

# Kant's Theory of Divine and Secondary Causation

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(Draft: comments welcome)

In this paper I intend to discuss Kant's theory of God's relation to the causality of created beings—'secondary' causality, as it is traditionally known. Kant's main contributions to a venerable debate on this issue can be approached along two intersecting metaphysical axes. One issue to which his early work in particular devotes considerable attention is the character of God's contribution to cosmological relations among created entities. Kant's precritical writings develop a distinctive model of this divine contribution as a component of an interactionist cosmology whose targets include Leibniz's preestablished harmony and Malebranche's occasionalism. A second and related problem occupying Kant throughout his life is the mode of divine causal activity in nature more generally—the general division of causal labor between God and created beings. The central question he faces here is the traditional one for a theistic metaphysics: How does the activity of God viewed as primordial creator and conserver of the world relate to the causal activity, if any, of created beings? Kant accepts the position of many predecessors that a theory of God's causal role in the *ordinary* course of nature is a prerequisite of any coherent metaphysics of miraculous interventions. His own evolving account of this role is shaped by his ongoing engagement with three competing theories of divine causation distinguished in late scholastic philosophy and vigorously debated in the modern period by Malebranche and Leibniz.

The first of these theories is *occasionalism*, whose full-fledged version holds that God is the *only* true cause, solely responsible for all effects in nature. There is no genuine secondary causation at all according to occasionalism—God produces everything in nature by his own power, and finite substances and states count as causes only in the attenuated sense of providing occasions for God to act and produce effects in accordance with his own decrees. Malebranche, the most influential occasionalist of the modern period, maintains that "the nature or power of each thing is nothing but the will of God ... all natural causes

are not *true* causes but only occasional causes.”<sup>1</sup> Occasionalism is not an innovation of the modern period—earlier strains of it are seen in medieval Islamic thought in response to tensions between Aristotelian essentialism and scriptural accounts of miracles.<sup>2</sup>

Another theory of divine causation Freddoso labels *mere conservationism* (conservationism) is associated by Suarez, Malebranche and Leibniz with the fourteenth century Dominican theologian Durandus of St. Pourçain. On this view, immediate divine action in the ordinary course of nature is limited to God’s action in conserving created beings in existence. These conserved beings are regarded as capable of producing effects through their own powers without any additional divine action. In contrast to occasionalism, mere conservationism thus treats finite substances as genuine causes of natural effects and their actions as their own and not God’s actions.

*General concurrence* (concurrence) is a third theory of divine and secondary causation widely endorsed in late scholastic theology and the early modern period. It agrees with conservationism and occasionalism that finite substances depend completely for their existence on God’s creative and conserving action. It sides with conservationism against occasionalism in holding that there is genuine secondary causation. But concurrence claims that production of any effect whatsoever by creatures requires a divine action going beyond their mere conservation. The view holds in particular that God must also act as immediate co-cause of every naturally-produced effect through a cooperation or concurrence with the creature’s powers, one in which neither causal contribution alone suffices to elicit the effect. Concurrentism thus posits a more intimate and extensive divine involvement than conservationism in the production of natural effects, while opposing the occasionalist conclusion that God does everything and creatures nothing.

While Kant rejects occasionalism throughout his life, his objections to occasionalist arguments are not always explicitly spelled out. Identifying these objections is thus one task

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<sup>1</sup> *Oeuvres complètes de Malebranche [OCM]*, ed. André Robinet (Paris: Vrin 1958–84), vol II, p. 312; translated in *The Search for Truth and Elucidations of the Search for Truth [Search]*, trans. Lennon and Olscamp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 448.

<sup>2</sup> See D. Perler and U. Rudolph, *Occasionalismus. Theorien der Kausalität im arabisch-islamischen und im europäischen Denken* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000); Steven Nadler, “‘No Necessary Connection’: The Medieval Roots of the Occasionalist Roots of Hume,” *The Monist*, 79 (1996): 448–466.

in evaluating his own position. Kant's contributions to the concurrence/conservation dispute are also at the heart of his mature theory of divine causation. In spite of their significance for his theory of grace, these contributions have gone more or less unexamined.<sup>3</sup> One reason for the neglect is that medieval and modern debates on concurrence and conservationism were until recently poorly understood. Freddoso's influential scholarship on the late medieval concurrence debate has advanced our understanding of the issue in the modern context. Freddoso points out that mere conservationism was not, as one might expect, the default position for medieval opponents of occasionalism.<sup>4</sup> Conservationism was rejected as philosophically and theologically deficient by nearly all scholastic participants in the divine causation debate. It continued to be regarded as suspect well into the modern period—it is rejected by Leibniz and dismissed by Malebranche as “untenable in every respect.”<sup>5</sup> Common objections included the claim that conservationism issues in a deistic metaphysics failing to respect the absoluteness of creaturely dependence, and also that it is incompatible with Christian orthodoxy on grace. Kant's German predecessors generally follow Leibniz in rejecting conservationism in favor of concurrence. Kant himself, while heavily influenced by this theological tradition, rejects concurrence in favor of conservationism. One question this raises is whether his departure signifies sympathy for the more deistic position with which conservationism was traditionally associated.

The paper begins by investigating Kant's early response to an influential occasionalist argument proceeding from premises regarding creation and conservation close to his own

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<sup>3</sup> The manner of God's concurring action in the ordinary course of nature is traditionally treated separately from the metaphysics of grace and miraculous interventions. See Francisco Suarez S.J., *Metaphysical Disputations* [DM] 22, sect. 4, para. 11, translated in Suarez *On Creation, Conservation, and Concurrence: Metaphysical Disputations* 20–22, trans. A. Freddoso (St. Augustine's Press: South Bend, Indiana, 2002); also Leibniz, *Causa Dei*, in Gerhardt, C. I., *G. W. Leibniz: Die philosophischen Schriften*, [G] 7 vols. (Berlin, 1875–90), G VI, 440.

<sup>4</sup> See Freddoso, “God's General Concurrence with Secondary Causes: Why Conservation is not Enough”, *Philosophical Perspectives* 5 (1991), 553–585; “Medieval Aristotelianism and the Case against Secondary Causation in Nature,” in Morris, Thomas V. (ed.), *Divine and Human Action: Essays in the Metaphysics of Theism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), and “God's General Concurrence with Secondary Causes: Pitfalls and Prospects,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, 67(2) (1994): 131–156.

<sup>5</sup> Malebranche, OCM III, 243; *Search* 680.

views. Sections two and three turn to his early stance in the conservation/concurrence debate, and his early division of divine action into the ordinary and miraculous. A familiar narrative emphasizes Kant's increasing discontentment with the metaphysics of the schools in the period leading up to the critical turn. Its influence has tended to obscure his insistence from the 1760s on that some divine interventions in nature are probably *necessary*. This neglected doctrine is rooted in a major shift in his metaphysics of agency at this time with consequences for his subsequent approach to divine and secondary causation.

Section four considers the evolution of Kant's thought on divine causation into the critical period, focusing on his opposition to concurrentism. Examination of the arguments reveals that Kant's conservatism is not motivated by a rejection of theistic orthodoxy regarding the absoluteness of creaturely dependence. The metaphysical continuity with Kant's earlier theory, particularly from the 1760s, is another finding. There is reason to conclude that the most significant milestone in the development of his critical theory of divine causation lies not in the transition from pre-critical to critical philosopher but in an earlier one from necessitarian to libertarian on human agency. The notion that the critical philosophy just dispenses with or forbids metaphysical theorizing regarding God's relation to creaturely causes nevertheless remains widespread. It is best dispelled by attending to Kant's own writings, which display no scruples about insisting on the correctness of a particular model of the relation. This makes it necessary to examine how the proposed model relates to transcendental idealism, and particularly how its correctness can be affirmed in the face of critical strictures on knowledge.

## **I Creation, Conservation and Secondary Causation**

Kant's early writings subscribe to a pluralistic substance metaphysics presenting God as creator and conserver—*Urheber und Erhalter*—of all finite existence through his will, and the ontological ground of possibility itself through his understanding. This theme of ontological dependence is prominent throughout his early writings. It finds expression in a claim that “whatever exists, whether it is possible or actual, is only something insofar as it is given through God” (*Only Possible Proof*, Ak. 2:151). In particular, Kant accepts the view of Descartes, Malebranche and Leibniz that finite substances do not depend on God merely

at the moment of their creation. The contingency of finite substances is held to entail complete dependence on divine conserving activity subsequent to creation. This conservation Kant describes as “actuation of continued existence,” as opposed to creation as first “production of the world” (Ak. 28:1307, R4792, R6173). His early thought does not reject an orthodox Christian view of the universe as of finite age and its creation as an event in time.<sup>6</sup> While his mature idealism demands a different understanding of creation, he continues in mature works to describe his metaphysical position as ‘theism,’ and to defend the doctrine of creation (*Practical Reason*, Ak. 5:101–2; *Danziger Rationaltheologie* (1783–4), Ak. 28:1299; R 6173). He also continues to describe created entities as “only perduring through a continuous *actum divinum* [...] as much power as was required for the creation of substances is needed for their conservation” (*Pölitz Religionslehre*, Ak. 28:1104; cf. *Nova Dilucidatio*, Ak 1:414).

The strong emphasis on the ontological dependence of creatures in Kant’s early and mature writings raises questions about his lifelong opposition to occasionalism. The opposition is not itself in doubt.<sup>7</sup> Created substances are presented in his earliest works as subsistent entities endowed with active and passive forces causing an array of effects in nature.<sup>8</sup> What is not so obvious is how Kant proposes to respond to Malebranche’s

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<sup>6</sup> “[T]he remaining part of the time sequence of eternity is always infinite and the part already flown by is finite ... Creation is never completed. Though it did begin once, it will never end.” *Universal Natural History* (1755), Ak. 1:314.

<sup>7</sup> For early affirmations of realism regarding secondary causation, see *True Estimation*, Ak 1:17–22, 142; *Universal Natural History*, Ak 1:234; *Nova Dilucidatio*, 1:411–2, 415; *Physical Monadology*, Ak. 1:480; *Prize Essay*, Ak. 2:287; *Dreams of a Spiritseer*, Ak. 2:324, 343; *Inaugural Dissertation*, Ak. 2:397, 409. See Eric Watkins’ detailed discussion of Kant’s early causal realism in *Kant and the Metaphysics of Causality*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), chaps. 1–2.

