is once again able to insist that God's causal contribution by way of concurrence is intrinsically good, and evil only to the extent that it is in conformity with the limited activities of finite creatures. He can thus maintain that God concurs with the actions of a finite creature only insofar as "there is something of perfection in them" (*Causa Dei* 10; see also T 391/H 358f; T, preface/H 61). In the final analysis, any imperfection in God's physical concurrence is again understood along Augustinian lines as a mere privation of further perfection, and the physical problem of evil is again reduced to the moral problem of why God concurs in the imperfect actions of creatures at all.

In indicating his responses to the three central challenges facing the adoption of divine concurrentism, Leibniz provides us with a sketch of his views on the nature of divine and creaturely cooperation within the order of nature. Although we might want for more detail, nothing in that picture suggests a deep difficulty for Leibniz's general theodicy or mature metaphysics. God's cooperation with creatures within the order of nature is consistent with Leibniz's solution to what he sees as the moral and physical problems of evil. It is also consistent with Leibniz's insistence that creatures play a genuine causal role in the production of their own states through time. Leibniz is thus free to hold that just as we can imagine God creating a finite substance, but not conserving it, we can imagine God's conserving it but not concurring in the causal production of its ordinary effects. He is thus able to maintain that the ordinary production of effects within the order of nature depends not only on God's acts of creation and conservation, but also on his *concurrence* in creaturely activities. It now only remains to be considered whether or not the delicate balance Leibniz has struck is ruined by his adoption of the principle – bracketed thus far – that conservation is a continued creation.

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A Continued Creation?

So far it has been argued that none of the traditional theological doctrines concerning creaturely dependence, when considered in isolation, creates a special, or deep difficulty for Leibniz's mature metaphysics or general theodicy. But Leibniz also endorses the principle that conservation is a continued, or continuous, creation, and one might imagine that the deepest threat to Leibniz's position is to be found in that principle.³³ In assessing the danger that the continued creation principle poses for Leibniz's commitment to genuine, productive creaturely causation, it will be necessary to distinguish two readings of the principle. A weak reading, I'll suggest, is accepted by Leibniz but poses no threat to his concurrentism, while a strong reading raises greater difficulties for the postulation of secondary agents, but is explicitly rejected by Leibniz.

The weak reading of the continued conservation principle is suggested by Suarez in his own discussion of the relationship between creation and conservation. In his *Metaphysical Disputations*, he rejects the possibility that there is in general a real distinction between God's act of creating and God's act of conserving. He endorses instead the position that God not only creates and conserves through one and the same power, but furthermore that there is only a conceptual, or "rational" distinction between creation and conservation:

[C]onservation is not an action that differs from creation with respect to any reality or real mode, but rather it differs from creation only by reason of a certain connotation or implied negation – that is, it is only conceptually distinct from creation. For "creation" designates the effecting of an entity while connoting that the entity has not previously existed, whereas "conservation" designates that same effecting while connoting that the entity has already existed beforehand.³⁴

As he goes on to explain in more detail, Suarez's considered position is that – miracles and such aside – conservation is a continued creation in the sense that God creates and conserves through a single continuous act that, as it were, begins at the moment a creature comes into existence *ex nihilo* and ceases the moment that it is annihilated. The distinction between creation and conservation is thus at root a conceptual one. The term "creation" connotes the beginning of God's temporally extended act, while the term "conservation" connotes the continuation of that extended act.³⁵

Although the principle that conservation is a continued creation, as it was understood by Suarez, speaks directly only to the relationship between God's act of creation and God's act of conservation,³⁶ it might nonetheless be thought to have implications for causation within the order of nature as well. And, indeed, in his

Dialogues on Metaphysics and Religion, Malebranche famously argues that occasionalism must follow from the doctrine that “the conservation of creatures is – on God’s part – simply a continuous creation, a single volition subsisting and operating continuously.”³⁷ The core idea of the argument is expressed with some rhetorical flourish in the following passage from *Dialogue VII*:

. . . 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. Now, it is a contradiction that God wills this armchair to exist, unless he wills it to exist somewhere and unless, by the efficacy of His will, He puts it there, conserves it there, creates it there. Hence, no power can convey it to where God does not convey it, nor fix nor stop it where God does not stop it, unless God accommodates the efficacy of His action to the inefficacious action of His creatures.³⁸

At the heart of Malebranche’s argument lies the intuition that if God creates and conserves through a single continuous action, then absolutely every aspect of the world must be fully determined from “underneath” as it were by God alone, and consequently that there is literally nothing left that might be causally determined by creatures themselves. Just as I – as a created being – could have no causal influence on the location of my armchair at the first instant of creation, so too, it might be thought, I can have no causal influence on the location of my armchair subsequently to creation given that God creates and conserves through a single, continuous act that begins with creation and ends only with complete annihilation.

