CAUSAL INDEPENDENCE
AND DIVINE SUPPORT
IN SPINOZA AND LEIBNIZ

Kristin Elizabeth Carlson Primus

A DISSERTATION
PRESENTED TO THE FACULTY
OF PRINCETON UNIVERSITY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE
OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

RECOMMENDED FOR ACCEPTANCE
BY THE DEPARTMENT OF
PHILOSOPHY
Adviser: Daniel Garber

September 2013
© Copyright by Kristin Elizabeth Carlson Primus, 2013.
All rights reserved.
Abstract

Most thinkers before the Enlightenment held that the created world must be continually sustained— as it were, continuously created by an omnipotent God who thereby maintains everything in existence. But if that is true, in what sense are created things genuinely real, genuinely distinct from God, and genuine productive causes of events in the world? This question occupied some of the best philosophical minds of the period, and seeing how those minds thought about the problem can reveal a lot about their views on causation, dependence relations, substance, and the extent to which theistic considerations inform and constrain theories about the workings of the natural world.

In this dissertation, I focus on Spinoza and Leibniz, two philosophers for whom the problem of how to reconcile divine sustenance and creaturely activity raises special issues. Most discussions of the problem show up in metaphysical systems in which there is a transcendent God, and it has long been assumed that since Spinoza’s system does not have such a God, he is not concerned to reconcile creatures’ activity with their dependence on God for their being. I argue that Spinoza was concerned with a version of this problem, despite his monist metaphysics. In chapter one, I show how the Short Treatise contains arguments designed to resist the occasionalist conclusion that creatures are not genuine productive causes. In the second chapter, I argue that a concern with the nature and scope of divine causality persists into the Ethics, and that a recognition of this
concern motivates a new interpretation of the metaphysics of causation in that book. In the third chapter, I turn to Leibniz, and argue that the view of divine and secondary causation he advocated in many of his post-1680s texts is not at all the kind of position previous commentators have assumed it was. I provide a model for the position and show how it allows him to reconcile the radical activity of created things with theological orthodoxy.
## Table of Contents

Abstract iii  
Acknowledgements vi  
Chapter One  
   The Two Dialogues in the *Short Treatise* 1  
Chapter Two  
   Spinoza’s Four Causes: A New Reading of the Causal Metaphysics of the *Ethics* 42  
Chapter Three  
   Leibniz’s View of Divine and Secondary Causation 116  
Complete Bibliography 171
Acknowledgments

First of all, I’d like to thank Dan Garber, for being such an inspiring scholar and generous advisor. He has understood with rather uncanny sympathy when to offer advice or criticism and when to let me fumble around on my own. Dan, as well as Des Hogan, have over the years challenged me to think more deeply and more ambitiously, and I am tremendously grateful for their encouragement and guidance. Thanks are also due to the entire philosophy department at Princeton for providing me with such a fantastic place to grow up intellectually. I would also like to thank David Hills, Lanier Anderson, Allen Wood, and Andrea Nightingale. Without their support back at Stanford, I would not have gone on in philosophy in the first place.

Thanks to the Whiting Foundation, The Bayard Henry, Class of 1876, Graduate Fellowship Fund, the École Normale Supérieur (rue d’Ulm), the Graduate School of Princeton University, and the Princeton University Department of Philosophy for financial support during my time in graduate school.

For feedback on parts of this dissertation, I would like to thank Sam Baker, Colin Garretson, Shamik Dasgupta, Michael Della Rocca, Dan Garber, Leslie Geddes, Sukaina Hirji, Andrew Huddleston, Des Hogan, Raffi Krut-Landau, Martin Lin, Paul Lodge, Monica Olaru, Ohad Nachtomy, Karl Schafer, the Fall 2012 dissertation seminar, and audiences at the New York City Modern Philosophy Workshop, the Princeton-Bucharest Seminar in Early Modern Philosophy, the 2011-2012 Séminaire Leibniz in Paris, the 2011 Leibniz Kongress Doktorandenkolleg in Hannover, Carleton College, the École Normale Supérieure (Lyon), Georgetown University, Marquette
University, The University of Nebraska-Lincoln, North Carolina State University, The Ohio State University, Oxford University, Princeton University, The University of Southern California, and Stony Brook University.

I would not have made it through graduate school without all of my dear friends, but special thanks to those who helped make this last year of research, writing, and job-hunting much more enjoyable than it otherwise would have been: Dora Achourioti, Max Barkhausen, Sepideh Bazazi, Sarah Cassanego, Tom Dixon, Corinne Gartner, Leslie Geddes, Hart Gilula, Dustin King, Marika Knowles, Monica Olaru, Raffi Krut-Landau, Josh Lobert, Jon Ma, Susan Tieh, and Lauren Wechsler.

My entire family deserves a lot of thanks, especially my adoptive father, Dave, who taught me the importance of engaging deeply with whatever interests me, and my mother, Carol, who taught me the importance of taking it easy sometimes. I also owe a lot to my late father, Jeff Carlson, who taught me to keep going even when things get tough. Thanks to my aunt Sally and her family for all of the fun mini-vacations, and to Jordan, my twin brother, for his wit and willingness to listen to half-baked ideas. The Garretson family has given me more love and support than I could have imagined. Jan, Richard, Lauren, and Seth Wechsler have become like family, and I owe them some special thanks for their love and warmth during my time in graduate school. My cat Addy introduced me to ataraxia.

Finally, I’d like to thank Colin Garretson. For everything.
Chapter One

The Two Dialogues in the *Short Treatise*¹

I. Introduction

The *Short Treatise* or *Korte Verhandeling* (KV), which was likely written in the early 1660s but not discovered until the mid-nineteenth century, appears to be a first draft of the *Ethics*, since many of the same themes and arguments are discussed in roughly the same order.² As is the case with most rough drafts, some arguments or presentations of arguments make their way into the final draft without much alteration, while others undergo significant changes of substance or style (or both). In this chapter, I will provide a detailed interpretation of one of the more

---


² An summary of the KV was discovered in 1851 and two manuscripts of the KV itself by 1869. Neither of the manuscripts we have is an original Spinoza manuscript, and it is unclear how many of the footnotes are Spinoza’s own; the footnotes might be a reader’s notes copied by an editor who thought they were Spinoza’s, or they might be an editor’s own notes. The dialogues do not have such footnotes, although there are some minor differences between the manuscripts, which I have noted where relevant. For more detailed information about the history of this text and speculations about which parts of the text may not have been written by Spinoza, see Filippo Mignini’s (1986) commentary.
obscure sections of the KV that has not received much scholarly attention, a set of two short dialogues that appears early on in the first book of the KV.\(^3\) Although Spinoza abandons the dialogue form by the time he writes the *Ethics*, he does not abandon a central issue discussed in the dialogues: how exactly God, the one substance, is the cause of the modes of that substance.

As we will see, one important conclusion of the first dialogue is that God is an immanent cause. If there is just one substance, and if individual things are just ways that one substance is, then substance somehow has to cause its modes *from within*, or *immanently*. What I think other scholars have failed to see is that even if Spinoza disagrees with the Cartesians that there is a *transcendent* God who creates a distinct world *ex nihilo*, a problem that arises within Cartesian metaphysics can arise within his system too. That problem, which will be discussed in more detail below, is the problem of occasionalism: if God is causally responsible for the very being of everything at every time and down to the last tiny detail, then it looks like

---

\(^3\) To date, there is no secondary literature focused on these dialogues. In general, there is very little secondary literature that focuses on the KV itself, but see Curley (1988b), Ganault (1988), Mignini (1998), di Poppa (2009), and Ramond (1988). There has recently been a resurgence of interest in the KV and other early texts, however. In the fall of 2011, there were two lively conferences on the work of the young Spinoza at Johns Hopkins and ENS-Lyon organized by Yitzhak Melamed, Daniel Garber, Frédéric Manzini, and Pierre-François Moreau. Although none of the papers presented at these conferences dealt with these dialogues, many of the papers focused on other key aspects of the KV. I anticipate many of the papers that were presented at these conferences will be in print soon.
God is the only genuine cause.\(^4\) According to my reading of the second dialogue, Spinoza does not want to accept the thesis that God \textit{qua substance} is the only genuine cause, since finite modes are genuine causes too; Spinoza’s God will sustain the very being of finite things, but this does not mean that there is not room for finite things to be causes in their own right. As will become clearer by the end of the next chapter, an apparent concern to resist a certain kind of argument to occasionalism persists into the \textit{Ethics}, and a failure to see that this is a long-standing concern of Spinoza’s threatens to flatten the complexity of the causal metaphysics Spinoza offers in his mature work.