<sup>8</sup> Kant rejects Descartes’ definition of substance as a “thing which so exists that it needs no other thing in order to exist” (*Principles* I, 51) on the usual grounds that it invites a short argument to Spinozism (ML<sub>2</sub>, Ak. 28:563–4; *Pölitz Religionslehre*, Ak.1104–5). Baumgarten, whose textbook Kant used in lectures, proposes as a definition applying univocally to God and creatures; “a being which can exist without being a determination of another” [*Ens, quod potest existere, licet non sit determinatio alterius*] (preface to *Metaphysica*, 1742, reprinted in Ak. 17:8–9). Kant accepts the ‘first subject’ requirement—but not the suggestion that the mere possibility of existing as first subject suffices: “substance is that which exists *only* as subject...when some opine that substances could also exist as inherent things [*als Inhärenzen*]*—this is incorrect*” Ak. 28:563.

argument that the ontological dependence of creatures already forces acceptance of an occasionalist model of God's relation to secondary causes. One of Malebranche's most influential arguments for global occasionalism rests on the principle that divine conservation amounts to continuous creation. This ('CCC') principle is rooted in the idea, accepted by Aquinas, Suarez, Descartes, Leibniz and Kant, that the ontological dependence of finite substances subsequent to creation remains such that they would immediately cease to exist were God to withdraw his conserving support. Such lack of existential inertia is presented as an immediate correlate of creaturely contingency, and it motivates an account of creatures' conservation as metaphysically symmetrical with creation. As Leibniz explains, "the dependence [of creatures] being as great in the sequel as in the beginning, the extrinsic denomination, of being new or not, does not change its nature" (*Theodicy* 385, cf. 27).<sup>9</sup>

One of Malebranche's central arguments for occasionalism sets out from this idea. It begins with the claim that God cannot create a body—in his example a chair—"without at the same time willing that it exist either here or there and without His will placing it somewhere."<sup>10</sup> The idea here is that creation requires the fixing of some or other complete set of properties—it is impossible for God to create a chair 'in general.' Since the created entity did not exist prior to its creation, Malebranche concludes that its *esse* and initial properties must be entirely fixed by God at the moment of creation, leaving nothing undetermined to be caused by the created entity at that instant. He then generates the

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<sup>9</sup> Compare Descartes, "All the time of my life can be divided into parts, each of which is entirely independent of the others, so that from the fact that I existed a short time ago, it does not follow that I ought to exist now, unless some cause as it were creates me again in this moment, that is, *conserves* me. For it is quite clear to anyone ... that the same power and action are needed to preserve anything at each individual moment of its duration as would be required to create that thing anew if it were not yet in existence. Hence the distinction between preservation and creation is only a conceptual one, and this is one of the things that are evident by the natural light" (Third Meditation, AT VII 48–9; CSM II 33); also Suarez, *Metaphysical Disputations* 22.1.16; Malebranche, *Entretiens sur la métaphysique et sur la religion* (1688), *Entretien* VII, in *OCM* XII, 156; translated in N. Jolley and D. Scott (ed.), *Dialogues on Metaphysics and on Religion [Dialogues]* (Cambridge: CUP, 1997), 112.

<sup>10</sup> *Entretien* VII, in *OCM* XII 156; *Dialogues* 112. For discussion of De La Forge's earlier version of the argument, see Dan Garber, "How God Causes Motion," *Descartes Embodied* (Cambridge: CUP, 2001), 209–10.

occasionalist conclusion by extending the argument to all created entities and generalizing it using *CCC* to all times:

*Creation does not pass*, because the conservation of creatures is—on God’s part—simply a *continuous* creation, a single volition subsisting and operating continuously. Now God can neither conceive nor consequently will that a body exist nowhere, nor that it does not stand in certain relations of distance to other bodies. Thus, God cannot will that this armchair exist, and by this volition create *or conserve* it, without situating it here, there, or elsewhere. It is a contradiction, therefore, for one body to be able to move another. (OCM XII 160, *Dialogues* 115–6)

The final sentence adds to the thought that there is nothing left undetermined at creation by God the idea that the creature cannot modify or override God’s creative choices. Kant offers no explicit response to this argument, though his writings exhibit familiarity with Malebranche.<sup>11</sup> On one interpretation, he might be taken as rejecting Malebranche’s extension of the claim that God does everything and creatures nothing beyond the instant of creation. While Leibniz, Wolff, Baumgarten and Meier accept the *CCC* principle on which this extension rests, some Kantian texts suggest resistance.<sup>12</sup> On the one hand, he affirms even into the critical period that “there is no distinction between creation and conservation with respect to God; since in God’s case we cannot distinguish beginning and continuation. It is one act; a distinction is made only in the world” (*Danziger Rationaltheologie*, Ak. 28:1308). The same transcript continues, however, by warning that conservation “cannot be

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<sup>11</sup> For early references to Malebranche’s occasionalism and doctrine of vision in God, see *Nova Dilucidatio*, Ak. 1:415; *Metaphysik Herder*, Ak. 28:887; *Dissertation*, Ak. 2:410; R 4275. Acquaintance with *De la recherche de la vérité* is evident in *Logik Philippi* (1770–1), Ak. 24:337; *Logik Busolt* Ak. 24:613.

<sup>12</sup> Leibniz writes that conservation by God “consists in the perpetual immediate influence which the dependence of creatures demands. This dependence attaches not only to the *substance* but also to the *action*, and one can perhaps not explain it better than by saying with theologians and philosophers in general that it is a *continued creation*” (*Theodicy* §27). He later qualifies the claim somewhat, writing that “the production of *modifications* has never been called creation [...] God produces substances from nothing, and the substances produce accidents by the changes of their limits” (§§395–96). Compare Wolff, “*Quoniam actio conservationis et creationis quoad Deum minime differunt; conservatio continuata creatio est.*” *Theologia Naturalis*, §845; Baumgarten, “[...] *unde conservatio non male dicitur continuata creatio*” *Metaphysica* §951; also G. F. Meier, *Metaphysik*, Dritter Teil (Halle 1757), §1023.

called *creatio continua*, because creation is the production of the *ortus* or beginning. A continuous beginning is contradictory. We cannot make any concept of it.” (Ak. 28:1308).<sup>13</sup> Given the initial affirmation of symmetry, it is not clear whether Kant’s qualification denies that the symmetry is sufficiently robust for Malebranche’s purposes. Such denial would not have been unprecedented. While the CCC principle finds broad support in eighteenth century Germany, Leibniz already records some opposition (*Theodicy* §382). In Kant’s day, the principle is rejected by Crusius, a major influence on his early thought.<sup>14</sup>

Another, and I think more promising, approach to Kant’s early rejection of Malebranche’s occasionalist conclusion views him as rejecting the argument’s premise that God does everything and creatures nothing even at the instant of creation. Malebranche rests this key move on an intuition that “only He who gives being could give the ways of being, since the ways of being are nothing but beings themselves, in this or that fashion” (*OCM* XI 160).<sup>15</sup> Leibniz’s response must be viewed as relevant given Kant’s explicit acknowledgment of his influence on his earliest causal realism (*True Estimation*, Ak. 1:17–21). Leibniz maintains that CCC can be affirmed and yet occasionalism averted by marking distinct orders of causation within a single instant:

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; and yet all these things are in being in the same moment. 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. The limitations and imperfections arise therein through the nature of the subject, which sets bounds to God’s production; this is the consequence of the original imperfection of creatures. (*Theodicy* 388)

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<sup>13</sup> An undated handwritten note in Kant’s copy of Baumgarten’s *Metaphysica* likewise asserts that “a continuous beginning is a contradiction” (R3688; cf. *Metaphysik Dohna*, Ak. 28:702).

<sup>14</sup> Crusius’s objection appeals to lack of insight into God’s activity: “We cannot understand the internal character of the divine actions, and so it is not justified when the divine action by which the world continues to exist is identified with that with which it is created and conservation called continuous creation.” *Entwurf der Nothwendigen Vernunftwahrheiten* (Leipzig, 1745), §329.

<sup>15</sup> Translated in *Treatise on Ethics* [*Treatise*] Walton, C. (trans.) (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1993), 160.



The role of a similar non-temporal ‘priority of nature’ in Kant’s mature thought supports the conclusion that he endorses a similar response to Malebranche. His doctrine of the ideality of time combines with continued commitment to a theistic framework to demand appeal to non-temporal causal orderings. Later discussions of divine providence, for example, criticize German terms for such activity—*Vorsehung*, *Vorsorge*—as “misleadingly infected” with connotations of time (Ak 28:1110). Early writings also support the conclusion that Kant endorses Leibniz’s response to Malebranche’s argument. He describes attractive and repulsive forces as essential to matter—thus must regard them as operative upon its existence (*Universal Natural History*, Ak. 1:230). Kant also upholds an early division of creation into aspects whose dependence on God is “through the mediation of the order of nature” and those “independent of that order.” The existence or alteration of anything in the first class is “sufficiently grounded in the forces of nature,” meaning that these are its “efficient cause” (*Only Possible Proof*, Ak. 2:103–4).

Kant accepts throughout his life the traditional theological view that God’s creative and conserving action cannot be delegated; he thus rejects the idea that finite substances could depend merely mediately on God.<sup>16</sup> He does not mean to deny that creatures depend on each other in various ways. Medieval and modern debates on conservation distinguish ways in which creatures’ existence can depend on each other—for protection, sustenance, omission of destructive acts, and so forth—from the kind of “bottom-up” conservation seen as God’s prerogative alone. Suarez describes this latter activity as a “persisting influx or inpouring of the very *esse* communicated through the [creature’s] production.”<sup>17</sup> While the immediate ground of substance in divine conservation is thus God alone, Kant’s early works consistently describe *states* or accidents of substances as having immediate ‘real grounds’ in finite substances themselves: “The substrate of substances [*das substantiale*] contains the

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<sup>16</sup> “God doesn’t concur in the *existence* of [finite substances]; since these substances contribute nothing to their own continued existence, thus cannot contribute as co-causes to their own conservation; for otherwise they would be independent of him.” *Religionsphil. Volckmann*, Ak. 28:1208. Compare Leibniz, *Theodicy* §249.