Although Leibniz’s wording is uniformly cautious, he is willing to accept the principle that conservation is a continued creation in the relatively weak sense proposed by Suarez (and apparently accepted by Malebranche). Thus after casting doubt on some stronger construals of the principle Leibniz writes:

What can be said for certain on the present subject is that the creature depends continually upon divine operation, and that it depends upon that no less after the time of its beginning than when it first begins. This dependence implies that it would not continue to exist if God did not continue to act . . . Now there is no reason why this conserving action should not be called production, or even creation, if one will: for the dependence being as great afterwards as at the beginning, the extrinsic designation of being new or not does not change the nature of that action. (T 385/H 355)

Similarly in an apologetic piece, entitled *De Libertate Fato Gratia Dei*, Leibniz

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asserts:

God is the conserver of all things. That is, not only are things produced by God when they begin to exist but also they would not continue to exist if not for a certain continuous action by God which terminates in them, and if this [action] ceased, they too would cease. In this way, truly, creation is nothing other than the beginning of this action. (Grua, 307)³⁹

Leibniz thus affirms the traditional motivation for the adoption of divine conservation, namely, that creatures depend as much upon God's causal activity at each enduring moment of their existence as they do at their initial moment of creation. And since, for Leibniz as well, God's actions are related to time only by an "extrinsic designation," he is able to say with the later scholastics and Malebranche that conservation is a continued, or continuous, creation, with the term "creation" connoting an initial coming into being, and term "conservation" connoting the subsequent preservation of that entity's being.

Nonetheless while Leibniz is willing to embrace a weak reading of the continued creation principle, he denies that that principle so understood in any way undermines the possible existence of genuine secondary causes. No doubt recognizing that the view that God creates and conserves through a single action is plausibly consistent with God's creating and conserving only inactive beings, he insists that there is no reason for supposing that it is not also consistent with God's creating and conserving creatures with genuine, active powers that are exercised within the order of nature:

I grant in some way . . . that God continually produces all that is real in creatures. But I hold that in doing it he also continually produces or conserves in us that energy or activity which according to me constitutes the nature of substance and the source of its modifications. And so I do not grant that God alone acts in substances, or alone causes their changes, and I believe that that would be to make the creatures totally futile and useless. (G 4:588f,⁴⁰ see also G 3:566)

Given our discussion above, Leibniz's response should come as no surprise. As we have seen, Leibniz, following a long tradition, makes what is for him an absolutely essential distinction between the order of creation/conservation and the order of nature. He maintains that God creates creatures complete with their own causal powers, concurs with them in the production of their effects, and conserves them in accordance with their essential natures and the accidents they (co-)produce. Unlike Malebranche, Leibniz is thus perfectly willing to allow that "God accommodates the efficacy of His action to the . . . action of His creatures," and so he is able to maintain that just as creaturely actions depend upon their created constitutions, God's conservation of creatures is responsive to their actions. He is thus able to maintain, as he does in a letter to Bourguet, that "When I speak of

the force and the action of creatures, I understand that each creature is presently great (*grosse*) with its future state, and that it will naturally follow a certain course if nothing prevents it . . . But I do not say for all that that the future state of the creature follows its present state without the concurrence of God, and I am rather of the opinion that conservation is a continual creation with change in conformity with order” (G III, 566).⁴¹