\section*{II. The First Dialogue}

There are four characters in the short first dialogue: Understanding (\textit{Verstand}), Love (\textit{Liefde}), Reason (\textit{Reede}), and Lust (\textit{Begeerlykheid}). I will set aside speculations about how interactions between characters in the dialogue may

\(^4\) In this dissertation, I focus on Spinoza’s response to one kind of occasionalist argument in circulation among the Cartesians, but it is important to note that there were other arguments to the conclusion that God is the only real causal agent. For example, Geulincx provides an epistemological argument to an occasionalist conclusion that God must be the cause of every movement of a person’s body. The argument begins with the idea that what one does not know how to do cannot be one’s action (\textit{quod nescis quomodo fiat id non facis}) (1891-1893, vol. 2, pp. 502-3, cf. 2006, p. 225)). A person cannot understand all the detailed mechanisms involved in the most ordinary of bodily movements, so a person cannot be the real cause of his or her bodily movements. God, however, does have the adequate knowledge needed, so is the cause of each and every bodily movement.
be intended to illustrate relationships between various aspects of human psychology, since such speculations would lead us too far afield from what appears to be the main issue in this dialogue, which is the nature of the relationship between the one infinite being and the plenitude of the ordinary things of everyday experience.\(^5\)

That this is the main issue is clear from Spinoza’s own setup in the previous section. There Spinoza reminds the reader that thus far, he has only spoken of how God is “in himself, and not as he acts outside himself.” He says that the dialogue following that section will make it clearer in what sense God is a cause of all things.\(^6\) That the relationship between the one infinite being and individuals is the main topic of discussion is also made clear at the start of the dialogue:

**LOVE:** I see, Brother [Understanding], that both my essence \[wezen\] and perfection \[volmaaktheid\] depend entirely on your perfection; and since the perfection of the object which you have conceived \[begrepen hebtt\] is your perfection, while from yours again mine proceeds, so tell me now, I pray you, whether you have conceived such a being \[wezen\] as is supremely perfect, not capable of being limited by anything else, and in which I also am comprehended \[begreepen ben\]?

\(^5\) The formulation of Spinoza’s monism is not quite as clear in the KV as it is in the *Ethics*. There are a few passages in the KV in which substances and attributes are treated as equivalent, which suggests that each term refers to the same thing. If God thus has an infinite number of attributes, and attributes and substances are the same thing, then God is a being made up of an infinite number of substances. I agree with di Poppa (2009) that a more plausible reading of the KV has it that Spinoza fully endorses substance monism in that early work. In the passages in which Spinoza treats substances and attributes as equivalent, Spinoza is trying to point out inconsistencies in Cartesian systems which treat extension and thought as separate substances.

\(^6\) O I.27.
UNDERSTANDING: I for my part view [aanschouw] Nature only in its entire infinity [geheel oneyndelyk] and as supremely perfect [oppersten volmaakt], but you, if you doubt this, ask Reason, she will tell you.\(^7\)

Love says that she depends on Understanding for both her “essence”\(^8\) and “perfection” and that her essence and perfection depend on Understanding’s perfection. The omission of any talk of Understanding’s essence is key. On the assumption that perfection is to be identified with being or existence, then we can take Love to be saying that her essence and being or existence depend on Understanding’s being or existence. Since “the existence of God is essence,”\(^9\) it could be seen as unnecessarily misleading to say that something depends on God’s existence and essence if, strictly speaking, God’s existence just is God’s essence. It seems plausible to suppose that Love’s care to merely mention Understanding’s being or existence is intended to make us see that Understanding plays the role of God in the dialogue.

So Love is something that depends on God [Understanding] for her essence and perfection (or existence or being). As something that depends on something else in this way, she is distinct from that which does not have to depend on

---

\(^7\) O I.28.

\(^8\) There is notable inconsistency throughout the English translations of *wezen* (being), *wezenthlykheid* (existence), and *wezentheid* (essence): many translations often use ‘essence’ for both *wezentheid* and *wezen*. I will continue to provide the Dutch in brackets for clarity. Curley translates *wezen* in this passage as ‘being,’ but *wezen* can also be translated as ‘essence,’ and I follow most French translations in translating it as ‘essence’ here.

\(^9\) O I.15.
anything else: God. But what is the nature of this distinction? Is she a being separate from God or is she somehow in God?

One might think Love’s approach to the issue is a little too circuitous. Why is she talking about what Understanding can conceive [begreepen]? Why doesn’t Spinoza just have Love ask God whether she is in God? There are a few reasons why I think Spinoza opens the dialogue in this way. First, this way makes it clear that we are conceiving God under thought, one of God’s proper attributes, which capture how God is “in himself.” One must conceive of God either under the attribute of thought or under the attribute of extension, and Spinoza is just making it clear that God is being considered under the former. To simply speak of God without specifying how God is being conceived is imprecise, and perhaps disastrously so: we want to understand the nature of the relation between God and things, and how exactly that relation is understood might depend on whether we are thinking of God under the attribute of thought or under the attribute of extension. As Spinoza will say later in the KV, “all the effects [like motion and rest] which are seen to depend necessarily on extension must be attributed [only] to this attribute,”
and the same goes for the effects of thought. Spinoza also cites love as an effect that “implies no extension,” and so must be attributed to thought alone.

Second, introducing God in this way gives Spinoza a concise way of saying how thought is related to the object of thought. Love says that “the perfection of the object which you have conceived is your perfection”; if being and perfection are interchangeable, then the being of the object of God’s conception simply is God’s being. This idea will get fleshed out later on in the dialogue: it isn’t just true that what understanding thinks about determines the character of the understanding, but it is also true that there is simply nothing more to the understanding than what it thinks. That is, there is not some thing that understands or thinks and a separate

---

10 O I.91. This prohibition on inter-attribute causation is made explicit later on in the Ethics: the cause of an extended mode cannot be God qua thinking, but only God qua extended, and the cause of a mode of thought cannot be God qua extended, but only God qua thinking (2p6d). Interestingly, in the KV, Spinoza has not yet committed himself to the idea that a finite mind can have no effect on an extended body: a mind might be able to change the direction of a moving extended body (see O I.91). This might be Descartes’s position as well. See Garber (1987) for discussion.

11 “The most important effect of the other [thinking] attribute is an idea [begrip] of things, which is such that, according to the manner in which it apprehends them, there arises either love or hatred, etc. This effect, then, as it implies no extension, can also not be attributed to the same, but only to thought, so that, whatever the changes which happen to arise in this mode, their cause must on no account be sought for in extension, but only in the thinking thing. We can see this, for instance, in the case of love, which, whether it is to be suppressed [vernietigt] or whether it is to be awakened [opgewekt], can only be thus affected through the idea itself, and this happens, as we have already remarked, either because something bad is perceived to be in the object, or because something better comes to be known.” (O I.91-2)
realm of things to be thought about or understood. There is just one thing here.  
There is just one self-conceiving substance.

Third, as we will see in a moment, Spinoza will draw an analogy between the causal operations of God vis-à-vis things and the operations of the understanding vis-à-vis ideas. Perhaps identifying God with Understanding early on just helps make the upshot of the analogy that much clearer.

Understanding answers Love’s query by stating that he views “Nature only in its entire infinity and as supremely perfect.” While Spinoza may have had thoughts about different senses of infinity, it does not look here as though Spinoza were allowing for different sizes of infinity; I take it that Understanding conceives of everything, Love included. Understanding tells us that this is the case, but Reason —Spinoza’s apparent spokesperson— is brought in to explain how exactly this is supposed to work.

Reason reiterates some general truths about God with which the reader will be familiar from the section of the KV immediately preceding the dialogue:

To me the truth of the matter is indubitable, for if we would limit Nature [want zoo wy de Natuur willen bepaalen], then we should, absurdly enough, have to limit it with a nothing [Niet]; we avoid this absurdity by stating that it is one eternal unity, infinite, omnipotent,

---

12 Why isn’t Understanding just called ‘Thought’? I take it that ‘understanding’ is supposed to connote thought that is true. God, as a perfect intellect, only has true thoughts.

