

BROADENING THE HORIZON OF OCCASIONALISM: FROM METAPHYSICS TO SCIENCE

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Christian HENKEL*

Occasionalism: From Metaphysics to Science is an anthology published by *Brepols* in 2018 studying occasionalism, i.e., “the view that natural events are mere occasions for the exercise of the only real and effective causal power, i.e., God’s power [...]” (p. 7). It aims at providing a “detailed map of [the] complex landscape” (p. 16) of debates about occasionalism, particularly in the seventeenth century. Besides an introduction, the book consists of four parts: I. *God and the World*, II. *Causality and the Laws of Nature*, III. *Minds and Bodies*, and IV. *Malebranche Reconsidered*.

In the introduction, the editors Matteo Favaretti Camposampiero, Mariangela Priarolo, and Emanuela Scribano introduce the reader to the complicated and complex history of (the reception of) occasionalism. Occasionalism has oftentimes been seen as a threat to the Aristotelian-Christian philosophy of the schools. However, occasionalism is a “genuine philosophical offspring of monotheism” (p. 7), not only compatible with Christian belief but perhaps a better candidate to support it philosophically than other philosophical doctrines. Furthermore, despite its earlier neglect, occasionalism was successfully revived in early modern times as a counterpart both to “pagan” Aristotelian philosophy and Renaissance vitalism, which is a particularly interesting thought. Far from being just an *ad hoc* fix to the interaction problem of mind and body encountered by Descartes, occasionalism was motivated by a multiplicity of reasons that scholars have only lately become aware of. Talking about “occasionalisms” instead of “occasionalism” as if it were a unified doctrine would hence be more appropriate and better suited to reflect the diversity of occasionalist thought.

Part I of this book discusses the two arguments thought to establish whole-scale occasionalism (i.e., occasionalism in all realms of reality): the no necessary connection argument (NNC) and the argument that conservation is but continuous creation (CCC).

In the first chapter (*God’s Qudra (Power) and Natural Causality: Between Falsafa and Islamic Occasionalism*), Cecilia Martini Bonadeo discusses CCC with regard to Islamic speculative theology, and the role NNC plays in al-Ghazali’s anti-Aristotelian or anti-Avicennian philosophy. The main focus is on the latter. Bonadeo presents the scholarly debates about al-Ghazali. Furthermore, she reveals al-Ghazali’s

* University of Groningen, Oude Boteringestraat 52, 9712 GL, Groningen, The Netherlands. E-mail: c.k.r.henkel@rug.nl

argumentative strategy in favour of NNC including his anticipation of counter-arguments.

In next chapter on *Continuous Creation and Cartesian Occasionalism in Physics*, Tad M. Schmaltz discusses the Leibnizian reading of CCC in terms of continuous *recreation*. This reading is supposed to establish occasionalism. While Leibniz ascribed this reading to Bayle, Schmaltz shows that the actual history is more complex than that. According to some interpretations, both Descartes, La Forge and Malebranche seem to have conceived of CCC in this way. Schmaltz takes issue with these interpretations on various grounds, but leaves the reader puzzled as to how to best to understand CCC.

Sukjae Lee in *Conservation as Continuous Creation: Just like Creation but not Necessarily Recreation* clarifies matters Schmaltz had left unclear. Lee engages with a paper by Winkler (2011) wherein the latter argued in favour of understanding CCC in Malebranche in terms of continuous recreation. In contrast, Lee thinks CCC is better understood as continuous maintenance of the world by God. Creation and conservation of the world are qualitatively identical. God willed the world to exist at the beginning and by default He wishes the world to persevere by the same volition.

Concluding this part, Andrea Sangiacomo in *Neither with Occasionalism nor with Concurrentism: The Case of Pierre-Sylvain Régis* shows how Régis does not opt either for occasionalism nor for concurrentism, be it in its Thomist, Durandist, or Jesuit form. Against the occasionalists, Régis maintains that secondary cause are real causes. Against the concurrentists, Régis maintains that secondary causes are not *per se* causes. Sangiacomo elucidates Régis' own position of understanding secondary causes as instrumental causes by situating him in the complex context of positions on causation available at Régis' time.

Part II of this book deals with the relation between occasionalism and laws of nature.

In the fifth chapter of the book (*Force de Loi: The Debate on the Laws of Nature and Malebranche's Occasionalism*), Mariangela Priarolo discusses Malebranche's conception of laws of nature. She traces the roots of this conception back to Aquinas who located laws of nature in the realm of creatures and their respective operations. Suárez developed further this idea inspired by Matri. Malebranche eventually unified aspects accentuated in both Aquinas and Suárez to consolidate his case in favour of occasionalism.

In the next chapter dealing with *Malebranche and the Janus Faces of Law*, Nicolas Jolley argues in favour of a minimalist reading (in contrast to a traditional reading) of Malebranche's occasionalism according to which God does not operate on a case by case basis but following simple and general laws. Jolley shows that taking laws of nature either as being prescriptive (the older sense of laws) or as descriptive (the new sense of laws *à la* Descartes) is compatible with a minimalist reading of occasionalism. If this is the case, however, one might wonder how the analysis of laws of nature that Jolley deems necessary to studying occasionalism could possibly shift the burden of proof in debates about occasionalism.