Perhaps Leibniz’s point can be made more salient with the help of a (necessarily imperfect) physical analogy. Mirroring the weak reading of the principle of continuous creation, it might be suggested that my freezer creates and conserves ice cubes through one and the same power.⁴² Furthermore, it might be suggested that – in the typical case at least – my freezer can be thought of as creating and conserving particular ice cubes through a single continuous action that begins when a tray of water is put in the ice box, and ends when the cubes are removed. If we think of the action of the freezer in this way, we might, of course, be willing to say that the freezer typically conserves ice cubes through a “continued creation.” But even if all of this is granted, it does not follow that the ice cubes themselves cannot be genuine efficient causes in their own right. Even though they depend at each moment of their existence on the continuous action of the freezer, nonetheless they possess their own efficient casual powers as witnessed by the fact that they can be stacked on top of one another, or support a heavy tub of ice cream, or stop a bag of frozen vegetables from toppling over. Although Leibniz holds that God’s conservation is more specifically tailored to the requirements of each entity – in scholastic parlance he holds that conservation is “special” rather than “general”⁴³ – the central point of the analogy nonetheless remains: the causal order through which creatures are created/conserved must not be confused with the order in which their own causal powers are exercised. In our toy example, the freezer “conserves” the ice cubes at every instant, but they are nonetheless able to resist deformation and penetration in virtue of their own (preserved) causal powers; in Leibniz’s examples, God conserves finite spirits at every instant, but they are nonetheless able to play a genuine causal role in the production of their own accidental modifications in virtue of their (preserved) active natures.

The situation becomes somewhat more complicated if a stronger reading of the continued creation principle is adopted. In its most extreme form the continued creation doctrine might be understood as entailing a real distinction between each instantaneous temporal “slice” of a creature, and thereby implying that in conserving creatures through some interval of time, God must literally *recreate* each individual at each instant. Although such a reading is dismissed as absurd by Suarez,⁴⁴ and firmly denied by Leibniz,⁴⁵ it might not unreasonably be thought to follow from commitments already present in the weak reading. To see this, suppose that I am

created on Monday and continue to exist for a couple of days. On any reading of the continued creation doctrine, it will be held that my existence every day of the week depends essentially upon God's actively creating or conserving me. But then surely, it will be suggested, it must be the case that God could have created me on Monday, but not conserved me on Tuesday, so Monday-me could have existed without Tuesday-me. And conversely it also seems that if God creates and conserves through the same power, God could have created Tuesday-me, without having previously created Monday-me, and so Tuesday-me could have existed without Monday-me. But that just is to satisfy the definition of a real distinction according to which *a* is really distinct from *b* if and only if *a* can exist without *b*, and *b* can exist without *a*.⁴⁶ And, of course, if the argument works in the daily case, it should work equally well for any shorter possible time segment. Starting with premises accepted by the weak reading of the continued creation principle, we thus seem to be led inexorably towards a very strong reading according to which conservation is best understood as a continuous "recreation."

In a passage that has, I think, misled Leibniz's commentators, he makes the point that even a strong reading of the continued creation principle needn't undermine the traditional concurrentist distinction between the order of creation/conservation and the order of nature. Taking a strong reading of the continued creation principle as an entertained hypothesis, Leibniz writes:

Let us assume that the creature is produced anew at each instant; let us grant also that the instant excludes all priority of time, being indivisible; but let us point out that it does not exclude priority of nature, or what is called anteriority *in signo rationis*, and that this is sufficient. The production, or action whereby God produces, is anterior by nature to the existence of the creature that is produced; the creature taken in itself, with its nature and its necessary properties, is anterior to its accidental affections and to its actions . . . God produces the creature in conformity with the exigency of the preceding instants, according to the laws of his wisdom; and the creature operates in conformity with that nature which God conveys to it in creating it always. . . . When God produces the thing he produces it as an individual and not as a universal of logic (I admit); but he produces its essence before its accidents, its nature before its operations, following the priority of their nature, and *in signo anterior rationis*. (T 388-390/H 357-358)

Leibniz's point here is, of course, really just the same one we saw him making earlier, and which we elaborated upon with the example of the ice cubes. Even if we suppose, following the strong reading of the continued creation principle, that God does not merely create and conserve through the same power, but that he continuously *recreates* individual substances at each instant, nonetheless we can still

distinguish between the order through which God creates/conserves and the causal order of nature itself. Thus, to return to our toy example, even if we imagine that the freezer continuously *recreates* the ice cubes at each instant, we can still distinguish between the freezer's action through which the ice cubes are created/conserved, and the ice cubes' action through which, say, the tub of ice cream is supported or through which the bag of frozen vegetables is prevented from falling over.