13 See, for example, his April 1663 letter to Lodewijk Meyer (Letter 12, O IV.52-62).
etc., that is, that nature is infinite and that all is contained therein; and the negative of this we call nothing.\textsuperscript{14}

At this point, Lust interjects, saying that it would be great if there could be such absolute unity \textit{and} such differentiation in nature, but wonders how on earth this could be so.\textsuperscript{15} Lust complains that thought and extension seem so different that it seems bizarre to suppose that they are attributes of the same substance; Lust takes up the Cartesian position, asserting that thought and extension are attributes of distinct substances. But then Lust says that if thought and extension are to be united, they have to be united into a \textit{third} substance, one that is supposed to encompass both yet be distinct from them. To say this, Lust explains, is deeply problematic. First, if this third substance is in fact distinct from the other two, if it is “placed outside” of these first two [\textit{gesteld word, buyten de twee eerste}], then it has, according to the Cartesian assumptions here, a different principal attribute.\textsuperscript{16} If it has this principal attribute, then it doesn’t have the principal attributes of the other two substances, so it will lack something. But this “can never be the case with

\textsuperscript{14} O I.28. I follow Curley and Fruedenthal in translating this passage. The text is quite muddled at this point. Here is the original for comparison: \textit{De waarheid hier van is my ontwyffelyk: want zoo qy de Natuur willen bepaalen, zoo zullen wy hem ’t welk ongerynt is, met een Niet moeten bepaalen en dat onder deze volgende eigenschappen namelyk dat hy is een, eeywig, door zig zelfs, oneyndelyk, welk ongerymtheid wy ontgaan stellende dat hy is een eeuwige Eenheid, oneyndig, almagtig, enz. de Natuur namentlyk oneydig, en alles in de zelve begreepen, en de ontkeninge dezes noemen wy de Niet.}

\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Ey dog dit rynt zig alwonderlyk, dat de Eenheid met de Verscheidentheid, die ik alomme in de Natuur zie tezamen overeen komt. Want hoe? (O I.28).}

\textsuperscript{16} Cf. Descartes’ \textit{Principia Philosophiae} I, 53 (AT VIII.25).
a whole outside of which there is nothing.” So this third substance cannot in fact encompass the other two substances.

A second problem has to do with the assumption that the one unifying being posited by Reason is omnipotent and perfect. Lust agrees that such a being, as a perfect, omnipotent being, would create itself, but says that such a being would be even more powerful if it were to create something distinct from itself besides. Lust makes a similar argument about omniscience: it’s great if a being knows itself, but it’s even greater to know about other things as well.

Reason strongly disagrees:

What you say, O Lust, that you see there are different substances [verscheide zelfstandigheeden], that, I tell you, is false: for I see clearly that there is but one, which exists through itself [door zig zelve bestaat], and is a support [onderhouwder] to all other attributes [eigenschappen]. And if you want to call the corporeal [lighaamelyke] and the mental [verstandige] substances [zelfstandigheeden] in relation to the modes [wyzen] which are dependent on them, why then, you must also call them modes in relation to the substance on which they depend [die daarvan afhangig zyn]: for they are not conceived by you as existing through themselves. And in the same way that willing, feeling, understanding, loving, etc., are different modes of that which you call a thinking substance, in which you bring together and unite all these in one, so I also infer, from your own proofs, that both infinite extension [oneyndige uytgebreidheid] and thought [denking] together with all other infinite attributes [oneydige eigenschappen] (or, according to your usage, other substances [zelfstandigheeden]) are nothing but modes of the one, eternal, infinite Being [Wezen], who exists through himself; and from all these we posit, as stated, An Only One [Een Eenige] or a Unity [Eenheid] outside which one cannot imagine [verbeelden] anything.\(^{17}\)

\(^{17}\) O I.29-30.
Reason points out that the Cartesians are happy enough to admit that there are modes of thinking and modes of extension; they happily admit that modes depend on their substances. As Reason points out, though, Cartesians like Lust don’t think that thinking substance and extended substance exist through themselves: the Cartesians think that these substances are dependent for their being on a self-subsisting God. Why should the Cartesians not, then, think of thinking substance and extended substance as dependent on the self-subsisting God as modes are dependent on a substance? In other words, Reason has underscored that for a Cartesian, ‘substance’ isn’t univocal: there is substance that is self-subsisting (God) and created substances that are not.\footnote{Descartes’ \textit{Principia Philosophiae} is obviously in the background here: “By \textit{substance} we can understand nothing other than a thing which exists in such a way as to depend on no other thing for its existence. And there is only one substance which can be understood to depend on no other thing whatsoever, namely God. In the case of all other substances, we perceive that they can exist only with the help of God’s concurrence. Hence the term ‘substance’ does not apply \textit{univocally}, as they say in the Schools, to God and to other things.” (\textit{Principia} Part I, 51; AK VIII.24). Note that ‘concurrence’ [\textit{concursus}] appears to mean \textit{continual creation} in this context.) But as Descartes goes on to say in the next section, the term ‘substance’ does apply univocally to created mind and body, since they both fall into the category of things that need only God’s creative activity to exist. We come to know these substances by perceiving “the presence of some attribute”; since “nothingness possesses no attributes,” we then infer that there is some substances to which that attribute can be attributed (\textit{Principia} Part I, 52; AT VIII.24-5).} Reason just doesn’t understand why the latter are deemed substances at all. Instead of having two layers of dependence — attributes of which we’re aware depend on created substances, which in turn depend on the continual creative activity of God— why not just have one layer of dependence, and make everything depend on one self-subsisting substance?
Lust’s retort is that Reason is confused: “for it seems you [Reason] will have it that the whole must be something outside of [buyten] or apart from [zonder] its parts, which is truly absurd [waar ongerymt].”\(^{19}\) Lust goes on:

For all philosophers are unanimous in saying that “whole” is a second notion [tweede kundigheid], and that it is nothing in Nature apart from human thought [menschelyk begrip]. Moreover, as I gather from your example, you mix up whole with cause [oorzaak]: for, as I say, the whole only consists of and [exists] through its parts [het geheel bestaat alleen van of door zyn deelen], and so it comes that you represent the thinking power [denkende kragt] as a thing on which the understanding, love, etc., depend. But you cannot call it a whole, only a cause of the effects [uytwerkzelen] just named by you.\(^{20}\)

The argument is obscure, but it seems to me to go like this. Lust begins that a whole is a thing of reason or a matter of conception. This seems to be a familiar enough idea: whether something is a whole depends on what criteria for wholeness are in play in a context, and these criteria may vary with human interests. In one context, a mind will unite a group of people into a whole, seeing that they are an army, but in another context, the mind will not unite such a group into a whole, since it sees that although they march together, they are not an organism. According to Lust, a whole does not exist before or apart from the things that comprise it, since existing things are united by a mind that confers on them the status of being a whole (and ipso facto their status of being parts). Lust also assumes that a cause must exist apart from its effects. In order to be a cause, then, the whole would have to exist

\(^{19}\) O I.30

\(^{20}\) O I.30.
apart from its effects, but if it has to exist apart from its effects, then it cannot be a whole. Importantly, this argument amounts to an argument for the transcendence of God: if the one perfect infinite substance is the cause of its own modes, then it cannot be a whole comprised of its own modes, but must necessarily exist apart from them. God can still be a cause, but God cannot be a whole.

Reason counters that Lust argues in this way because her conceptual repertoire is too limited, since she knows only “of the transeunt and not of the immanent cause, which by no means produces anything outside itself.”21 While it may be true that transeunt (transitive) causation requires a cause to be “outside of” its effect, immanent causation has no such requirement. Here Reason illustrates:

[the immanent cause] is exemplified by the understanding [verstand], which is the cause [oorzaak] of its ideas [begrippen]. And that is why I called the understanding (insofar as, or because, its ideas depend on it) a cause; and on the other hand, since it consists of its ideas, a whole: so also God is both an immanent cause [inblyvende oorzaak] with reference to his works [uytwerkzelen] or creatures [schepzelen], and also a whole, considered from the second point of view [in opzigt van de tweede aanmerkinge].22

According to Reason, there is no absurdity in the assertion that substance is both an immanent cause of its effects and united with them as a whole. Such a cause need

21 O I.30.
22 Ibid. The understanding was a textbook example of an immanent cause. See Burgersdijk’s Institutionum logicarum I, ch. 8, ax. 12: actio immanens est, cujus effectum est in agente: ut intelligere, velle. The Institutionum logicarum was a tremendously popular textbook that was first published in Leiden in 1626 and reprinted in Cambridge and London in 1637, 1644, 1647, 1651, 1660, 1666, 1668, and 1680. The list of causes in KV I, ch. 3 reproduces the causes listed in the Institutionum logicarum. See Gabbey (1996).
not exist before or apart from its effects, and so it can be united with them in a whole. Importantly, this wholeness is not just a tight necessary unity of ontologically distinct entities. It is not as though there were one thing that understands and other things that are understood: the understanding just is what it comprehends.