<sup>17</sup> Suarez, *DM* 21.3.2. Compare G. F. Meier, *Metaphysik: Dritter Teil* (Halle 1757) §1024. See Freddoso, *God’s General Concurrence*, 564.

first real ground of all inhering accidents” (*Herder Metaphysik*, Ak. 28:25; cf. *True Estimation*, Ak. 1:17–21; *Universal Natural History*, Ak. 1:230; *Nova Dilucidatio* Ak. 1:415; *Physical Monadology*, 1:480). In this respect, his early thought follows self-consciously in the metaphysical tradition of Leibniz’s pluralistic dynamism.

## II Kant’s Early Theory of Divine Action: Conservation or Concurrence?

Kant thus thinks it possible to resist Malebranche’s inference that God as sole giver of being in creation and conservation must therefore also be the sole source of ‘the ways of being.’ His early works subscribe instead to a version of Leibniz’s view that God causes the existence of substances, while these substances are ‘real grounds’ of their states. Though Kant’s early model of the relation of divine and secondary causation acknowledges its Leibnizian debt, it would be rash to identify their positions. For one thing, Kant consistently rejects the preestablished harmony in favor of interactionism.<sup>18</sup> What is far less clear is whether he ever accepts Leibniz’s position that states or accidents of substances in the ordinary course of nature depend immediately on God. As noted, this is a key point dividing proponents of general concurrence from mere conservationists. Leibniz rejects the view of Durandus that “God creates substances and gives them the force they need; and thereafter he leaves them to themselves, and does nothing but conserve them, without aiding them in their actions.” He insists instead that “the perpetual immediate influence which the dependence of creatures demands ... attaches not only to the substance but also to the action” (*Theodicy* 27; *Causa Dei* G VI, 440).

In rejecting conservationism, Leibniz notes that the view “apparently met with disapproval in the writings of Pelagius” (*Theodicy* 27). He seems to sympathize with a traditional theological motivation for concurrence according to which the absoluteness of divine sovereignty favors a theory viewing God as immediately involved in all aspects of the world. Suarez describes as his ‘best’ argument for concurrence the idea that “this manner of acting *in* and *with* all agents pertains to the breadth of the divine power”

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<sup>18</sup> “An aggregate of substances doesn’t yet amount to a world, rather, the causal interaction (*commercium*) of substances first produces a world” (Ak. 28:212). See *True Estimation* (1747), Ak. 1:22–23; *Nova Dilucidatio* (1755), Ak. 1:410–12; *Inaugural Dissertation* (1770), Ak. 2:407–8.

(*Disputatio* 22.1.13). As Freddoso explains, the central thought here is simply that “theistic naturalists should be antecedently disposed to countenance in nature the *maximal* degree of divine activity compatible with the thesis that there is genuine secondary causation.”<sup>19</sup> Leibniz’s language in staking out a middle ground between occasionalism and conservationism in the *Discourse on Metaphysics* suggests sympathy for this traditional motivation. He writes that “it is rather difficult to distinguish the actions of God from those of creatures; for there are some who believe that God does everything; others imagine (*d’autres s’imaginent*) that he does nothing but conserve the force that he has given to creatures” (DM §8)

While Kant’s later works explicitly reject the doctrine of concurrence on grounds yet to be examined, it is not so clear where his early thought stands with respect to it. He is perhaps most plausibly read as sympathetic to the doctrine if we accept Robert Sleight’s interpretation of Leibniz’s model of divine concurrence. On this interpretation, Leibniz views concurrence as a kind of divided effort in which “God produces whatever there is of perfection in the states of creatures; creatures produce whatever there is of limitation in their own states.”<sup>20</sup> The model is suggested by a number of texts discussing the ‘author of sin’ problem. The problem is how God as sovereign creator, conserver and providential lord of creation can avoid authorship of creatures’ sins. Leibniz’s response appeals to a favorite analogy of a boat whose motion results from the combination of its own inertia and the river’s current. The inertia is meant to correspond to the creature’s negative contribution to its states by virtue of its ‘natural imperfection,’ the current to God’s production of the perfection or reality in those states. Leibniz explains that “the current is the cause of the boat’s movement, but not of its retardation; and [by analogy] God is the cause of perfection in the nature and the actions of the creature, but the limitation of receptivity of the creature is the cause of the defects in its action” (*Theodicy* §30).<sup>21</sup> On this model, God produces

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<sup>19</sup> Freddoso, *God's General Concurrence*, 577.

<sup>20</sup> Robert C. Sleight, *Leibniz and Arnauld: A Commentary on Their Correspondence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 185.

<sup>21</sup> “[J]e me suis servi dans les Essais de l’exemple d’un bateau chargé, que le courant emporte d’autant plus tard que le bateau est plus chargé. On y voit clairement que le courant est cause de ce qui est positif dans ce mouvement, de la perfection, de la force, de la vitesse du bateau, mais que la charge est cause de la restriction

what is positive or real in creatures, while sins and imperfections flow from the ‘original limitation’ of creatures’ natures and are imputable to them rather than to God. The model treats states of finite substances as well as the substances themselves as immediately dependent on God. Leibniz writes that, “in acting [as well as existing], all things depend on God, since God concurs in the actions of things insofar as these have some degree of perfection, which at least must come from God” (*Causa Dei*, G 6, 440).

Kant’s early (though not mature) works accept a similar solution to the problem of the author of sin, and this might be taken as indicating early sympathy for concurrentism. Writings of the 1750s follow Leibniz in tracing moral evil to intellectual limits of creatures leading them to favor the worse above the better. Sinful actions are described as ‘infallibly’ ordained by creatures’ natures. Imputability of actions is nevertheless upheld on the grounds that acting freely requires only doing what one desires “with consciousness” (*Nova Dilucidatio*, Ak. 1:403). Kant adds that the imperfection of creatures entails no imperfection on God’s part, because “God’s creative act is limited according to the nature of the limited being to be produced”—*Limitata enim est actio Dei creatrix, pro ratione entis limitati producendi* (*Nova Dilucidatio*, Ak. 1:406). Given Kant’s consistent rejection of occasionalism, it may be tempting to infer that his early proximity to Leibniz on the authorship of sin indicates sympathy for divine concurrence interpreted along the lines proposed by Sleigh.

Such an inference should, I believe, be resisted. For one thing, Kant’s early writings never explicitly assert that states of creatures in the ordinary course of nature depend immediately on God. His formulations appear designed to express a view of creatures’ forces as sole immediate causes of their states. Furthermore, it is not clear that he understands Leibniz’s model of divine concurrence along Sleigh’s proposed lines. The interpretation of divine concurrence upheld by followers of Leibniz and later attacked by Kant looks different, as we will see. Adams has suggested that passages in which Leibniz describes creatures as mere fountains of imperfection and God as the source of all that is real in their states seem to be focused more on issues of theodicy than the general metaphysics of divine and secondary causation. Other Leibnizian texts suggest different approaches to

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de cette force et qu’elle produit la tardité.” *Mémoires de Trévoux*, July 1712, reprinted in G 6, 348; also, *Causa Dei* G 6, 450.

concurrence, and as Adams points out, Sleigh's general model seems difficult to square with Leibniz's view that creatures as well as God possess *active* as well as passive forces.<sup>22</sup>

Discussions of transeunt causation in Kant's early work offer further support for the conclusion that he belongs in the conservationist camp from the beginning. Relevant discussions set out from a key premise that the existence of finite substances does not yet entail cosmological relations among them—"finite substances stand by virtue of their mere existence in no relation to each other" (*Nova Dilucidatio*, 1:412).<sup>23</sup> This is meant as a rejection of Leibniz's view that substances can belong to one world simply by existing with suitably harmonious intrinsic states.<sup>24</sup> Kant claims instead that real causal relations are required for genuine cosmological unity, while dismissing what he labels a 'vulgar' interactionism on which the mere existence of finite substances suffices for the existence of these causal relations. His proposal holds that the possibility of causal bonds underwriting cosmological connection rests on a special divine act. He concludes that God could connect finite substances in discrete groups, giving rise to discrete actual worlds.<sup>25</sup> The notable

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<sup>22</sup> Adams, *Leibniz: Determinist, Theist, Idealist* (New York: OUP, 1994), pp. 94–98. Sleigh concedes that "there appears to be a tension between what we might call Leibniz's metaphysical exposition of creaturely action and what we might call Leibniz's theological exposition of creaturely action. On the deism-occasionalism scale, the former seems to be located near the deism end, the latter closer to the occasionalism end." *Leibniz and Arnauld*, p. 185.

<sup>23</sup> "It is not necessary to [a substance's] existence that it should stand in connection with other things" *True Estimation* 1:22 (1749); "Composition is only a relation for these [substances] and therefore only a contingent property, which can be removed without affecting their existence" *Physical Monadology*, 1:477 (1757). For recent discussions, see Rae Langton, *Kantian Humility*, pp. 115–121; Watkins, *Kant and the Metaphysics of Causality*, 141–160. Hogan 2005, chap 1.

<sup>24</sup> "An aggregate of substances doesn't yet amount to a world, rather, the causal interaction (*commercium*) of substances first produces a world" (Ak. 28:212). Compare *True Estimation* (1747), Ak. 1:22–23; *Nova Dilucidatio* (1755), Ak. 1:410–12; *Inaugural Dissertation* (1770), Ak. 2:407–8.