Although Leibniz is right, I think, to insist that the distinction between the order of creation/conservation and the order of nature might be preserved even on a strong reading of the continued creation principle, one might well imagine that such a reading of the principle holds more pressing dangers for his commitment to productive creaturely causation. For one might think that given such a reading there is literally no time for one stage of a created entity to contribute to the production of another stage of that entity. If, as it were, Monday-me must always fall out of existence just prior to the creation of Tuesday-me, then it would seem that Monday-me can have no more efficient causal influence on the production of Tuesday-me, than Monday-me had on its own initial production. One could, of course, still insist on an order of causal dependence within each temporal slice, distinguishing even at each instant between an essential core and its non-essential consequences.⁴⁷ Additionally, one could maintain that each temporal slice, in some sense, gives God a reason, request, or imperative for creating the next temporal slice in some particular way at the next instant.⁴⁸ Nonetheless, such a "cinematic" picture of creaturely causation seems to fall far short of Leibniz's vision of a world stuffed full of enduring substantial forms, endogenously driving entelechies, and "spontaneously" unfolding monads. Furthermore, it is clearly at odds with Leibniz's own explicit warning that "if the created substance is a successive being, like movement; if it does not endure beyond a moment, and does not remain the same (during some stated portion of time) any more than its accidents; if it does not operate any more than a mathematical figure or a number: why shall one not say, with Spinoza, that God is the only substance, and that creatures are only accidents or modifications? Hitherto it has been supposed that the substance remains, and that the accidents change; and I think one ought still to abide by this ancient doctrine . . ." (T394/H 360).

It is therefore crucial to recognize that while Leibniz is willing to engage – often respectfully – with the likes of Bayle, Weigel, and "The Cartesians," whom he takes to be lobbying for a strong reading of the continued creation principle, he nonetheless flatly rejects the view that creatures are literally "*recreated*" anew at each instant as opposed to their being conserved through an enduring act of divine creation. Frequently, Leibniz is willing to rest his rejection of the continuous *recreation* reading – as Suarez did – on its leading to what he considers to be manifest

absurdities: it leads to Spinozism (T 394/H 360; *cf.* G 4:508f/AG 160), to the conclusion that “the creature never exists, that it is ever newborn and ever dying” (T 382/H 354); to the resolution of time into moments and thereby into difficulties concerning the labyrinth of the continuum (T 383/H 354; see also Grua 330-331); to the conclusion that God is the author of sin (T 400/H 362). The texts are thus clear on at least this point: for Leibniz the thesis of continuous *recreation* must be rejected. It would therefore be misguided to shape – or reshape – our understanding of Leibniz’s views on creaturely agency in light of his supposed commitment to a view that he himself thought would reduce his metaphysics to nonsense.

Confident in the truth of his own system, Leibniz could reasonably see the absurdities that would be generated by the thesis of continuous *recreation* as so many reasons for rejecting the thesis itself as manifestly false. As his commentators, however, we might identify his essentialism as providing an especially salient ground for his resistance. The point will perhaps be clearest if we suppose – as often is supposed – that Leibniz is best read as a superessentialist.⁴⁹ On such a reading Leibniz is committed to maintaining that every predicate belonging to the complete concept of a substance must be instantiated in order for that substance to exist at all. But from this it follows that Leibniz is already committed to denying, for example, that a Caesar who never lived to cross the Rubicon, could be identical to a Caesar created too late to march on Rome, or that either could be identical to the Caesar that was, in fact, created and conserved in the actual world. Miracles and such aside, given his complete concept, when Leibniz’s God decides to create Caesar, he commits himself to an act whose effect lasts not just an instant, or even to a series of wholly independent acts each of whose effect lasts an instant, but to an act whose effect lasts for as long as Caesar endures. To paraphrase Leibniz’s response to an argument he attributes to Erhard Weigel, it is, for him, no absurdity to suppose that in positing the existence of an essence yesterday, one might thereby commit oneself to positing the existence of the same essence tomorrow (Grua 331).