Part III discusses the role of occasionalism in discussions about the interactions between the mind and the body.

Sandrine Roux in her *Des trois notions primitives à Dieu: Le problème corps-esprit chez La Forge et chez Cordemoy* shows in how far considerations about the interactions between both bodies and minds as well as among bodies influenced the development of La Forge's and Cordemoy's occasionalism. In contrast to Descartes for whom no interaction problem existed and who took the mind-body union to be a simple notion intelligible by common experience, La Forge and Cordemoy found the interaction between two such radically different substances as the mind and the body problematic – though not more problematic than the interaction among bodies. As such, an interaction problem broadly conceived motivated occasionalist developments in La Forge and Cordemoy.

In the next chapter on *La Forge's Mind-Body Problem: A Guide for the Perplexed*, Steven Nadler analyses la Forge's commitment to occasionalism. While la Forge's case in favour of body-body occasionalism is uncontroversial, Nadler shows that questions can be raised concerning mind-body and intramental occasionalism. On the one hand, la Forge seems to maintain that the mind is an active substance (following Descartes). On the other hand, this conviction appears problematic given the use of the CCC argument to establish occasionalism which would seem to rule out active mental substances other than God, and hence be proving too much. Over time, la Forge appears to have adopted different positions on the role of the mind, and its causal status.

Matteo Favaretti Camposampiero in his *The Direction of Motion: Occasionalism and Causal Closure from Descartes to Leibniz* investigates the change of direction account according to which the soul acts on the body by changing the body's motional direction though not its motive force. Leibniz ascribed this account to Descartes. While this is subject to discussion, it is certainly an essential part of both interactionist and occasionalist accounts of followers of Descartes. Favaretti analyses the integration of this account in the case of Clerselier, Regius, Clauberg (on the interactionist side), and La Forge and Cordemoy (on the occasionalist side). Favaretti shows that Leibniz was essentially correct in blaming this account for violating the principles of physical causal closure of the world. Favaretti ends by looking at the aftermath of the debate over this account in Wolff.

Part IV is dedicated to the most prominent proponent of occasionalism: Nicolas Malebranche (1638 – 1715).

In the tenth chapter of the book (*The Motivation of Malebranche's Occasionalism*), Thomas M. Lennon argues that in contrast to Cartesians such as La Forge, Cordemoy, perhaps Clauberg, and Régis, Malebranche's occasionalism was motivated not by metaphysical but by theological concerns revolving around his conception of divine providence. Lennon places Malebranche's account of providence in the context of his controversy with Arnauld and shows the proximity and divergence of Malebranche's view with regard to Fénelon. According to Lennon, occasionalism for Malebranche is motivated by an essentially determinist conception of divine providence and grace. Malebranche saw the roots of his account in the doctrine of St. Augustine.

In the next chapter (*Extensions du domaine de l'occasionalisme: Les miracles de l'Ancien Testament et la distribution de la grâce dans le "Traité de la nature et de la grâce" de*

Malebranche), Denis Moreau shows that Malebranche's occasionalism is operative on all levels of reality: the physical, the psycho-physical, the purely psychological (i.e., the natural), as well as the realm of miracles and grace (i.e., the supernatural). Moreau focuses on the latter two dimensions which have been neglected by scholars of Malebranche. He explains that in the case of miracles, angels function as occasional causes; in the case of grace Jesus Christ (and humans) function as occasional causes. Occasional causes being spread out in the natural and supernatural world diversify God's workings who acts by simple and general volitions only.

In the final chapter of the book (*Connaissance et causalité: Les adversaires de Malebranche*), Emanuela Scribano focuses on Malebranche's use of the *Quod nescis argument* in order to refute the pagan divinisation of nature he saw in Renaissance and early modern vitalist philosophers, but especially medical doctors. The *Quod nescis argument* holds that to count as a cause necessarily implies knowledge of how to cause. Since finite agents notoriously lack this kind of knowledge, they fail to qualify as causes thus establishing occasionalism. Scribano identifies Jean Fernel as the immediate target of this argument in Malebranche, to be more precise, Fernel's platonised understanding of Galen's *De Foetuum Formatione* in Fernel's own *De abditis rerum causis* (1548).

Overall, *Occasionalism: From Metaphysics to Science* presents a broad spectrum of different facets of occasionalism. It covers the most noteworthy occasionalist philosophers situating them in their respective historical, philosophical and discursive contexts. Its focus is on early modern philosophy, to wit, the relationship between occasionalism and natural philosophy. It opens up new areas of scientific research, such as *inter alia occasionalism* as an opposition to Renaissance vitalism; the relationship between occasionalism and Platonism, the connection between occasionalism and debates about laws of nature, occasionalism and its connection to the natural and supernatural world.

If there is anything to criticise it might be that this anthology leaves out discussions about occasionalism in medieval times among authors, such as Gabriel Biel or Nicolas of Autrecourt, and that it almost entirely brackets discussions about as well as the reception of occasionalism throughout the 18th century and outside France. It would have been interesting to see, for instance, how occasionalism fares in competition with other causal theories, such as pre-established harmony, and physical influx, in, say, 18th century Germany.