<sup>25</sup> "The possibility that, had it pleased God, there might be a number of worlds, even in the metaphysical sense, is not absurd" (*Nova Dilucidatio*, Ak 1:414); "It is really possible, even when taken in a strict metaphysical sense, that God has created many millions of worlds; therefore it is undecided whether they really exist or not" (*True Estimation*, Ak. 1:22). The claim is distinct from Newton's idea that "God is able ... to vary the laws of nature and make worlds of several sorts in several parts of the universe." *Opticks* (London, 1704), Query 31.

point here is his consistent classification of this divine connecting act with God's *conserving* activity:

The schema of the divine understanding, the origin of existences, is an enduring act (it is called *conservation [conservatio]*); and in *that act*, if any substances are conceived by God as existing in isolation and without any relational determinations, no connection between them and no reciprocal relation would come into being. If, however, they are conceived as related in God's intelligence, their determinations would subsequently always relate to each other for as long as they continued to exist in conformity with this idea. That is to say, they would act and react (*Nova Dilucidatio*, 1:414)

Kant's descriptions of this connecting act sometimes have a voluntarist ring—he says it is “obviously arbitrary on God's part and can therefore be omitted or not omitted at his pleasure” (*Nova Dilucidatio*, Ak. 1:414). Langton infers that his early doctrine of cosmological connection treats intrinsic facts about finite substances as “not constrain[ing] relational facts *in any way*.”<sup>26</sup> The claim that the mere existence of substances does not entail their cosmological connection is not however the claim that intrinsic states of such substances do not constrain their relations if connected. In Langton's terms, Kant does reject the proposition that if a certain causal relation *R* holds between finite substances then these substances instantiate certain intrinsic properties, such that necessarily, if they exist with those properties, *R* must hold between them. This is a weaker result than Langton supposes, however, since it is compatible with the proposition that substances if connected must be connected in one way only—by means of a certain law, say, or one of a fixed number of laws. That is, Kant's early endorsement of a divine *libertas contradictionis* with regard to cosmological relations, God's freedom to create or omit them, is not an endorsement of an unconstrained *libertas contrarietatis* in this regard—a complete lack of constraint of things' relations by their intrinsic properties.<sup>27</sup> This becomes very clear in Kant's doctrine that harmony of the intrinsic forces of finite substances is required for their

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<sup>26</sup> *Kantian Humility*, 119

<sup>27</sup> Langton interprets Kant's mature doctrine of the unknowability of the thing in itself as asserting the inscrutability of intrinsic states of things affecting us. This inscrutability is derived from Kant's supposed view that relations of substances are unconstrained by their intrinsic properties.

connection to be possible (*True Estimation*, Ak. 1:25; *Herder Metaphysik*, Ak 28:51–3).<sup>28</sup> In contrast to a picture on which causal relations float entirely free of intrinsic properties, his early model of cosmological connection has more in common with a jigsaw puzzle. Though the puzzle might be left undone, intrinsic features of the pieces constrain how they could be connected.<sup>29</sup>

The significance of this for Kant’s early position on conservationism and concurrence is straightforward. His early metaphysics ascribes an essential role to intrinsic forces of finite substances in making their connection possible, but he never takes the opportunity to describe this as a creaturely *concurrence* with God’s activity in connecting them. Kant’s language suggests the conservationist’s clean division of labor between God and creature. He locates the possibility of transeunt causation in the representation of interdependence in God’s understanding and then locates particular transeunt effects in created substances which “act and react” (1:414). This suggests a view of God as ground of the possibility of transeunt influence by virtue of the conserving/connecting act, and of creatures as sole causes of actual transeunt effects. This reading agrees with the *Dissertation’s* description of God’s act of cosmological connection:

The connection which constitutes the essential form of a world is seen as the principle of the *possible* influences of the substances which constitute it. For *actual* influences do not belong to the essence but to the state, and the transeunt forces [of creatures], which are the causes of [actual] influences, suppose some principle [i.e., God’s act] by which it may be possible that the states of several things, the subsistence of each of which is nonetheless independent of the

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<sup>28</sup> Kant claims that physical influx between substances presupposes a harmony of the laws in accordance with which they could act and ‘receive effects’ from without. The doctrine is discussed by Karl Ameriks, ‘The Critique of Metaphysics: Kant and Traditional Ontology,’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Kant*, ed. P. Guyer (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 262; Watkins 2005, 153–4; Hogan 2005, 58–60. There is a potential conceptual difficulty in Kant’s earliest explanation of intrinsic harmonizing forces as a function of distance at which substances act, since he describes space as first given by their connection. See Böhme, *Die Abhängigkeit der Raumauffassungen Kants*, Ph.D. Diss, Leipzig 1914, 9–11; Hogan 2005, 54–61.

<sup>29</sup> The analogy is imperfect, since there is an attractive middle ground between Langton’s interpretation on which intrinsic features exert *no* constraint on substances’ relations and a jigsaw model treating these features as removing most or all leeway regarding connection. Kant’s doctrine of cosmological connection subsequently backs away from a voluntarist element, by suggesting that God *must* connect substances with the right intrinsic features—though this connection is still said to require interaction (*Inaugural Dissertation*, Ak 2:409).

others, should be mutually related to one another as states determined by a ground (*Inaugural Dissertation*, Ak. 2:390)

While a conservationist position is strongly suggested here, it is explicitly affirmed in later works. Before turning to a closer examination of the motivations and mechanics of Kant's mere conservationism in the critical setting, it is necessary to say something about his early position on immediate divine action outside of the ordinary course of nature.

### III Supernatural Action in Kant's Early Philosophy

The conclusion that Kant's early thought embraces a consistent conservationism might seek to draw further support from his defense in the *Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens* (UNH) (1755) of a mechanistic cosmogony seeking to derive the large scale structure of the cosmos "from the simplest state of nature through mechanical laws alone" (*Universal Natural History*, Ak. 1:234). The slogan of this early work is, "Give me only matter and I will build you a world out of it" (Ak. 1:230). It sets out from the hypothesis of a primordial distribution of matter endowed with essential forces of attraction and repulsion in an infinite space. Kant does not extend his explanation of natural order to organisms, rather asserting that we are incapable of understanding these on mechanical grounds (Ak. 1:230). Neither does he show any sympathy for materialism, insisting on the "infinite distance" between mind and matter (Ak. 1:355).<sup>30</sup> The work does however present the operation of both minds and matter as both natural and determined. Mechanistic evolutionism is juxtaposed with Leibniz's spiritual determinism in the claim that "the same unlimited fruitfulness of nature has brought forth the inhabited celestial globes as well as the comets, the useful mountains and the harmful crags, the habitable lands and empty deserts, the virtue and the vice" (Ak. 1:347).

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<sup>30</sup> This point is rightly emphasized by Ameriks, *Kant's Theory of Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 88–9; cf. Schönfeld, *Philosophy of the Young Kant*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) 119.



The work's central project is to advance mechanism beyond Newton's conclusion that celestial motions require periodic 'reformation' through immediate divine action.<sup>31</sup> Another aim is to argue that theism is strengthened rather than undermined by acceptance of a fully mechanistic cosmology in which natural forces produce all regularity and order in the universe (Ak. 1:331). Kant rejects the idea that miracles are necessary for cosmological order as suggesting a conception of God as mere 'architect' of a world wrestling with recalcitrant pre-existing matter—a 'refined atheism' [*feineren Atheismus*] his early and mature writings associate with Greek thought (*Only Possible Proof*, Ak. 2:122; *Danziger Rationaltheologie*, Ak. 28:1308). He complains that on such a conception, God is, "while great, yet not infinite, while powerful, yet not all-sufficient" (*Universal Natural History*, Ak. 1:223, 333). The proposal that created natures rather than "God's immediate hand" effect harmony and order is described as supporting rather than undermining theism and the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. The central argument here is that acknowledgement of nature's capacity to produce all order in the world supposedly directs us to the ontological dependence of essence itself on God (Ak. 1:333, 336).<sup>32</sup>

While the *Universal Natural History's* rejection of miraculous interventions might seem suggestive of conservationism, considerable caution is required. Contemporary concurrentists including Leibniz and Wolff also tightly limit miraculous interventions, distinguishing God's general concurrence as prerequisite of *all* natural order and interventions which violate this order.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Newton describes it as "unphilosophical to pretend that [orbital motion] might arise out of a Chaos by the mere Laws of Nature." He proposes that God "being in all Places, is more able by his Will to move the Bodies within his boundless uniform Sensorium, and thereby to form and *reform* the Parts of our own Bodies." *Opticks* (New York: Dover, 1952), Query 31, p. 402.

<sup>32</sup> "How would it be possible for things of different natures to produce such excellent harmonies and beauty in connection with each other ... for the benefit of things which in are in a sense outside the realm of dead matter, namely the uses of men and animals, if they did not have a common origin, an infinite intellect in which all things were designed in respect of essential properties?" (*Universal Natural History*, 1:225; cf. *Only Possible Proof*, Ak. 2:112). Kant however rejects creation of the eternal truths in favor of Leibniz's view that essences are grounded in God's understanding. Here I pass over his confused proposal that the ontological dependence of essence on God should help ensure that miracles are rarely necessary for cosmological order.

<sup>33</sup> *Discourse on Metaphysics* [DM] 16 offers a theory of miracles as not exceeding the forces encoded in substantial forms of created things: "God's extraordinary [i.e. miraculous] concurrence is included in that which

The claim that nature's ability to produce order testifies to a divine ground of possibility remains prominent in Kant's writings of the 1760s, but his position on divine action in nature undergoes a shift of considerable importance for his mature theory of divine causation. His *Only Possible Proof* of 1763 develops a theistic proof from the idea that "it is only because God exists that anything else is possible at all" (Ak. 2:112).<sup>34</sup> The work includes a summary of the earlier *Universal Natural History*, whose print run had been mostly destroyed. The later discussion extends Kant's critique of supernatural explanations, now described as impeding human understanding by "imposing a reverential silence upon reason in its enquiries" (Ak. 2:122). What has been generally overlooked is that this methodological critique is accompanied by a new claim that miraculous interventions are probably *required* for the purposes of providential control. Kant explains as follows:

The alterations which occur in the world are either necessary, and necessary in virtue of the initial order of the universe and of the laws of nature, both general and particular—and everything which takes place mechanically in the corporeal world is of this character—or, alternatively, these same alterations possess, notwithstanding, an inadequately understood contingency—a case in point being the actions which issue from freedom and of which the nature is not properly understood. Changes in the world of this latter kind, in so far as they appear to have about them an indeterminacy in respect of determining grounds and necessary laws, harbor within themselves a possibility of deviating from the general tendency of natural things towards perfection. And, for this reason, it can be expected that *supplementary supernatural interventions may be necessary*, for it is possible that the course of nature, looked at in this light may on occasion, run contrary to the will of God. (*Only Possible Proof*, Ak. 2:210–1)

As the passage indicates, the argument rests on an underlying shift to a libertarian theory of agency. Many texts testify to Kant's conversion by the mid-1760s to a robustly libertarian metaphysics.<sup>35</sup> He now describes the non-determined character of human agency as

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our essence expresses, for this expression extends to everything." These miracles "are always in conformity with the universal law of the general order, even though they may be above the subordinate maxims." For discussion of divine actions excluded from this sense of 'miracle,' see Adams, *Leibniz* chap. 2.