Plausible weaker readings of Leibniz’s essentialism – all still remarkably strong by contemporary standards – would require one to put the point with a little more care but would hardly blunt its force. Thus if we were to read Leibniz as “merely” a strong essentialist he could grant that some relational predicates true of the actual Caesar might have been false even of Caesar himself. But even so, Leibniz would still deny that any of the predicates specifying the intrinsic properties of Caesar could have been false of Caesar himself. But that alone is sufficient to block the sort of off hand thought experiment that is likely to seem so compelling to more Humean contemporary philosophers. Even by the lights of (merely) strong essentialism we cannot assume that, having actually existed on Monday and Tuesday,

I – as opposed to someone else otherwise quite like me – could have existed for merely a day, an hour, or a second. In maintaining that each and every substance enjoys a large and robust core of essential properties, Leibniz thus affords himself the resources for resisting what might otherwise seem like an irresistible argument for continuous *recreation*.

Once two readings of the continued creation doctrine are distinguished it should be clear that it presents no insurmountable difficulties for Leibniz's considered metaphysics and theodicy. As we have seen, Leibniz accepts the principle on a weak reading according to which there is merely a conceptual distinction between God's initial act of creation and his continued act of conservation. On such a reading, the continued creation doctrine in no way undermines Leibniz's commitment to genuine creaturely activity or his solutions to the moral and physical problems of evil. A stronger reading according to which there is a real distinction between every instantaneous state of a creature would raise more serious difficulties for Leibniz's mature metaphysics and theodicy. Fortunately, however, he has good historical as well as philosophical reasons for resisting the doctrine so understood. Carefully thought through, it thus becomes apparent that the bridging principle that conservation is a continuous creation no more threatens a traditional reading of Leibniz's mature metaphysics and theodicy than do the doctrines of creation and conservation themselves.

Conclusion

It has been tempting to suppose that Leibniz's understanding of traditional theological doctrines concerning creaturely dependence are largely peripheral to the central themes of his mature metaphysics. In arguing that Leibniz's theological views seriously undermine his commitment to creaturely activity – at least as that activity has been traditionally understood – recent commentators have helpfully given the lie to any such presumption. And yet, I think, it would be rather surprising if, as has been maintained, Leibniz's mature metaphysics did not mesh fairly smoothly with the traditional theological doctrines of creation, conservation, and concurrence, or if those doctrines forced him to deny the possibility of active, productive, creaturely causation within the order of nature. For on the one hand, those traditional theological doctrines were themselves developed and crafted for the explicit purpose of reconciling divine activity with secondary causation, creaturely activity, and human responsibility. And, on the other hand, Leibniz constructed his mature metaphysics of endogenously unfolding active monads keenly aware of – and eager to meet – the demands of traditional theological dogma. In the *Theodicy*, *Causa Dei*, the “*Excursus*,” and many other works, Leibniz clearly

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indicates that he is convinced that, with sufficient care, the strands of his metaphysical and theological commitments can be neatly woven together. At least as far as the doctrines of creation, conservation, and concurrence are concerned, in this, it seems to me, he was almost certainly correct.⁵⁰

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Notes

¹ In addition to those listed by the editor, I will use the following abbreviations for Leibniz's works: *Causa Dei* = Cited by section number as given in G VI, 437-460; English translation by Paul Schrecker, ed., *Leibniz: Monadology and other Philosophical Essays* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1985) 114-145. Mon = *Monadology*, 1714, reference by section; English translation in AG 213-224. MP = Mary Morris and G. H. R. Parkinson, ed. and trans., *G. W. Leibniz: Philosophical Writings* (London: Dent, 1973). NCT = *Necessary and Contingent Truths* in Louis Couturat, ed. *Opuscles et fragments inédits de Leibniz* (Paris, 1903; reprinted Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1966); English translation in MP. R = *Malebranche et Leibniz: Relations personnelles*, ed., André Robinet (Paris: Vrin, 1955). *Summary* = "Summary of the Controversy Reduced to Formal Arguments," appendix to T, by objection number in G, vol. 6. T = text of Theodicy in G, volume 6, cited by section number.

² The apparent tension here is sometimes framed in terms of a conflict between creaturely activity and theodicy (see, for example, Robert Sleight, *Leibniz and Arnauld: A Commentary on Their Correspondence [Leibniz and Arnauld]* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990) 185. While a convenient simplification, this is somewhat misleading since, for Leibniz, the postulation of genuine creaturely activity is an essential part of his free will theodicy. It might be more helpful therefore to see the tension in terms of a somewhat more complex interaction between theological doctrine, metaphysics and theodicy.