Here we see that ‘Understanding’ really was an apt name for God in this dialogue. Understanding is the cause of its ideas and ipso facto itself, just as God is cause of what God comprehends and ipso facto himself. There is no need to posit anything “outside” of God. Furthermore, if God is a cause of himself in this way, then we need not ascribe passivity—a “palpable imperfection” [tastelyke onvolmaaktheid]—to God. In the section preceding the dialogue, Spinoza says this explicitly:

…of such an agent who acts in himself it can never be said that he has the imperfection of a patient, because he is not affected by another; such, for instance, is the case with the understanding, which, as the philosophers also assert, is the cause of its ideas [begrippen], since, however, it is an immanent cause, what right has one to say that it is imperfect, howsoever frequently it is affected by itself? Lastly, since substance is [the cause] and the origin [beginzel] of all its modes, it may with far greater right be called an agent [doender] than a patient [lyder].

A broadly Aristotelian picture has it that in order for there to be activity, there has to be something that has a bare capacity (first potentiality) for activity. Activity occurs when that capacity is actualized, either from within or without. Spinoza is

---

not just saying that God is a self-actualizer; he is saying that God is not a something with a capacity for activity that somehow exists without any actual activity. We can see now why Spinoza would say (contra the Aristotelians) that God is a *causa sui* [oorzaak syns zelfs]²⁴: God isn’t *anything* without activity, so in order for God to be (and God necessarily is), then there has to be activity. What God is is an infinite, all-encompassing whole, so this activity is the activity of creating an infinite, all-encompassing whole.

God, like the understanding, is an immanent cause, but as we have just seen, it also looks like God, like the understanding, is a sustaining cause: just as ideas only are because of the activity of understanding (which is, again, comprised of ideas²⁵), so everything that is only *is* because of the sustaining activity of God (which, because all that there is is God, turns out to be *self*-sustaining activity).

There is a further reason for thinking that Spinoza might have deployed the analogy with the understanding to illustrate both immanent causation and sustaining causation: as Daniel Garber has pointed out, Johannes Clauberg, a Dutch Cartesian whose work Spinoza knew, deploys the analogy to illustrate how God is

---

²⁴ O I.18. Scholastics thought that the notion of a *causa sui* was contradictory. See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologica*, I, q.2, art. 3, and *Summa contra gentiles*, I, cap. XVIII, 17 and I, cap. XX11, 24. See also Suarez, *Disputationes metaphysicae*, disp. I, sect. 9, art. 7, and disp. XXXVIII, sect. 1, m. 7.

²⁵ Here we might discern traces of a position Spinoza will make more explicit in the *Ethics*. Ideas are not there to be endorsed or denied by a faculty of will: when one has an idea, one thereby affirms it. All mental actions, like the activity of understanding, are just ideas. Ideas themselves really do have power. See 2p49d and Michael Della Rocca’s (2003) discussion.
a sustaining cause. The analogy between God’s operations and the operations of our understanding shows up in exercise 28 of Clauberg’s *De cognitione* (1656), and is part of an extended discussion of Descartes’ thesis that God must sustain the world from moment to moment:

> For example, if from my mind I produce a concept of some thing, then this concept, which was nothing before [I produced it], and whose creator I am, can’t subsist through even a moment of time without the continual influx of my mind; it requires my present and continual attention, and immediately disappears as soon as my mind turns to another.

Similarly, Clauberg reasons, this is the way in which God works in the world:

> Therefore, since all things which do not exist in themselves [*a se*] are operations of another mind, indeed the most powerful mind, that is the divine mind (for what did not exist could not exist unless through a mind which willed that it exist) it follows that these things bear the same relation to the divine mind as the operations of our mind bear toward our mind. And just as these things [i.e. the operations of our mind] could not subsist for even a moment of time without the fixed and continual attending to them of our mind, so the things outside of God which persevere in existence necessarily require the continual concourse of that same God.

---

26 Garber (2000).
27 Johannes Clauberg (b. 1622) studied in the 1640s at Groningen and Leiden and taught the Cartesian philosophy from 1649 to 1651 in Herborn. In 1651, he moved to Duisburg and remained there until his death in 1665. There is a lot of evidence that even though he taught in Germany, his books were read and talked about by the Dutch Cartesian he had known in his youth. While we don’t have proof that Spinoza read *De cognitione* before composing the KV, Clauberg’s *Defensio Cartesiana* (1652) and *Logica Vetus et Nova* (1654) were in his library when Spinoza died. Even if Spinoza hadn’t read *De cognitione*, Clauberg was central enough in Dutch Cartesian circles that we can say that it is very possible that Spinoza encountered Clauberg’s analogy at some point.
28 Ex. 28, §4.
29 Ex. 28, §5.
This “exceedingly elegant analogy” enables us to see that we

are related to God in exactly the same way that our thoughts are
related to our mind; indeed even less so, since there are some
[thoughts] which present themselves to us, even when our minds are
unwilling.... But God is the Lord of his creatures to such an extent
that they have so little power to resist his will, and depend on him so
strictly, that if once he were to turn his thought away from them,
they would immediately fall back into nothingness.\(^\text{30}\)

Clauberg uses the analogy with the understanding and its ideas to elucidate

how God sustains the being of things. Spinoza appears to shift the emphasis
somewhat: as a sustainer of the very being of things, God is an immanent cause.

III. The Second Dialogue

Although the cast of characters changes, the second dialogue picks up

where the first one left off on the topic of immanent causation. Erasmus\(^\text{31}\) confronts

Theophilus, Spinoza’s spokesperson, with the first of three interconnected worries:

1.

I have heard you say, Theophilus, that God is a cause of all things,
and, moreover, that he can be no other than an immanent
[inblyvende] cause. Now, if he is an immanent cause of all things,
how then can you call him a remote cause [een verder oorzaak]?
For, that is impossible in an immanent cause.\(^\text{32}\)

\(^{30}\) Ex. 28, §12.

\(^{31}\) I assume ‘Erasmus’ is Desiderius Erasmus. I have not figured out why Spinoza
would choose Erasmus to be his spokesperson’s interlocutor.

\(^{32}\) O I.31.
The distinction Erasmus is pointing to is between immediate and remote causes. A cause $c$ is an *immediate* cause of an effect $e$ at some time $t$ iff the following conditions obtain:

1) $c$ exists at $t$,
2) $c$ is an active cause of $e$ at $t$,\(^{33}\) and
3) there is *no* set $S$ such that
   a) $c$ and $e$ are both members of $S$, and
   b) each member $S$ is an active cause of the effect at $t$, and
   c) $c$ is an active cause of $e$ only because $c$ causally contributes to the members of $S$ existing at or before $t$.

A cause $c$ is a *remote* or *mediate* cause of $e$ at $t$ iff the following conditions obtain:

1) $c$ is an active cause of $e$ at $t$, and
2) $c$ is not an immediate cause of $e$ at $t$.\(^{34}\)

---

\(^{33}\) For $c$ to be an *active* cause, $c$ has to *do something*, rather than have something *done to it*.

\(^{34}\) I borrow these formulations from Alfred Freddoso’s enormously helpful (1991) presentation. According to Burgersdijk, the next or proximate efficient cause is “that which produces the effect immediately” (*causa proxima est, quae producit effectum immediate. Institutionum logicarum* I, XVII, ax. 34), while the remote cause is that “which produces the effect by means of some more neighboring cause” (*causa remota est, quae producit effectum media causa propinquiore. Institutionum logicarum* I, XVII, ax. 35). Parents are proximate causes of their children, even though they become parents by way of eggs and sperm. For although the egg and sperm are “instruments, they do not effect by their intervening”: the egg and sperm are exactly what enable the “principal cause” (the parents) to “be next to the effect” (the child). Similarly, the fire is not a remote cause of the heat three inches away from it, even though there is heat between the fire and this spatially distant heat. In contrast, a grandfather would be the remote cause of his grandson. In this case, the grandfather and the father are both principal causes (whose seed enables them to be proximate causes of children), but only of their own children. In this case, because a veritable principal cause comes between the grandfather and the grandson, the grandfather is not the principal cause of the grandson.
So for God to be a remote or mediate cause of an effect \( y \) at \( t \), there has to be something, \( z \), which is distinct from both God and \( y \) and which itself acts as an immediate cause of \( y \). In that case, God causes \( y \) in virtue of causing \( z \).