<sup>34</sup> The argument is already sketched in the 1755 *Nova Dilucidatio* (Ak. 1:395), and is obviously influenced by Leibniz's claim that God contains not only the source of existences, "but also of essences in so far as they are real, that is, [God is] the source of what is real in the possible" *Monadology* #43.

<sup>35</sup> For some discussion of this shift see my 'Noumenal Affection,' *Phil. Review* 118, pp. 517-8

grounds to assume that miracles will be required for God's perfect providential control. In one text from this period, he bluntly asserts that harmony of free acts with providential purposes "will *not* be fully possible through the order of nature"—thus "one must admit" some extraordinary direction (*Reflections on Religion* 1760–64, R8081, Ak. 19:617).<sup>36</sup> It is significant that Kant continues to assert that providential control may require supplements to nature even into the critical period:

There is nothing at all impossible in the thesis that in a best world natural forces should from time to time require immediate divine cooperation in order to achieve certain important ends...Who dares to be so presumptuous as to claim to cognize the possibility that God can achieve everything He has planned for the world through general laws without any extraordinary direction?...Such exceptions from the rules of nature may be *necessary* on the grounds that God wouldn't otherwise be able to achieve many important ends *via* the normal course of nature. We must however be careful about desiring to determine whether such extraordinary intervention occurred *in this or that instance*." (*Poelitz Religionslehre*, Ak. 28:1112; cf. *Religion* Ak 6:85n; *Religionsphilosophie Volckmann*, 28:1215).

Kant's methodological prohibition on supernatural explanations is thus supplemented from the 1760s with a metaphysical thesis that full providential control may demand miraculous supplements to the ordinary course of nature. Subsequent criticisms of supernatural explanations are carefully formulated to agree with the metaphysical thesis.<sup>37</sup> This finding can help resolve a long-standing puzzle regarding his earliest motives for transcendental

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<sup>36</sup> Kant may be influenced here by his libertarian contemporary Crusius, who offers the same argument: "Since there are in the world infinitely many free acts which on account of their freedom do not follow in accordance with any rule of physical predetermination, it cannot be understood how the mechanical edifice of the world which must by its nature always respect the same rules could be set up so that it would agree everywhere with all of these free acts and divine intentions, without further spontaneous directing on God's part." *Entwurf der Nothwendigen Vernunftwahrheiten* (Leipzig, 1745), §341.

<sup>37</sup> "It is a well-known rule of philosophers or rather of common sense in general that nothing is to be regarded as a miracle or supernatural event unless there are weighty reasons for doing so. This rule implies firstly that miracles are *rare*; and secondly, that the whole perfection of the universe can in conformity with the will of God and in accordance with the laws of nature be attained without *many* supernatural influences" (*Only Possible Proof*, Ak. 2:108). Discussions of Kant on miracles often fail to distinguish his methodological and metaphysical theses regarding such interventions. Schönfeld's long discussion, for example, asserts that Kant's view has "sharpened into a criticism of miracles" by the 1760s (*Philosophy of the Young Kant*, p. 111).

idealism. Textual evidence strongly indicates that the antinomy of freedom and empirical determinism was a major motive in the doctrine's emergence. But this conclusion has also faced a major hurdle stemming from the causal principle's status in the 1770 *Inaugural Dissertation*, the work in which the ideality of space and time is first proposed. The *Dissertation* describes the principle that "all things in the universe in happen in accordance with the order of nature" as a merely regulative principle of philosophical enquiry (*Dissertation* §30, Ak. 2:418). Commentators have been understandably inclined to conclude Kant does not yet claim a priori knowledge of the causal principle in the empirical realm.<sup>38</sup> The puzzle is then how an antinomy of freedom and determinism could have motivated the emergence of his idealism, as the broader evidence strongly indicates.<sup>39</sup>

A simple solution presents itself in light of the discussion above. The *Dissertation's* regulative principle of philosophical enquiry is followed with a warning that we cannot demonstrate "the impossibility or the very slight hypothetical possibility of *supernatural events*," but should remember that "hasty appeal to supernatural events is the cushion of a lazy understanding" (Ak. 2:418). This is plainly a reiteration of Kant's methodological prohibition on supernatural explanation. That prohibition does not however compete in his mature philosophy with the *KrV's* doctrine that determinism is constitutive of empirical order, or with his metaphysical thesis that some divine supplements to nature may be necessary to maintain providential control. The *Dissertation's* merely regulative principle of philosophical enquiry can thus be taken simply as a reminder of Kant's warning that we could never know miraculous interventions to have occurred in 'this or that instance.' Since this does not conflict with the claim that appearances are known as deterministically ordered, it becomes possible to interpret him as already committed to this doctrine in the *Dissertation* itself. Indeed, the work explicitly associates knowledge of causal laws with a priori representations of space and time. Kant asserts that "pure mathematics deals with

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<sup>38</sup> Compare Paul Guyer's discussion of the passage in his *Kant and the Claims of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 19–20.

<sup>39</sup> According to a famous note, the antinomies first led Kant to his mature idealism: "I saw this system as though in a twilight. I tried in all seriousness to prove propositions and their opposites, not in order to construct a skeptical philosophy, but because I suspected an illusion of the understanding—to discover, wherein it was concealed. The year '69 gave me great light" (Ak. 18:69, compare Kant's 1798 letter to Garve, Ak. 12:257; also R6353; R6344, R6349, *Nachlass*, Ak. 20:235).

space in geometry and time in pure mechanics,” and that “all observable events in the world, all motions and all internal changes necessarily accord with axioms which can be known about time” (Ak. 2:397, 402). Broader evidence indicates that the principles here associated with a priori intuition are viewed as imposing deterministic order in nature.<sup>40</sup>

#### IV Mere Conservatism in the Critical Philosophy

Readers of the first *Critique* have often regarded the work as limiting all discussion of causality to the empirical realm, thus as rejecting metaphysical theorizing regarding God’s relation to secondary causes. Historically, this reading has been heavily influenced by the work’s doctrine that theoretical knowledge of causal relations rests on categories of cause-effect and community “containing the ground of the possibility of all experience in general from the side of the understanding” (B 167–8). Kant’s restriction of theoretical causal knowledge to a transcendently ideal domain of experience in which the categories play a constitutive role is not, as it turns out, a rejection of supersensible causation. The ‘unschematized’ category of causation—the category in abstraction from conditions of its empirical application—is said to allow for the supersensible application required by his theory of freedom, doctrine of noumenal affection and moral theology (A 88/B 120, B 166–7, A 254/B 309; *KpV* Ak. 5:55–57, 134–141).<sup>41</sup> It has nevertheless remained the case that the

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<sup>40</sup> Kant holds by the late-1760s that the PSR holds in the empirical realm (R4007, R4012, R4172, R4174, R4225). He also follows Leibniz and Wolff in associating a priori cognizable laws of motion with physical determinism: “Neither through a miracle nor through a spiritual being can a motion be brought about in the world without producing just as much motion in the opposite direction, thus in accordance with the laws of action and reaction... Motions cannot begin by themselves, nor through something which wasn’t itself in motion; and freedom and miracles are not to be met with *among the phenomena*” (R5997, 1780s). Kant’s claim here is not that miracles and absolute freedom are impossible but that they must operate in a way consistent with a priori principles of experience—in particular with mechanical laws.

<sup>41</sup> See esp. Benno Erdmann, *Kants Kritizismus in der ersten und zweiten Auflage der Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (Leipzig, 1878), 44–47, 73–74; Erich Adickes, *Kant und das Ding an Sich*, (Berlin: Pan Verlag Rolf Heise, 1924), 4–12, 28–37, 50–1; cf. James Van Cleve, *Problems from Kant* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 137; Robert M. Adams, “Things in Themselves,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, (Dec 1997): 820–1; Hogan, ‘Noumenal Affection,’ *Phil. Review* 118, pp. 501–532.

*KrV*'s epistemic strictures and its attack on traditional theistic proofs are commonly understood as simply dismissing debates on God's relation to secondary causes of such importance to Descartes, Malebranche, Leibniz and Berkeley.

Perhaps the most efficient way to dispel this misunderstanding is by turning to the positive theory of divine and secondary causation proposed and defended in Kant's critical writings. The *KrV* describes as one of its central aims the "destruction of the roots of materialism, fatalism and atheism" (Bxxxiv). Kant explains in a 1790 letter that his philosophical efforts, "so far concerned with critique, are by no means intended to work against the Leibniz-Wolffian philosophy [...] but are rather intended to lead this philosophy through a roundabout route [...] to the same end, but only through the combination of theoretical philosophy with the practical—an intention that will become clearer if I live long enough to put metaphysics into a coherent system, as I plan to" (*Correspondence*, Ak. 11:186). A late summary of his thought argues that "the ultimate purpose, to which the whole of metaphysics is directed" lies in addressing the questions of the existence of God, the freedom of the will and the immortality of the soul (*Progress*, Ak. 20:260). Kant's moral arguments serve this purpose, and the "practico-dogmatic metaphysics" they ground is held to vindicate "reason's proper claim to knowledge [*Erkenntniß*] of the supersensible" on combined practical and theoretical grounds (*Progress*, Ak. 20:310).<sup>42</sup> Writings and lectures from the critical period remain heavily engaged with the rationalist theology of the German schools. In particular, Kant continues to debate the metaphysics of divine and secondary causation under Baumgarten's headings of creation, conservation, concurrence and omnipresence. He also commits himself to a positive account of such causation, as we will see. The philosophical theology of the critical period is accurately summarized by Wood as the product of a mind "fundamentally unable to conceive of the human situation except

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<sup>42</sup> "It was not until the moral laws unveiled the supersensible in man, namely freedom ... that reason made proper claim to knowledge of the supersensible [*gerechten Anspruch auf Erkenntniß des Übersinnlichen*], though only when confined to its use in the latter [practical] capacity" (*Progress* 20:310); "Transcendental philosophy, the doctrine of the possibility of a priori knowledge as such [...] has as its purpose the founding of a metaphysics envisaging as an aim of pure reason the extension of the latter from the limits of the sensible to the field of the supersensible" (*Progress*, 20:272–3; cf. B xxviii; *Practical Reason*, 5:121–148; *Judgment*, 5:469).

theistically, and unable to conceive of God in any terms except those of the scholastic-rationalist tradition.”<sup>43</sup>