³ See, Sukjae Lee, "Leibniz on Divine Concurrence," *The Philosophical Review* 113:2 (April 2004): 203-248; Robert Sleight, "Leibniz on Malebranche on Causality," in *Central Themes in Early Modern Philosophy*, ed. Jan Cover and

Mark Kulstad (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1990) 161-193; and Sleigh, *Leibniz and Arnauld*, 183-185.

⁴ See, Robert Adams, *Leibniz: Determinist, Theist, Idealist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994) 94-99; and Ezio Vailati, "Leibniz on Divine Concurrence with Secondary Causes," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 10:2 (2002) 209-230.

⁵ It is closely related to Leibniz's insistence on a distinction between the divine intellect and the divine will. See, for example, *Causa Dei*, 9.

⁶ Less immediately, they lay the groundwork for Leibniz's view, to which we will return to below, that creatures may have a role in their own causal development – in virtue of helping to shape their limits or modifications – even though God is in a strict sense the original, and sole, source of all that is created *ex nihilo*. See, for example, T 388/H 357f, Grua 363-5/AG 113-114.

⁷ With respect to this last suggestion, see Sukjae Lee, "Leibniz on Spontaneity: A Sketch of Formal and Final Causation," *Einheit in der Vielheit: VIII Internationaler Leibniz-Kongress, Vorträge 1. Teil*, (Hannover, 2006) 440-447.

⁸ See, for example, Francisco Suarez, *Disputationes Metaphysicae* (Salamanca, 1957) Disputation 20, section 1, paragraph 1; modern edition edited by Carolo Berton as vols. 25 and 26 of Suarez, *Opera Omnia: Novo Editio* (Paris, 1866; reprinted in two volumes at Hildesheim, 1965); available in English translation – which I have followed throughout – in *On Creation, Conservation, and Concurrence: Metaphysical Disputations 20-22*, trans. Alfred J. Freddoso (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2002). For the sake of clarity, I set aside here issues concerning "creation *ab aeterno*"; for discussion see Suarez, *Disputationes Metaphysicae*, Disputation 20, section 5.

⁹ The restriction of the power to create *ex nihilo* to God alone was more often contested in the Islamic tradition. For arguments in defense of the restriction, see Suarez, *Disputationes Metaphysicae*, Disputation 20, section 2.

¹⁰ For the sake of clarity, I set aside complications concerning miracles and such.

¹¹ Descartes alludes to this same distinction of orders in his reply to Gassendi, "When you deny that we require the continual influx of the first cause in order to be conserved, you deny something that all metaphysicians affirm as manifest, although the uneducated often do not think of it, because they only attend to the causes of coming to be [*causas secundum fieri*] and not however causes of being [*causas secundum esse*]," C. Adam and P. Tannery, eds., *Oeuvres de Descartes* (Paris: 1897-1913; reprinted Paris: J. Vrin, 1964-75) volume VII, page 369; available in English translation, John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch, trans., *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes, 2 vols.* [CSM] (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) volume 2, page 254.

¹² See, for example, Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles* [SCG] book 3, part 1, chapter 65; available in English translations in *Summa contra gentiles, trans.*, Anton C. Pegis, et. al. (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975); Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* [ST] part 1, question 104, article 1; Suarez, *Disputationes Metaphysicae*, Disputation 21, section 1.

¹³ Suarez, *Disputationes Metaphysicae*, Disputation 21, section 1, paragraph 16.

¹⁴ This simplifies matters a little in order to keep the relevant details more clearly in focus. Suarez, for example, having distinguished *per accidens* conservation and *per se* conservation, goes on to distinguish between *immediate per se* conservation (as performed by God in sustaining all creatures) and *mediate per se* conservation (as might be performed by food in contributing to the sustenance of an animal, or by oxygen in the conservation of a fire). For further details see, especially, Aquinas ST, part 1, question 104, and Suarez *Disputationes Metaphysicae*, Disputation 21, section 3.

¹⁵ Suarez *Disputationes Metaphysicae*, Disputation 21, section 3, paragraph 2.

¹⁶ Suarez *Disputationes Metaphysicae*, Disputation 22, section 1, paragraph 11.

¹⁷ Suarez *Disputationes Metaphysicae*, Disputation 22, section 1, paragraph 13; cf. Leibniz, NCT 22/MP 102.