If God is the sort of immanent cause described in the preceding dialogue, then Erasmus thinks that God cannot be a remote cause. If all there is is God, and all activity is within God, then there isn’t a thing \( z \) that is distinct from both God and some effect and which itself acts as an immediate cause of that effect. Without such a \( z \), there is no sense in which God can be a remote cause.

Theophilus responds like this:

> When I said that God is a remote cause, I did not say that regarding the things which God has immediately produced (without any other conditions beyond his mere existence [wezenthlykheid]); but by no means did I call him a remote cause absolutely: as you might have clearly gathered from my remarks. For, I also said that in some respects [in eenigen manieren] we can call him a remote cause.\(^{35}\)

An “absolutely” remote cause presumably would be robustly ontologically distinct from all \( z \)’s, which would not work within a monist metaphysics. But even though God is not a remote cause absolutely, Theophilus says that God is a remote cause in some respects: there are some things that God produces immediately, but there are other things that he produces mediately (i.e. remotely).\(^{36}\) We know that the \( z \)’s that come between God and effects are not really separate from God — there is, after all,

\(^{35}\) O I.31. See also Part I, ch. 4 (O I.36).

\(^{36}\) When Theophilus says that we “can call” [konnen noemen] God a remote cause, I take it that we are not supposed to read this as meaning that this is an acceptable (albeit in truth metaphysically nonsensical) way of talking.
just God. So how can they be distinct enough for God to count as a mediate or remote cause of them? The answer is, of course, that the z’s, as modes of God, are, as we might say, modally distinct from God. Some mode of God is caused by God and is, strictly speaking, God, but this doesn’t mean that there is not a sense in which the mode causes effects.\(^{37}\)

Notice that the reality of the modes is at issue. God would not be a mediate or remote cause unless there is something — and a something that can be an immediate cause in its own right — that comes between God and some effect. If there is only God’s immediate causation, then there is not anything between God and effects; any effect would be immediately traceable to God’s activity \textit{qua God}.

2.

Erasmus says he follows, but then raises the following worry:

\ldots but I also remark that you have said, that the effect [\textit{gevrogte}] of the immanent cause remains united with its cause in such a way that together they constitute a whole. Now, if this is so, then, methinks, God cannot be an immanent cause. For, if he and that which is produced by him together form a whole, then you ascribe to God at one time more being [\textit{wezen}] then at another time. I pray you, remove these doubts for me.\(^{38}\)

\(^{37}\) Although Spinoza does not talk of infinite modes in the KV, nothing said so far has precluded God from being a remote or mediate cause of infinite modes as well as finite modes.

\(^{38}\) Shirley translates \textit{wezen} in the last sentence as “essence,” but I think that since it seems that Theophilus has just insisted that there are things (modes) that are distinct enough from God that they can serve as acting \textit{somethings} standing between God and effects, the passage is more naturally read as concerning \textit{being}.
All that there is is God, so if God causes anything, he causes something within God; God and his effects “constitute a whole.” If there are things that are distinct from God and have being such that they can be between God and effects, then, Erasmus worries, when God creates those things, he thereby comes to have more being than he had before. However, God is supposed to be so infinite that there is not anything “outside of” God — there no empty space into which God can expand, so to speak. So God can’t be an immanent cause of these things, contrary to assumption.

Theophilus replies that

The being [wezen] of a thing does not increase through its union [vereenigen] within another thing with which it makes a whole [geheel]; on the contrary, the first remains unchanged.

So the being of God remains the same, even if it is united with the modes it creates immanently. What Erasmus has failed to understand, it seems, is the nature of modes: modes are anything at all because of the substance of which they are modes, but nevertheless, they do have a being that is distinct from the substance qua substance. Theophilus deploys two examples to help Erasmus understand.

The first example concerns a whole made by conjoining two preexisting parts. A woodworker has taken a bunch of wood and carved a bunch of disconnected body parts out of it: a head, hands, torso, etc. The head and the torso are each made of a certain amount of wood when they are apart, and when they are joined together, the head’s amount of wood — its being — and the torso’s amount of
wood — *its* being — remain the same. The *way* the pieces are put together has of course changed, but this doesn’t mean that there has been any problematic change in the being of the pieces of wood that have been conjoined.\(^{39}\)

I think this example is merely supposed to serve as a sort of warm-up: it just shows that x’s being united with something y does not entail a change in the being of x itself. The second example takes the discussion further. Here there is the production of something new but still no objectionable change in being:

For the sake of greater clearness let me give you another illustration, namely, an idea [*denkbeeld*] that I have of a triangle, and another resulting from an extension of one of the angles, which extended or extending angle is necessarily equal to the two interior opposite angles, and so on. These, I say, have produced [*voortgebracht*] a new idea [*denkbeeld*], namely, that the three angles of the triangle are equal to two right angles. This idea is so connected [*vereenigt*] with the first [ideas], that it can neither be [*bestaan*] nor be conceived [*begrepen*] without the same.\(^{40}\)

Various ideas about a triangle give rise to new ideas about the triangle, but there is no change in the original ideas from which the other idea followed. Importantly, this is also a case in which the created idea is “so connected with the first [ideas], that it can neither be nor be conceived without the same.” A mode of God cannot be or be conceived without its substance, God, just like the idea about the triangle cannot be or be conceived without the other ideas about the triangle. God produces the mode, just like the collection of ideas produces another idea. Theophilus also reminds us that the collection of ideas is the understanding, an addition that is, I

\(^{39}\) O I.31-2.
\(^{40}\) O I.32.
think, meant to remind the reader of the previous dialogue’s analogy between God and the understanding.\textsuperscript{41}

Theophilus goes on:

I have distinctly stated that all attributes [\textit{eigenschappen}], which depend [\textit{afhangen}] on no other cause, and whose definition [\textit{beschryven}] requires no genus [\textit{geslagt}] pertain to the being [\textit{wezen}] of God; and since the created things are not competent [\textit{machtig}] to establish [\textit{stellen}] an attribute, they do not increase the being of God, however intimately [\textit{naauw}] they become united to him.\textsuperscript{42}

Created things have to be understood through a genus: a particular extended thing has to be understood through the attribute of extension, and a particular idea has to be understood through the attribute of thought.\textsuperscript{43} But even if this is so, it’s not as though \textit{extension} or \textit{thought} changes. The being or nature of God, which is characterized by those attributes,\textsuperscript{44} stays the same, even if particular extended things and particular ideas are created by God and united with God.

Theophilus then adds that

‘Whole’ [\textit{geheel}] is but a thing of reason, and does not differ from the general [\textit{algemeen}] except in this alone: that the general results from various disconnected individuals [\textit{verscheide nietvereenigde ondeelbaare}], the whole, from various united individuals [\textit{verscheide vereenigde ondeelbaare}]; also in this, that the general only comprises parts of the same kind [\textit{geslagt}], but the whole, parts both the same and different in kind.\textsuperscript{45}

\textsuperscript{41} This addition only appears in Manuscript A.
\textsuperscript{42} O I.32.
\textsuperscript{43} Part I, ch. 9 (O I.48) and Part II, ch. 19 (O 1.91-2).
\textsuperscript{44} Part I, ch. 2 (O I.27).
\textsuperscript{45} O I.32-3.
This addition is a bit puzzling, but I think this is how we are to make sense of it. Theophilus has just emphasized that the being of God does not change with the creation of the modes, even if God and the modes are united. Modes and God are very united: modes depend on and are conceived through God, the one substance.\textsuperscript{46} But the unity does not —perhaps contrary to what Hegel might have surmised\textsuperscript{47}— swallow up the finite modes. God’s being and the modes’ being remain distinct, even if they are united. The whole consisting of God and modes is comprised of things “both the same and different in kind” that are really unified. It is seen as a whole when we abstract away those differences between modes and God. We do a similar operation of mind when we gather really separate individuals together under a common genus: we abstract away differences. Keep in mind that parts are also beings of mind.\textsuperscript{48} We might see modes as parts of the whole, but seeing modes as such reverses the proper order of being. To say that they are parts implies a capacity for independent existence, which is, of course, impossible for modes.