The central question to be addressed here is how the critical philosophy can insist upon a positive account of God’s relation to secondary causes in light of critical epistemological strictures. It is helpful to examine Kant’s reasoning on an issue-by-issue basis. His continued rejection of occasionalist models of divine and secondary causation in the critical period appeals in part to the very epistemological strictures sometimes assumed to exclude all transcendent theorizing. The *Critique of Judgment* describes occasionalism in the terms the pre-critical philosophy uses in rejecting explanatory appeals to miracles as “imposing a reverential silence upon reason in its enquiries” (Ak. 2:122). Kant presents occasionalist explanations as *ad hoc*, a charge he also levels against Cartesian and Crusian theories of a priori knowledge resting on supposed divine illumination. One might respond that it is one thing to reject a priori justifications resting on purported divine illumination, quite another to rule out a positive noumenal model of causation. There is nevertheless a straightforward sense in which Kant’s rejection of occasionalism and divine illumination expresses the one preference for broadly naturalist explanation, where this naturalism is explicitly held to exclude occasionalism as a theory of the relation of noumenal and empirical reality.<sup>44</sup> Practical grounds also play an important part in the opposition to occasionalism. Kant clearly accepts Leibniz’s view that creaturely agency presupposes the rejection of

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<sup>43</sup> *Kant’s Rational Theology* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), 17. An important debate in the early twentieth century asked whether Kant’s mature theology requires a ‘conservative-metaphysical’ or admits of a ‘fictionalist’ reading. Vaihinger admits that Kant affirms the transcendent existence of God as the metaphysical reading asserts, but sees a tension with another account of God as mere rational fiction subserving theoretical and practical ends (*Die Philosophie des Als Ob*, 1911, 10th ed. 1927). Adickes’ patient analysis of Vaihinger’s textual case reaches the verdict that there is “not one single passage which can and should be interpreted fictionally [i.e., as incompatible with the metaphysical reading] when examined systematically in narrower or wider context, as duty clearly demands” (*Kant und die Als-Ob Philosophie*, 1927, 290).

<sup>44</sup> Kant writes, “If we assume occasionalism for the production of organized beings, then all *nature* in this production is lost entirely [...] We may therefore assume that *anyone who is at all concerned to do philosophy will not adopt this system.*” *Judgment*, Ak. 5:422. Compare the rejection of Crusius’s ‘preformation’ theory of a priori knowledge at Ak 10:130 (1772); A 92/B 125–6; Ak. 4:319; R 4473.

occasionalism and the reality of secondary causation.<sup>45</sup> His moral philosophy makes heavy appeal to powers and forces, struggles and obstacles. Virtue itself is defined as “moral disposition in the struggle [*Kämpfe*]” to obey the law, and elsewhere described as “the deployment of one’s forces [*Kräfte*] in the observance of duty” (*Practical Reason*, Ak. 5:84; *Religion* 6:201; *Metaphysics of Morals*, Ak. 6:484). Kant’s mature philosophical theology is intended as a moral theology, and this already provides reason to reduce live options for God’s relation to secondary causes to versions of conservationism and concurrence.<sup>46</sup>

Kant’s rejection of divine concurrence in favor of conservationism in critical writings provides further instructive illustration of his combining of epistemological, practical and conceptual arguments to justify a positive metaphysics of supersensible causation even against the backdrop of his critical strictures. I will focus in what follows on his arguments against Leibniz and German followers on the issue of divine concurrence. Several objections to concurrence repeated often in texts from the critical period are summarized in a footnote to the late *Perpetual Peace* essay. Kant writes:

As for the concept, current in the schools, of a divine intervention or collaboration (*concursum*) toward an effect in the sensible world, this must be given up. For to want to pair what is disparate (*gryphes iungere equis*) and to let what is itself the *complete* cause of alterations in the world supplement its own predetermining providence (which must therefore have been inadequate) during the course of the world, is first, self-contradictory. For example, to say that, next to God, the physician cured the illness, and was thus his assistant in it, is in the first place self-contradictory. For *causa solitaria non iuvat* [a solitary cause does not assist]. God is the author of the physician together with all his medicines and so the effect must be ascribed *entirely* to him, if one wants to ascend all the way to that highest original ground, theoretically incomprehensible to us. Or one can ascribe it *entirely* to the physician, insofar as we follow up this event as

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<sup>45</sup> Leibniz argues that Malebranche’s occasionalism leads directly to Spinozism; it makes “created things disappear into mere *modifications* of the one divine substance, since that which does not act [...] can in no way be substance” (*On Nature Itself*, G IV 515, AG 166–7). Compare Kant’s definition of *nature* “the connection of the determinations of a thing according to an *inner principle of causality*” (A 419–20/B 466–7), and his claim that “if we assume occasionalism for the production of organized beings, then all *nature* in this production is lost entirely” (*Critique of Judgment*, Ak. 5:422).

<sup>46</sup> There remains room, of course, for a Cartesian-style multiplication of occasionalist and realist causal models in body-body, mind-body (etc.) cases. Kant’s pre-critical philosophy stands in the tradition of Leibniz’s rehabilitation of substantial forms in upholding metaphysical continuity between spiritual and physical causation. We will see that the critical philosophy does propose different models of God’s causal relation to free and determined causes, though both models are anti-occasionalist.



belonging to the order of nature and as explicable in terms of the order of nature, within the chain of causes in the world. *Second*, such a way of thinking [concurrentism] also does away with all determinate principles for appraising an effect. But from a *morally practical* point of view (which is thus directed entirely to the supersensible), as, e.g., in the belief that God, by means incomprehensible to us, will make up for the lack of our own righteousness if only our disposition is genuine, so that we should never slacken in our striving toward the good, the concept of a divine *concursum* is quite appropriate and even necessary; but it is self-evident that no one must attempt to *explain* a good action (as an event in the world) through this *concursum*, which is a futile theoretical cognition of the supersensible and is therefore absurd. (*Perpetual Peace*, Ak. 8:361n)

In speaking of concurrentism as ‘current in the schools,’ Kant does not refer to Aquinas or Suarez but to proponents of the theory in the German rationalist tradition including Leibniz, Wolff, Baumgarten and Meier.<sup>47</sup> One objection above, that concurrence “does away with all determinate principles for appraising an effect,” reprises the familiar methodological rejection of supernatural explanation. Suarez and Leibniz describe divine concurrence as necessary for production of every effect in nature and can therefore respond that parity of reasoning should lead to the rejection of creation and conservation. It is important to emphasize that Kant refuses to take such a step; he continues to affirm creation and conservation as essential components of his practical-dogmatic theism. The *Critique of Practical Reason* asserts that the proposition that “God as universal original being is the cause also of the existence of substance [is] a proposition that can never be given up without also giving up the concept of God as the being of all beings and with it his all-sufficiency, on which everything in theology depends” (Ak. 5:101–2).<sup>48</sup>

Kant’s continued commitment to the doctrine of creation in the critical period calls for an account of the creative act consistent with his critical metaphysics. His official doctrine is that creation is non-temporal and directed at underlying noumena rather than phenomena. He writes that “if existence in time is only a sensible way of representing things which belongs to thinking beings in the world and consequently does not apply to them as things in themselves, then the creation of these beings is a creation of *things in themselves*, since the concept of a creation does not belong to the sensible way of representing existence or

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<sup>47</sup> Leibniz, *Theodicy* 27–32; Christian Wolff, *Theologia Naturalis Methodo Scientifica Pertractata* (Frankfurt and Leipzig, 1736) §875; Alexander Baumgarten, *Metaphysica* (Halle, 1757) §§ 954–59; Georg Friedrich Meier, *Metaphysik Dritter Teil* (Halle 1757) §§1027–28.

<sup>48</sup> Compare *Danziger Rationaltheologie* (1783–4), Ak. 28:1104, 1299; R 6173

causality but can only be referred to noumena” (*Practical Reason*, Ak. 5:102). Kant rejects Baumgarten’s description of creation and conservation as a causal ‘influx,’ reserving this term for production of properties rather than substrates (*Poelitz Religionslehre*, 28:1107). Mature discussions of creation and conservation barely differ from those of pre-critical writings. The concept of God is now described as “merely thinkable” from the perspective of theoretical reason alone—it is “assertorically declared to have a real object [only] because practical reason indispensably requires this existence for the possibility of its absolutely practically necessary object, the highest good, and theoretical reason is thereby justified to assume it” (*Practical Reason*, 5:134). The most prominent metaphysical difference between pre-critical and critical accounts of creation concerns the non-spatiotemporal character of the substratum created and conserved in the later theory. Regarding the relation between created noumena and empirical reality, the critical philosophy maintains that “no one can have the slightest knowledge” whether “the supersensible underlying the appearance of a body is composite or simple as thing in itself” (Ak. 8:209n). What is essential to Kant’s practical-dogmatic metaphysics is that distinct moral agents at the empirical level are noumenally distinct.<sup>49</sup> That his moral theology does not require more does not entail sympathy for Berkeley’s claim that there are only minds and Kant is very clear that he lacks any sympathy for this doctrine (*Prolegomena*, Ak 4:493; *Correspondence*, Ak. 11:395). Whether this is rightly interpreted as reflecting a fundamental and unargued “realist bias” in his thought, as Adickes argues at length, can be bracketed here.<sup>50</sup>

What is important for present purposes is that the critical philosophy continues to describe conservation as broadly symmetrical with creation and both as directed towards the causally-active substratum of empirical reality. Lectures presented after the appearance of the *KrV* describe conservation as a divine action “in the innermost component [*das innerste*] of substances, that is, in the substantial [*das Substantiale*] or first inner principle of action of substances” (*Danziger RT*, Ak. 28:1310). We are told that “the omnipresence of God is the

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<sup>49</sup> See B xxvii–iii; Ak 5:104, 114; Adickes, *Kant und das Ding an Sich* 115–6, 159, Heimsoeth

“Persönlichkeitsbewußtsein und Ding an sich,” in *Immanuel Kant: Festschrift zur zweiten Jahrhundertfeier seines Geburtstages*, Leipzig 1924; Robert Adams, “Things in Themselves,” 822.