¹⁸ Cf. DM 8/AG 40f. For a helpful introduction to the tensions between concurrentism, mere conservationism and occasionalism, see Alfred Freddoso, “God’s General Concurrence with Secondary Causes: Pitfalls and Prospects,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 52:8 (1994) 131-156; “God’s General Concurrence with Secondary Causes: Why Conservation is Not Enough,” *Philosophical Perspectives* 5 (1991) 553-585; and “Medieval Aristotelianism and the Case against Secondary Causation in Nature,” in *Divine and Human Action: Essays in the Metaphysics of Theism*, edited by Thomas V. Morris (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988) 75-118. I owe the term “mere conservationism” to Freddoso.

¹⁹ See, for example, T 30/H 140f; “Summary of Theodicy,” Objection V, G 6:383/H 384-5; *Causa Dei* 71; footnote to T 392/H 359.

²⁰ The toaster model shares with Leibniz’s boat model the danger of implying that concurring secondary causes might have only passive powers, whereas most concurrentists, including Leibniz, hold that secondary causes typically have both active and passive powers. Although the notion that the toaster is merely passive is undermined at the molecular level, one might therefore prefer a more complicated analogy that emphasizes the activity of both agents, e.g. an electrical motor which produces motion as the result of the interaction of a magnetic field and an electrical current. As long as it is recognized that Leibnizian secondary causes are active, the simpler toaster analogy should serve our purposes with minimal distraction.

Special thanks to Peter Millican for starting me thinking about electrical models for concurrence.

²¹ The boat analogy is thus most plausible if we think of the particular action that produces the speed of the boat as necessarily involving both the force of the river and the inertial “resistance” of the ship. Given his mature physics, it seems that this would have indeed been Leibniz’s understanding of the analogy. See, his *Specimen of Dynamics*, Part I, GM 6:234/AG 117-130; cf. his early *Theoria Motus Abstracti* (1671), GM VI 61f; A 6.2.261f.

²² Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones Disputatae de Potentia Dei [De potentia]*, in Raymund M. Spiazzi, ed., *Quaestiones disputatae* (Rome: Marietti, 1964-1965) question 3, article 8; available in English translation in *On the Power of God*, trans. Laurence Shapcote (London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne, 1932-1934).

²³ See, for example, Thomas Aquinas, *SCG* 3:70. For a helpful contemporary discussion, and further references, see Freddoso, “God’s General Concurrence with Secondary Causes: Pitfalls and Prospects,” 142-151.

²⁴ Grua 275/A 6.4.1382.

²⁵ As Robert Sleigh has noted, the relevant passage occurs in a report by Leibniz of a conversation with Steno, which contains a number of Steno’s arguments that Leibniz set out to refute. Sleigh attributes the argument to Leibniz partly on the grounds that it is not explicitly refuted in the report and partly on the grounds that “bluntly, it is too clever for Steno” (*Leibniz and Arnauld*) 184. Ezio Vailati, in response, has pointed out that the argument is reminiscent of one used by Luis de Molina and that, at any rate, Steno could be repeating someone else’s argument (“Leibniz on Divine Concurrence,” 223f).

²⁶ See, William Durandus de Saint-Pourçain, *In Sententias theologicas Petri Lombardi* II, dist. 1, quest. 5 (Venice, 1571; reprinted at Ridgewood, N.J., 1964) pp. 130d-131d.

²⁷ See, for example, Suarez *Disputationes Metaphysicae*, Disputation 22, section 1, paragraph 22, and Luis de Molina, *Concordia Liberi Arbitrii* (Antwerp 1595; reprint Paris 1876), Part II, Disputation 26.

²⁸ See, for example, Molina, *Concordia*, disputation 26, section 12.

²⁹ For a detailed attempt to show the compatibility of concurrentism and free choice, see especially Francisco Suarez, *Disputationes Metaphysicae*, disputation 22, section IV, paragraphs 10-39.

³⁰ See especially *Causa Dei*, sections 66-71; see also T 27/H 138.

³¹ In non-miraculous cases of course. Where God withholds his concurrence in performing what Aquinas called “*contra naturam*” miracles (*De Potentia*, question 6, article 2, ad.3), it is God’s withholding, rather than his concurring, which is presumably morally obligatory.