What is especially important to note is that modes, while they are really united to God and depend on God for their being, really have different being from God, and that is why there has to be an operation of mind to see God and modes as

\textsuperscript{46} Part I, ch. 6 (O I.40).

\textsuperscript{47} According to Hegel, Spinoza’s substance is but a “dark, formless abyss” (\textit{finstere, gestaltlose Abgrund}) that, as it were, swallows up all that is determinate and finite (1840, p. 303). Hegel’s criticisms of Spinoza deserve much more discussion, and I hope to engage with this debate someday soon. See Melamed (2010) and Hübner (2010) for discussions of Hegel’s charge that Spinoza denies the reality of the finite.

\textsuperscript{48} O I.24-5.
a whole. It is this real difference in being that allows them to come between God and effects, so that God is “in some sense” a remote cause.

3.

The details of how God and modes are causes are dealt with next. Erasmus continues:

in addition to this, you have also said, that the effect [gevrogt] of the inner [innerlyke] cause cannot perish so long as its cause lasts [duurt]; this, I well see, is certainly true, but if this is so, then how can God be an inner cause of all things, seeing that many things perish [te niet gaan]? After your previous distinction you will say, that God is really a cause of the effects which he has produced immediately [ommiddelyk...voortgebragt], without any other conditions except his attributes [eigenschappen] alone; and that these cannot perish so long as their cause endures; but that you do not call God an inner cause of the effects whose existence [wezentlykheid] does not depend on him immediately, but instead which have come into being through some other thing [van eenige andere zaak geworden zyn], only if [als alleen voor] those thing’s many causes do not work and cannot work without God or outside of God; and so therefore, because they are not produced immediately by God, they can perish.49

Erasmus introduces a new causal term, the inner [innerlyke] cause. Importantly, this is not just another word for immanent causation.50 We can see this by looking near the end of this paragraph, where Erasmus predicts that Theophilus will say that a thing mediately caused by God will not have God as an inner cause, even if that thing will have all of its causes in God and if these causes do not and cannot work without God. By this point in the dialogue, Erasmus seems willing to grant

49 O 1.33.
50 Paul Janet’s (1878) translation —from which many available French translations are based—translates innerlyke oorzaak as “cause immanente.”
that all causation, including what is caused *mediately* by God, is within God. What he wants to know now is whether God can be an *inner* cause of those things that are medially created.

But what is an inner cause? To any sixteenth-century reader, the formulation “the effect of the inner cause cannot perish so long as its cause lasts,” would make it very clear what kind of cause was under discussion: the *causa secundum esse*. A *causa secundum esse*, which I will often refer to in this dissertation as a *sustaining cause*, is a cause that is not just required to create the effect, but to sustain it as well. It must continually operate causally for its effects to continue to be; the moment it ceases operating, its effects simply vanish. Thomas, as well as the vast majority of his early modern successors, took Acts 17:28 — that it is in God that creatures “live, move, and have their being”— to indicate that the relationship between God and his creation was one of *causalitas secundum esse*:

Creatures are conserved in being by God.... For the being of each creature depends on God in such a way that, unless creatures are conserved in being by the operation of the divine power, they could not subsist for a moment but would be reduced to nothing.\(^{51}\)

God cannot just create the world *ex nihilo* and leave it to persist on its own, but must *continuously act to keep the world in existence*.

Erasmus simply asks how Theophilus can have it that God is the sustaining cause of *all* things. He predicts that Theophilus will say that God is a sustaining cause of the things produced immediately. To see why Erasmus thinks Theophilus

\(^{51}\) *Summa theological* I, q. 104, art. 1.
would say this, consider the case of extended being (not just a delimited portion of extended being, but the infinite extended being). Extension is one of God’s attributes. God, recall, is a causa sui, so in order for God to create God, what he creates must be extended. Nothing “comes between” God and extended being, so it is something that is immediately produced by God. Crucially, if —per impossibile— God were to stop activity as a causa sui, then there would not be extended being at all. This fits the bill for an inner or sustaining cause.

God is an infinite, ceaselessly self-creating being that cannot limit itself in any way; what God creates immediately and sustains —like extended being— will thus be infinite and ever-lasting. But there are things that do come in and out of existence. These things —modes— are what God creates mediately. As Erasmus sees it, Theophilus will have to say that God cannot be a sustaining cause of these things —God cannot support the being of these things— precisely because such being only lasts for a time or is not infinitely extended. Erasmus thinks Theophilus can say that these things and their causes can still require some sort of activity of God in order to operate, and that these things and their causes can be united with God in a whole, so that they are “in” God. But he thinks that Theophilus will not allow that the relationship between God and modes is one of causalitas secundum esse. God cannot be the immediate —and thus sustaining cause— of all things after all.

\[^{52}\text{O I.19-20.}\]
Such an anticipated answer would be unsatisfactory to Erasmus, however:

For I see that you conclude, that the human understanding is immortal [onsterfelyk], because it is an effect [gevrogt] that God has produced in himself. Now it is impossible that more than the attributes of God should have been necessary in order to produce such an understanding; for, in order to be a being of such excellent perfection, it must have been created from eternity [eeuwigheid], just like all other things which depend immediately on God. And I have heard you say so, if I am not mistaken. And this being so, how will you reconcile this without leaving over any difficulties?53

The problem is that Erasmus thinks he has identified a case that does not fit the model he has just described: the human understanding. This understanding has to have been created immediately in order to be the kind of perfect thing it is. And if it is created immediately, then it is also such that God is a sustaining cause of it. Presumably, Erasmus is thinking that the human understanding, even if it has always been and always will be, is not infinite. But if it is created immediately by God, and thus sustained by God, then it has to be infinite.

Theophilus’s task will be to convince Erasmus that the things that are not eternal, infinite things can nevertheless be sustained by God. Given that God’s immediate causation is sustaining causation, Theophilus has to figure out a way to say that God can still be an immediate cause of those things that do come into existence and go out of existence. Recall that Theophilus has said that God is only “in some respects” [in eenigen manieren] a remote or mediate cause. Nothing he has said so far seems to preclude Theophilus from saying that God is both a

53 O I.33.
mediate and immediate cause of certain things, provided God is not a mediate and immediate cause of those things in the very same respects.

Theophilus says that Erasmus is right to say that what God creates immediately has to be eternal:

It is true, Erasmus, that the things (for the existence \[wezenthlykheid\] of which no other thing is required, except the attributes of God) which have been created immediately by him have been created from eternity.\(^{54}\)

Theophilus then says exactly what we should expect him to say, given the purported counterexample Erasmus has presented:

It is to be remarked, however, that although in order that a thing may exist there is required a particular modification \[bezondere wyzing (modificatio)\] and a thing beside the attributes of God, for all that, God does not cease to be able to produce a thing immediately. For, of the necessary \[noodzaakelyke\] things which are required \[vereyscht\] to bring things into existence, some are there in order that they should produce the thing \[zouden voortbrengen\], and others in order that the thing should be capable of being produced \[zouden kunnen voortgebragt zyn\]. For example, I want to have light in a certain room; I kindle a light (\[ik steek het op\]), and this lights up the room through itself; or I open a window \[venster\], now this act of opening does not itself give light, but still it brings it about that the light can enter the room.\(^{55}\)

For any mode, God can be considered a remote or mediate cause. After all, for that particular mode to be produced, there needs to be “a special modification \[wyzing\] and a thing beside the attributes of God” — in other words, another mode \[wyzing\]. What Theophilus is emphasizing here is that even in this case, God is an immediate

\(^{54}\) O I.33.
\(^{55}\) O I.33-4.
cause —the sustaining cause or *causa secundum esse*— of the existence of that new mode.

We can begin to make sense of this by thinking of the analogy with light. It’s important to note first that the action of a luminous body was a common example of a *causa secundum esse*. Rays of light last only so long as the sun shines. Similarly, if, God were to cease his activity as a *causa secundum esse*, then everything would simply cease to be; God qua *causa secundum esse* ensures that there is *anything at all*, so of course it is necessary for the bringing into existence of a finite thing. But given that everything that is produced by God *immediately* is, in the system described by Theophilus, necessarily infinite, how are we to understand production and sustenance of something finite?