<sup>50</sup> This is a central claim of Adickes’s classic *Kant und das Ding an Sich*. For a similar proposal in recent times, see Ameriks, *Interpreting Kant’s Critiques* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) pp. 33–40.

most intimate presence: that is, God conserves *das Substantiale*, the inner nature [*das Innere*] of substance [...] and without God's unceasing inner and essential actuation of the *Substantiale* of things in the world, these things must cease to exist" (*Poelitz Religionslehre*, Ak. 28:1107).<sup>51</sup>

While Kant continues to present creation and conservation as essential components of his moral theology, the *Perpetual Peace* passage cited above shows that he regards divine concurrence as *competing* with naturalism regarding secondary causation in a way in which creation and conservation supposedly do not.<sup>52</sup> His concurrentist predecessors would respond that this objection conflates a general metaphysical condition for the efficacy of creaturely powers with miracles or violations of the natural order. Kant evidently sees no conflation; he claims repeatedly that "all concursus is miraculous," that "every case in which God acts immediately [in nature] is an *exception* to the laws of nature."<sup>53</sup> From the concurrentist's perspective, this begs the question against the doctrine that secondary causation rooted in creatures' natures requires concurrence as condition of its *natural* efficacy. In effect, Kant charges the concurrentist's doctrine of immediate divine action in nature with the error Leibniz attributes to occasionalism—that of appealing to "miracles which are no less miraculous for being continual."<sup>54</sup>

Adjudication of this dispute requires consideration of further arguments on both sides. Kant is unlikely to be moved by an argument offered by Suarez in favor of concurrence proceeding from the mechanics of so-called '*contra naturam*' miracles—those in which the miraculous effect goes against a natural disposition in creatures. Suarez notes that the concurrentist can, for example, explain God's holding back the effects of the Babylonian furnace in the book of Daniel as a withholding of concurrence with the fire's natural powers, without which cooperation the fire can effect nothing. The mere conservationist lacks this mechanism and Suarez argues must describe God's action in *contra naturam* miracles as thwarting the natural activity of creatures—as it were from without. Suarez rejects such

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<sup>51</sup> On Kant's notion of the 'substantiale' and his view of noumena as causally active, see Heinz Heimsoeth, "Metaphysische Motive in der Ausbildung des Kritischen Idealismus," *Kant-Studien* 29: 124-128.

<sup>52</sup> Compare *Poelitz Religionslehre*, Ak. 28:1106; *Danziger Rationaltheologie* Ak. 28:1309.

<sup>53</sup> *Danziger Rationaltheologie*, Ak. 28:1308; *Religionsphilosophie Volckmann*, Ak. 28:1213.

<sup>54</sup> Letter to Arnauld, April 30, 1687, G 2, 92.

acting against creatures as unbecoming to the absoluteness of divine sovereignty. He argues that the doctrine of concurrence gains an important advantage here by admitting a metaphysical symmetry between God's ability to annihilate creatures merely by withholding his conservation and his ability to "deprive a created entity of its natural action merely by withholding concurrence" (*DM* 22.1.11).<sup>55</sup>

Kant does consider and reject another argument for concurrence often employed in the schools. Its central idea is that a proper understanding of conservation reveals the necessity of an immediate divine action in all natural effects. We saw a similar claim in one of Malebranche's arguments for occasionalism. Malebranche argues that God's giving of being must involve "the ways of being, since the ways of being are nothing but beings themselves, in this or that fashion."<sup>56</sup> The concurrentist seeks to infer divine immediacy in all natural effects on these grounds while avoiding Malebranche's occasionalist conclusion that God produces everything and creatures nothing. Leibniz gestures at such an argument when he writes that "one cannot say what 'to conserve is,' without reverting to the general [i.e. concurrentist] opinion. It must be taken into account that the action of God in conserving should have some reference to that which is conserved" (*Theodicy* §27).

Arguments from demands of conservation to concurrence are also seen in Suarez, Wolff, Baumgarten and Meier.<sup>57</sup> Suarez argues that "if it is not the case that all things are effected immediately by God, then neither is it the case that they are *conserved* immediately, given that an entity is related to its *esse* in the same way that it is related to its being-made. For an entity's *esse* cannot depend more on an adequate cause after it has come to be than it did *while* it was coming to be" (*DM* 22.1.7). His idea is that if a creature can produce any effect whatsoever without God's immediate assistance, then that effect does not depend on an immediate divine conservation at the moment of its production—contrary to Suarez's understanding of divine conservation. Kant would simply grant the conclusion, since his

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<sup>55</sup> For a defense of Suarez from a theistic perspective, see Freddoso, *God's General Concurrence*, 572–77.

<sup>56</sup> Malebranche, *OCM* XI 160; *Treatise* 160.

<sup>57</sup> Wolff, *Theologia naturalis*, *Pars* II (Leipzig, 1737), §394; Baumgarten, *Metaphysica* §958; G. F. Meier, *Metaphysik*, *Dritter Teil* (Halle 1757), §1027-9.

official view is that God conserves accidents only mediately, by virtue of an immediate conservation of substances in which they inhere.<sup>58</sup>

Both Baumgarten and Meier likewise claim that the conservation of creaturely forces puts God into an immediate causal relation with natural effects of these forces—thus with all effects of secondary causes.<sup>59</sup> On one recent interpretation of Leibniz’s model of divine concurrence, he has something similar in mind. Adams suggests that Leibniz’s association of concurrence with demands of conservation might be understood as claiming that “what God (directly) produces, we may say, is not just the creature’s nature and its affections and actions, but the creature’s nature “operating” and thus producing its affections and actions. In thus producing the creature’s producing, God’s conserving activity has a direct causal relation to the creature’s actions, but without excluding the productive agency of the created nature.”<sup>60</sup>

The main problem for this proposal is the danger of collapsing concurrence into mere conservationism. Suarez objects that Durandus’s conservationism fails to maximize divine sovereignty in denying a further action of God “in and with all agents” (*DM* 22.1.13). Concurrence is standardly presented as something more than mere conservation—Suarez explains that “it is clear that even though God can be said to act through the secondary cause to the extent that he gives and conserves its power to act and to the extent that he instituted it for acting, nonetheless, to the extent that he immediately cooperates with the creature, he does not, properly speaking, act through the creature but acts instead *through himself* and through his own power and strength” (*DM* 22.1.21). If the immediacy of God’s action in concurring reduces to God’s producing creatures’ producing, then Durandus is at worst

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<sup>58</sup> See Freddoso, *God’s General Concurrence*, 566–69, for an attempted defense of Suarez here.

<sup>59</sup> “Conservatio virium huius universi quarumcumque, in ipso earundem actu, est CONCURSUS DEI PHYSICUS, isque, quia et quatenus ad singulas singularum substantiarum actiones extenditur, GENERALIS (universalis) dicitur.” Baumgarten, *Metaphysica*, §958. Cf. Meier, *Metaphysik*, §1027.

<sup>60</sup> *Leibniz*, p. 97. In this way Adams offers a possible resolution of Leibniz’s apparent dithering on the immediacy of God’s action in nature. In opposing deism, Leibniz insists that immediate divine action in *all* effects of creatures is a condition of conservation (*Theodicy* 27). Where occasionalism is his concern, he seems to restrict God’s immediate contribution in creation and conservation to production of *substance*: “The production of *modifications* has never been called *creation* [...] God produces substances from nothing, and the *substances* produce accidents by the changes of their limits” (*Theodicy* 395–6).

guilty of failing to grasp an immediacy of divine action which his own doctrine of conservation entails.

Kant evidently accepts the characterization on which divine concurrence is supposed to be something over and above mere conservation. On this understanding, the individual concurring causes, including the divinely conserved secondary cause, are regarded as individually insufficient for the effect. The concurrentist does not deny God could produce the effect alone if he wished, but rather claims that the action by which God actually concurs is insufficient to produce it without the creature's contribution. This provides the basis for Kant's objection that "conservation is not *concursum*, because *concursum* is the causality of an insufficient cause providing a *complementum ad sufficientiam*" (*Danziger Rationaltheologie*, Ak. 28:1309). In light of the traditional characterization of concurrence as something more than mere conservation, part of the point of Kant's physician example is to record what he sees as the confusion in seeking to derive concurrence from conservation. He objects that "God is the author of the physician together with all his medicines and so the effect must be ascribed entirely to [God], if one wants to ascend all the way to that highest original ground ... Or one can ascribe it entirely to the physician, insofar as we follow up this event as belonging to the order of nature and as explicable in terms of the order of nature, within the chain of causes in the world" (*Perpetual Peace*, Ak. 8:361n).

The same passage offers a conceptual objection to the very idea of divine concurrence with those secondary causes operating by a necessity of nature. Kant writes that "to allow what is itself the complete cause of alterations in the world supplement its own predetermining providence (which must therefore have been inadequate) during the course of the world, is first, self-contradictory [...] for *causa solitaria non iuvat*" (ibid.) This line of argument against concurrence is repeated in many mature texts (*Poelitz Religionslehre*, Ak. 28:1105-6; *Danziger Rationaltheologie*, Ak. 28:1308-9; *Metaphysik K2*, Ak. 28:811; *Metaphysik Dohna*, Ak. 28:648).<sup>61</sup> Leibniz and Suarez would respond by rejecting the sense of "predetermining providence" implicit in Kant's argument. The objection presents divine concurrence as God's *overdetermination* of a natural effect through cooperation with a secondary cause which would have produced the effect in any case. Insofar as concurrentist

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<sup>61</sup> An early statement of this argument is also found in a text dated to 1760-4—further evidence that Kant's pre-critical metaphysics is consistently conservationist (*Reflections on Religion*, R 8083, Ak. 19:627).

opponents present concurrence as a condition, above and beyond conservation, of the efficacy of secondary causes, the idea is rather that created natures are incapable of producing *anything* without divine cooperation. This point is admittedly muddled by arguments in which opponents suggest that concurrence follows from demands of conservation. But once it is made clear, it is evident that the concurrentist does not understand God's "predetermining providence" to mean that effects would come about in any case, that is, even without the concurring act. As Suarez explains, in the case of causes acting by a necessity of nature, God concurs with them "in the manner of a nature"—which is to say that God's decision to create and conserve such creatures brings with it a defeasible commitment "to concur with these same entities in their actions according to their capacities" (*DM* 22.4.3-4). God's predetermining providence thus includes this defeasible cooperation in the ordinary course of things—it is not supplemented by it.