³² After bringing up the objection that “it is God himself who acts and who effects all that is real in the sin of the creature” Leibniz tells us, “This objection leads us to consider the *physical co-operation* of God with the creature, after we have examined the *moral co-operation*, which was the more perplexing” (T 27/H 138).

³³ See, for example, Lee, “Leibniz on Divine Concurrence,” 203f.

³⁴ Suarez *Disputationes Metaphysicae*, Disputation 21, section 2, paragraph 2; see also Aquinas *SCG* 3:1, chapter 65; *ST* part 1, question 104, ad. 4; *De Potentia*, question 3, article 3, ad 6, and question 5, article 1, ad 2.

³⁵ Suarez does, of course, allow that God *could* create and conserve a creature through distinct actions, or even (perhaps more interestingly) create and conserve a creature through the same action with an intervening gap. Nonetheless, he holds that such possibilities are neither necessary nor “connatural.” For discussion, see his *Disputationes Metaphysicae*, Disputation 21, section 2, paragraphs 6 and 8.

³⁶ In his *Disputationes Metaphysicae*, Suarez thus appropriately offers his treatment of the principle in Disputation 21, *prior* to his treatment of concurrentism in Disputation 22.

³⁷ Nicholas Malebranche, *Entretiens sur la métaphysique et sur la religion* (1711), in *Oeuvres complètes de Malebranche*, ed. André Robinet (Paris: Vrin, 1958-84), Vol. 12, Dialogue 7, chapter 10; English translation from Nicholas Jolley and David Scott, *Dialogues on Metaphysics and on Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). See also, Nicholas Malebranche, *Méditations Chrétiennes et Métaphysiques* (OM/10/49-52) cited in Sleight, *Leibniz and Arnauld*, 185.

³⁸ Malebranche, *Entretiens sur la métaphysique et sur la religion* (1711), Dialogue 6, chapter 10.

³⁹ *Deus est conservator omnium rerum. Hoc est non tantum res cum existere incipient a Deo producuntur, sed etiam non continuarent existere, nisi continua quaedam Dei action ad ipsas terminaretur, qua cessante ipsae quoque cessarent. Ita ut revera creation nihil aliud sit quam huius actionis initium.*

⁴⁰ Passage cited and translated by Adams, *Determinist, Theist, Idealist*, 95.

⁴¹ *Quand je parle de la force et de l'Action des Creatures, j'entends que chaque Creature est presentement grosse de son etat future, et qu'elle suit naturellement un certain train, si rien ne l'empêche . . . Mais je ne dis pas pour cela que l'estat future de la Creature suive de son etat present sans le concours de Dieu, et je suis plutôt dans le sentiment que la conservation est une creation continuelle avec un changement conforme à l'ordre.*

⁴² One obvious imperfection of the analogy, of course, is that even very fancy freezers do not create ice cubes *ex nihilo*.

⁴³ See *Causa Dei*, 11-12. For discussion of Leibniz's commitment to concurrentism being immediate and special, see Vailati, “Leibniz on Divine Concurrence with

Secondary Causes,” 219-222.

⁴⁴ See Suarez, *Disputationes Metaphysicae*, Disputation 21, section 2, paragraphs 3-7, and Disputation 21, section 1, paragraph 16.

⁴⁵ See, for example, Grua 330-1.

⁴⁶ Cf. Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy*, part 1, section 60 in *Oeuvres de Descartes*, volume VIII A, pages 28f; available in English translation, Cottingham, Stoothoff, and Murdoch, *CSM*, volume 1, page 213.

⁴⁷ See Adams, *Determinist, Theist, Idealist*, 97-98.

⁴⁸ See Lee, “Leibniz on Divine Concurrence,” 220-225.

⁴⁹ For a helpful discussion and overview of Leibniz’s essentialism, as well as, for further sources, see J. A. Cover and John O’Leary-Hawthorne, *Substance and Individuation in Leibniz* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) chapter 3.

⁵⁰ I would like to thank Paul Hoffman, Yitzhak Melamed, Alan Nelson, Alison Simmons and John Whipple, as well as participants of *The Mid-West Seminar in Early Modern Philosophy* at the University of Chicago, and *The New England Colloquium in Early Modern Philosophy* at Yale University for their helpful feedback on this paper.