The activity of a luminous body itself —either a kindled light or the sun— is required for there to be light in the room at all. These are examples of the first necessary thing that is “required to bring things into existence”: they are there in order that they should produce being *at all*. The kindled light won’t serve as a good parallel for the metaphysical system under consideration, since that light will eventually die out. The sun, on the other hand, is much better, since from the early modern point of view, the sun is *self-illuminating* and won’t ever run out of fuel. God as a *causa sui* is, then, much like the sun; the sun ceaselessly and immediately produces sunlight, just as God ceaselessly and immediately produces infinite being.
The example of the opening of the window — probably a shutter, rather than a window made of glass — is an example of the other necessary thing that is “required to bring things into existence.” The opening of the shutter is not itself an act of illumination, but provided that the sun is shining, light will enter the room once the shutter is opened. Likewise, the activity of modes themselves, while not strictly speaking the creation of any being, can still be needed for the creation of some other mode, provided substance continuously acts to create being (which it will, since it’s a causa sui that can never stop its activity). The sunlight does not just shine into the open window, but illuminates everything outside of the room as well. Similarly, the being that is immediately created by God is infinite. Nevertheless, the light in the room is bounded, just like the being of a mode is finite. God ensures that there is being at all, but modifications are required to direct and determine that being.

Spinoza gives us another example to make the same point:

Likewise in order to set a body in motion another body is required [vereyscht] that shall have all the motion that is to pass from it to the other.  

I think it’s plausible that this is supposed to make us think of Descartes’ conservation principle, as stated in *Principia Philosophiae*, Part II, 36:

...God...in the beginning created matter along with motion and rest, and now, through his ordinary concourse alone, conserves just as much motion and rest in the whole of it [i.e., the material world] as he put there at that time. For although that motion is only a mode of

---

56 O I.34.
moving matter, it has a certain determinate quantity which can easily be understood to remain always the same in the totality of things, even though it is changed in the individual parts. And so, for example, we believe that when one part of matter moves twice as fast as another, and the later is twice as big as the former, there is as much motion in the smaller as in the larger; and as much motion as is lost by one part slowing down is gained by another of equal size moving more quickly.\(^{57}\)

Descartes’ conservation principle can be captured by a simple quantitative law: the total “quantity of motion” —the mass of each body multiplied by its speed—remains constant for the entire material world.\(^{58}\) God always conserves the same amount of motion and rest in matter, so whatever “new” motions in a system that we see are just local transformations or modifications of an existing quantity of motion. In a similar way, God continually creates the same “amount of being.” This makes sense, since there can never be more or less of the one substance. Whatever


\(^{58}\) This conservation principle should not be thought of as a principle about the conservation of _momentum_: speed is _just speed_, not the vector quantity of velocity. For Descartes, there is a strict distinction between the quantity of motion a body has and its _determination_: i.e., the direction in which that body is moving. See _Principia Philosophiae_, part II, 41 (AT VIII.65-6).

Descartes’s conservation principle was criticized by John Wallis, Christopher Wren, and Christiaan Huygens in papers sent to the Royal Society in 1668-9 and by Leibniz in his 1686 “Brevis demonstratio.” As is clear from two letters to Tschirnhaus, Spinoza had also distanced himself from Descartes’s physics by the mid-1670s (O IV.332, O IV.334), but perhaps Spinoza’s doubts about Descartes’s physics did not include doubts about Descartes’s laws of motion. If we are to believe Leibniz, Spinoza did not see any problems with Descartes’s laws of motion until November 1676, when Leibniz purportedly showed Spinoza how the laws violated the equality of cause and effect. Unfortunately, the only source for information about this exchange is Foucher de Careil’s (1854) introductory essay, as the manuscript from which Careil quotes has been lost.
“new” beings we see are just local transformations or modifications —modes— of an existing being.

One thing I think is important to notice is that again, the distinct reality of the modes is emphasized. Because the shutter and the room are, there can be a certain finite bit of light, and because the bodies are, there can be local changes in motion. Similarly, because modes are —because they have being that is distinct from the being of the infinite substance— other certain finite bits of being —other modes— can be. And just as the dimensions of the room and the shutters will determine what the light is like in the room, and just as the amount of one particular body’s motion will determine the amount of motion another particular body can have, so the characteristics of modes will determine what other modes will be like.

Theophilus adds one last thing before the end of the dialogue:

But in order to produce in us an idea [denkbeeld] of God there is no need for another particular thing [bezonder zaak] that shall have what is to be produced in us, but only such a body in nature whose idea is necessary in order to represent [vertoonen] God immediately. This you could also have picked up from my words. For I said that God is only known [gekend] through himself, and not through something else. However, I tell you this, that so long as we have not such a clear idea [denkbeeld] of God as shall unite us with him in such a way that it will not let us love anything outside him, we cannot truly say that we are united with God, so as to depend immediately on him [onmiddelyk van hem af te hangen].

Perhaps the thought behind this stretch of text is this: if God is the immediate sustaining cause of the being of individual modes, then it can be known

59 O I.34.
immediately that this is the case. Just by reflecting on the being of an individual thing, we can have an idea of God as the *causa secundum esse* of that thing’s being. God’s activity as the sustaining cause of being is just God’s activity of self-creation, so if we can know immediately that God is a *causa secundum esse*, then we can know immediately that God is a *causa sui*. The being of the modes of God—the effects of God as a *causa secundum esse*—is therefore known through God himself. Theophilus seems to end with an acknowledgement that we might not always be able to see things this way. We might fail to see that God is, when it comes to the being of things, an immediate cause. If we think of things in this mistaken way, then we might see individual modes as the cause of being, and if we do that, we fail to be “truly united with God”: in such a case, our ideas fail to match up with the metaphysical facts.

Here, then, is a summary of the position it appears Theophilus (and Spinoza) wants to advance in the dialogue. First, God, *qua* substance, is a remote or mediate cause: modes have effects of their own and vis-à-vis these effects, God is a remote cause. Second, modes do have the sort of distinct being that that enables them to have effects of their own. There is just one God, and all is united in God, but this does not mean that there isn’t a distinction to be drawn between the being of substance and the being of modes. Modes are just modes of the one substance, but they still *are* in a way that is not the way that the substance *is*: they are finite and might only endure for a time, for example. Third, God, *qua* substance, is also
an immediate cause: God is the immediate, sustaining cause of the very being of things.

We can now see more precisely what effects modes have. Modes are not responsible for the very being of things — God is immediately responsible for that — but it looks like they are immediately responsible for the way that being is. As Theophilus might say, the sun will always shine, but it is the arrangement of buildings and windows that determine whether and how rooms get illuminated. Similarly, God (qua substance) will always produce being, but it is the modes of God that determine how that being gets molded and shaped.

**IV. Resisting an Argument to Occasionalism**

Spinoza appears to assign distinct causal roles to God qua substance and God qua modes. We have already seen Spinoza thinks that God qua substance is a sustaining cause of the very being of things, a *causa secundum esse*. Now we can see that it looks like a mode’s activity can be classified as *causalitas secundum fieri*, the other kind of efficient cause recognized in the period.

Unlike a sustaining cause or *causa secundum esse*, a *causa secundum fieri*, a cause of becoming or a *productive cause*, brings about effects that persist even after the productive causal activity of the cause has stopped. For example, a builder can step away from the house he has just built without worrying that it will simply cease to exist. The builder is a *causa secundum fieri* that does not produce the very
being of the brick, mortar, and drywall, but he does produce the house by arranging all those materials in such a way that those things become a house.

Similarly, modes do not produce the very being of things, but it looks like they can cause being to become a certain way: existing modes of being seem to determine what modes can come to be. Even if modes are anything at all because of the activity of God as a sustaining cause, we can say that the way some mode is was immediately caused by the way some other mode was. This is what enables us to say that God is a mediate or remote cause of the effects modes bring about. A certain mode M is because God has given it being, but the way that mode is is due to other modes. M “comes between” God and M’s effects —the ways in which other modes are. What enables M to come between God and M’s effects is 1) that M is a something that has a distinct sort of being from the being of God qua substance and 2) M’s effects cannot be traced to God’s immediate activity.