Kant's conceptual objection might be seen as a response to the weight contemporaries place on arguments for the necessity of concurrence from demands of conservation. It might also be taken as a rejection of the coherence of divine concurrence as traditionally understood. As Freddoso explains, models of divine concurrence were traditionally viewed as having to avoid a number of pitfalls representing significant metaphysical constraints on proposals for its operation. Two important pitfalls involve splitting the effect and splitting the action, in the sense that a distinct part of the naturally produced effect or a distinct action is attributed to the creature alone. Any model of concurrence involving such splitting violates the concurrentist's fundamental doctrine that the creature can do or produce *nothing* without divine cooperation.<sup>62</sup> Kant offers very limited discussion of particular models of concurrent causation, and it is unclear whether he is aware of traditional worries concerning the satisfiability of the no-splitting constraint. Part of Malebranche's case for occasionalism is that divine concurrence as an alternative account of God's relation to secondary causes

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<sup>62</sup> Durandus notes that "it is one thing to say that God immediately produces *something* [in the effect and the creature something else] ... It is quite another thing to say that God immediately produces *each thing that a creature produces*," as concurrentism requires. *Petri Lombardi sententias theologicas commentariorum libri III*, § 6, trans. in Freddoso, 'God's General Concurrence,' 144. Durandus argues that the requirement makes it impossible to offer a coherent model of divine concurrence—hence his mere conservationism.

“appears the more incomprehensible the more effort is spent to understand it.”<sup>63</sup> Kant’s conceptual objection might be read as reflecting agreement with Malebranche that there is no coherent concurrentist middle ground between mere conservationism and an occasionalist attribution of effects solely to God.

One apparent problem with this reading is that Kant does not reject concurrent causation *per se*. He allows, of course, concurrence *among* secondary causes—this does not run afoul of his conceptual objection, since the co-causes are not “completely subordinated” to each other (Ak. 19:627).<sup>64</sup> But drawing on his mature libertarian metaphysics, Kant also allows for the possibility of divine concurrence with free causes. In this case, as he repeatedly argues, the creaturely causes as free are not ‘completely subordinated’ to God’s “predetermining providence,” and so his conceptual objection to concurrence with causes acting by a necessity of nature simply does not apply (*Poelitz RL*, Ak. 28:1110; *Metaphysik K2*, Ak. 28:811; *Danziger Rationaltheologie*, Ak. 28:1311).

Discussion of this issue brings us into the ambit of Kant’s theory of grace, which I can only touch on here. As noted, Leibniz and Suarez distinguish the metaphysics of divine and secondary causation in the ordinary course of nature from the metaphysics of grace as a special variety of concurrence. The former is the concern here but the issues are related, and Leibniz notes the old association of Durandus’s conservationism with the Pelagian heresy (*Theodicy* 27). Kant’s conservationism has the interesting consequence for his metaphysics of grace that he can ignore the no-splitting-of-action/effect constraint on divine concurrence as traditionally understood. For we have seen that this constraint is motivated by the concurrentist’s basic idea that creatures can do or produce nothing without divine assistance beyond mere conservation, and this is a doctrine Kant has given up. It follows that his admission of the possibility of divine concurrence with free acts is less of a concession to concurrence than might at first appear, since such cooperation need not meet traditional constraints on such cooperative causation. There remains room to interpret Kant as agreeing with Malebranche that divine concurrence as conceived of in the schools is unintelligible.

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<sup>63</sup> Malebranche, OCM III, 243; *Search* 680.

<sup>64</sup> The *KrV* speaks explicitly of concurrence of secondary causes: “an effect that arises from the concurrence of many acting substances is possible if this effect is merely external (as, e.g., the movement of a body is the united movement of all its parts)” (A352).



That Kant admits the possibility of divine concurrence with free acts does not contradict a traditional verdict that his mature theory of grace is Pelagian in rejecting or at least strongly downplaying prevenient grace—that divine assistance through which the finite agent first turns towards the good—in favor of an emphasis on human effort and freedom.<sup>65</sup> He writes in the *Religion*,

Granted that some supernatural cooperation is also needed to his becoming good or better, whether this cooperation only consist in the diminution of obstacles or be also a positive assistance, the human being must nonetheless *make himself antecedently* worthy of receiving it, and he must *accept* this help (which is no small matter), i.e. he must incorporate this positive increase of force into his maxim: in this way alone is it possible that the good be imputed to him, and that he be acknowledged a good human being. (*Religion*, Ak. 6:44; cf. 191)

There remains a crucial gap between Kant’s doctrine that divine cooperation with free acts is metaphysically possible and Christian orthodoxy according to which grace is absolutely essential to all moral agency.<sup>66</sup> Some of Kant’s most positive pronouncements regarding divine concurrence belong in contexts where his problem is not how the fallen agent can right himself morally, but rather the engineering issue of providential control in a libertarian setting.<sup>67</sup> By contrast, he often appears least inclined to allow divine concurrence with free acts where his focus is the acts’ moral character. The *Religion* describes “the concept of a supernatural intervention into our moral though deficient faculty” as, “very risky and hard to reconcile with reason; for what is to be accredited to us as morally good conduct must take place not through foreign influence but only through the use of our own powers” (*Religion*

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<sup>65</sup> See Robert Adams’ introduction to *Religion within the Boundaries of Reason Alone* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. xxi-xxii.

<sup>66</sup> Denzinger, *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, canons of the Council of Carthage against the Pelagians (§§104-5; cf. canons of the Council of Trent, §§811-14).

<sup>67</sup> “So far as moral concurrence or free cooperation of God in free actions is concerned, this cannot be understood due to the nature of freedom but shouldn’t be seen as impossible either. Since it is presupposed that rational beings can spontaneously act freely and independently of natural necessity even *against God’s plan*, it is quite possible that God should cooperate as *concausa* with their moral acts [zu ihrer Moralität] in order to keep their use of freedom in line with his highest will” (Pölitz *Religionslehre*, Ak. 28:1110; cf. *Danziger RT*, 28:1311).

Ak. 6:191). Lecture transcripts employ even stronger language and provide further support for viewing Kant's position on grace as Pelagian.<sup>68</sup>

To summarize, Kant thinks it possible to justify a conservationist metaphysics of divine and secondary causation even in the face of his critical strictures on knowledge of noumena. This is because such strictures do not rule out acceptance of the reality of finite agency on practical grounds; neither do they exclude appeals to a broadly-conceived naturalism in opposing the continuous interventions of occasionalism. Kant also argues by elimination for conservationism with the aid of conceptual arguments against concurrence, though neither Leibniz nor Suarez would be very impressed by the arguments he offers. Both would regard his objection that concurrence violates naturalism as conflating what they present as a metaphysical condition on *all* secondary causation and miracles in the sense of violations of the natural order. Kant's defense of conservationism over concurrence is weakened by his failure to make this basic distinction. His efforts to press the conservationist line on broadly naturalist grounds also remain in tension with his continued commitment to the dependence of all finite existence on divine acts of creation and conservation.

## V Conclusion

Kant's mature theory of God's relation to creaturely causality involves by his own admission a fundamental tension absent from his earliest thought. Alongside his enduring commitment to the complete ontological dependence of creatures, Kant comes to embrace a libertarian doctrine of agency on which free acts are not completely fixed by God's 'predetermining providence.' Late writings openly acknowledge the resulting tension:

It is totally incomprehensible to our reason how beings can be *created* to use their powers *freely*, for according to the principle of causality we cannot attribute any other inner ground of action to a being which we assume to have been produced except that which the producing cause has placed in it [...] the possibility of beings who are thus [morally] called is for speculation an impenetrable mystery. (*Religion*, Ak. 6:142)

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<sup>68</sup> We read in one case that "divine concurrence with free acts is *not conceivable* [...] If God is their determining cause, the acts aren't free [...] If God concurs in moral action [*zur Moralität*], the human has no moral worth, since [the action] cannot be imputed to him" (*Danziger RT*, Ak. 28:1309; cf. *RP Volckmann*, 28:1209).

For to be a creature and, as a natural being, merely the result of the will of the creator; yet to be capable of responsibility as a freely acting being (one which has a will independent of external influence and possible opposed to the latter in a variety of ways); but again, to consider one's own deed at the same time also as the effect of a higher being—this is a combination of concepts which we *must* indeed think together in the idea of a world and of a highest good, but which can be intuited only by one who penetrates to the cognition of the supersensible (intelligible) world and sees the manner in which this grounds the sensible world. (*On the Miscarriage of all Philosophical Trials in Theodicy*, Ak. 8:264)

Leibniz loosens this knot by rejecting the libertarian theory in favor of a universally 'predetermining providence.' Kant's early writings follow him in treating God's creative act as "the well or bubbling spring from which *all things flow with infallible necessity* down an inclined channel" (*Nova Dilucidatio*, Ak. 1:403). Jesuit libertarians including Molina and Suarez seek to unravel the knot with the help of a sophisticated theory of divine concurrence with free acts. Their theory is designed to preserve robust dependence of such acts on God without destroying creatures' freedom with regard to omission or specification. Suarez's version employs Molina's doctrine of middle knowledge and an ingenious model of 'conditional' divine concurrences with free acts (*DM* 22.4.10-39). It is not explored by Kant, and it is not clear how much he understands of it.

What is clear is that the critical philosophy expresses deep unease about proposals to reduce the tension between dependence and freedom by strengthening the role of grace. It is tempting to conclude that Kant is thereby forced to a more deistic position on which the bonds of creaturely dependence on God are relaxed. I believe it is important for an understanding of the critical philosophy to recognize his firm rejection of this conclusion. God's mere conservation of causes acting by a necessity of nature is described as a complete ontological dependence of such causes and their effects.<sup>69</sup> Kant denies that concurrentism strengthens creaturely dependence on God in this case, arguing that the position is unintelligible. Even those free acts not subordinated to "predetermining providence" continued to be described by Kant as "effects" of God. He writes that one must "consider one's own deed at the same time *also* as the effect of a higher being" (Ak. 8:264). His libertarian theory of freedom is never presented as justifying a deistic dilution of creaturely

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<sup>69</sup> "God is the author of the physician together with all his medicines and so the effect must be ascribed *entirely* to him, if one wants to ascend all the way to that highest original ground, theoretically incomprehensible to us." *Perpetual Peace*, Ak. 8:361n

dependence. Instead Kant simply acknowledges the tension between demands of ontological dependence and those of morality, while holding out for the possibility of a resolution beyond human understanding.