What is especially interesting to note is that even though Spinoza is a monist, so everything is, strictly speaking, God, it looks like Spinoza is trying to block a version of a certain powerful argument to occasionalism, one that was probably circulating in both Dutch and French Cartesian circles around the time Spinoza wrote the KV. The argument begins with the idea that God’s relationship with creation is one of causalitas secundum esse: if God were to cease that activity, then creatures would simply cease to be. Louis de La Forge, one Cartesian who
articulates the argument in his 1666 *Traité de l’esprit et de l’homme*, states this premise in the following way:

> It was necessary for [God] to employ his omnipotent power in order to bring all of Nature out of nothing.... It would all return to nothing if God ceased bringing it out of nothing at each moment that he conserves it.⁶⁰

La Forge emphasizes that when God sustains a body over time, he does not and cannot sustain it *in abstracto*, but rather in some specific place relative to other things:

> Not only must [God] continue to produce it [a body], if he wants it to persevere in existence; but, in addition, because he cannot create it everywhere nor outside of any particular place, he must himself put it in place [*lieu*] B if he wants it to be there.⁶¹

The relative place of a body is a mode of that body and the argument can be extended, *mutatis mutandis*, to cover any mode or property of a body: its size, internal constitution, shape, etc. La Forge concludes that this ensures that God is the *sole* causal agent in the world: God is the “first, universal, and total cause of motion.”⁶²

This argument amounts to the claim that divine sustaining causality simply washes out any creaturely productive causality. If God continually creates all

---

⁶⁰ *Traité* 241.
⁶¹ *Traité* 240.
⁶² *Traité* 241. It should be noted that there was not a great deal of communication between Dutch and French Cartesians in the 1650s and 1660s, so I will have to do much more archival work to see exactly how likely it was that Spinoza or those in his circle were familiar with such arguments to occasionalism. Of course, it could be that Spinoza saw on his own that a certain Cartesian understanding of continuous creation could lead to occasionalism.
creatures in all of their infinite specificity, then what room could there be for *causalitas secundum fieri*? If God continually creates the bricks, mortar, and drywall in all of their specificity, *including* their arrangement in space, throughout their entire existence, then it does seem that some builder is not really the one to be credited as the cause of that arrangement.63

Later in the KV, Spinoza emphasizes, just like his occasionalist predecessors and contemporaries, that in order for some finite thing to be, it has to be fully specified: it is “precisely the particular things” (fully determinate individuals, like Bucephalus), and “they alone, that have a cause, and not the general [e.g. the genus Horse], because they are nothing.”64 But whereas occasionalists like de La Forge argue that since God is the immediate source of a creature’s infinitely specific being, there is nothing left for creatures themselves to

---

63 A similar argument appears later on in Malebranche’s *Entretiens sur la métaphysique et sur la religion* (1688) (in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 12, p. 157).
64 O I.42-3.
do, Spinoza appears to deny that God is the *immediate* source of such specificity.\(^{65}\) As I read the second dialogue, Spinoza is trying to argue that God’s activity as a sustaining cause is wholly general, and does not *immediately* yield creatures in all of their infinite detail; finite modes are the immediate causes of such details, even if

\(^{65}\) It is worth noting that the argument to occasionalism from continuous creation à la de La Forge was a *Cartesian* argument, rather than an argument Descartes himself offered. In fact, it seems Descartes thought he could subscribe to a doctrine of divine conservation without thinking that God’s conservation of a substance is *ipso facto* the cause of all of a substance’s specificity. Daniel Garber (1987) has argued that even if his Cartesian successors were pushed toward occasionalism, Descartes himself can avoid thorough-going occasionalism because he does not seem to make God’s activity as *causalitas secundum esse* wash out every opportunity for a creature to be a *causalitas secundum fieri*. Although Descartes identifies the action by which God creates something with the action by which he keeps it in existence, Descartes does employ the following axiom in the geometrical presentation of his arguments added to the Second Replies: “it is greater to create or conserve a substance, than it is to create or conserve the attributes or properties of a substance” (AT VII.166). There appear to be two different kinds of causes, one that deals with the very being of a substance and another that deals with the modes of that substance, and if this is so, then it could be the case that God’s causal activity in sustaining bodies or minds is a different kind of causal activity than his causal activity in making bodies be in certain states or have certain modalities. Garber argues that Descartes does split God’s causal activity into these two kinds, and argues that although Descartes’ God sustains the very being of bodies and minds by way of continuous creation, he *moves* bodies by impulse in a way very similar to the way in which Scholastic forms were supposed to move bodies. God is both a sustaining cause of bodies’ being and a modal cause of their movements, but he is just a sustaining cause of minds’ being. It seems at least possible that finite minds could, perhaps with God’s concurrence, and perhaps only sometimes, provide an impulse that could serve as a modal cause of the movement of a body.

It seems La Forge had also wanted minds to be independently active. However, it is not clear that he can consistently maintain this, since he thinks that God must continuously create an object in a specific place and position; according to La Forge, God moves bodies by continuously creating them, not by contributing an impulse, so there is not the space for creaturely contribution in La Forge’s system that there was in Descartes’s. For discussion, see Nadler (1998).
it is true that those finite modes rely on God for their very existence. A finite mode, as a genuine kind of efficient cause, can itself be a *that from which* certain kinds of changes issue.

To be perfectly clear, the idea is that a finite mode can be an immediate cause of certain kinds of effects, even if all of those effects are completely determined. Spinoza is certainly not arguing that finite modes have any sort of libertarian freedom to determine themselves or that God *qua* an omniscient infinite being has any sort of Molinist middle knowledge of actions modes would freely perform. Spinoza underlines that “since all that happens is done by God”—either by God *qua* substance or by God *qua* modes, I think we can add—everything must necessarily be predetermined by God *qua* the infinite, perfect substance:

…otherwise he would be mutable, which would be a great imperfection in him. And as this predetermination [*voorbepaalheid*]

66 Jesuits like Luis de Molina and Francisco Suarez developed the notion of middle knowledge (*scientia media*) to accommodate two thesis: 1) that many actions are free since their agents are not logically or causally determined to perform them (in saying this, they disagree with Dominicans like Diego Alvarez, who hold that God maintains control over human history by causally determining human actions), and 2) that God nevertheless knows what such undetermined agents will do. How does this work? God causes circumstances in which he knows what the agents in those circumstances will freely do, and so maintains the course of the world in accordance with his plans. The certain knowledge God has of what every possible creature would freely do in any sort of circumstance is middle knowledge. Such knowledge was thought to be midway between God’s knowledge of merely possible things and his knowledge of actual things, as well as midway between God’s knowledge of the necessary truths following from the divine nature and his knowledge of his own will and all that is causally determined by his will. The activity of modes is completely determined in Spinoza’s metaphysics, so a question about how to accommodate libertarian freedom—and divine knowledge thereof—simply does not arise.
by him must be from eternity, in which eternity there is no before or after, it follows irresistibly [volgt daar uyt kragtelyk] that God could never have predetermined things in any other way than that in which they are determined now, and have been from eternity, and that God could not have been either before or without these determinations [bepaallenge].

As I hope to show in the next chapter, by the Ethics, Spinoza has developed a more nuanced account of how God’s sustaining activity fits with modes’ productive activity, as well as how God’s role in the predetermination of everything fits with modes’ role in how everything plays out. What we see is a highly complex causal metaphysics, the complexity of which has not yet been adequately appreciated by interpreters of Spinoza.

---

67 Part I, ch. 4 (O I.37).
68 There is a footnote that initially seems to undermine the thesis that Spinoza is concerned to accord modes of substance genuine causal efficacy. That footnote is footnote 16 in Part II (O I.36), and the author of the footnote (which again, may or may not be Spinoza) seems to argue from continual creation to occasionalism: once one accepts that created things require God’s continual creative activity to hold them in existence, it makes no sense to think of them as doing anything themselves. But it is important to see that that footnote concerns the activity of created substances distinct from God, not modes of God. The author of the footnote argues that one cannot consistently maintain that created substances rely for their very being at every moment on God _and_ that those substances produce things —like volitions— by themselves: “by what power? Not by that which has been, for it is no more; also not by that which it has now, for it has none at all whereby it might exist or last for a single moment, because it is continuously created anew. Thus, then, as there is nothing that has any power to maintain itself, or to produce anything, there remains nothing but to conclude that God alone, therefore, is and must be the efficient cause of all things, and that all acts of volition are determined by him alone” (O I.36). Spinoza can say that God alone is the efficient cause of all things, even if it is also true that there are different kinds of divine causal activity: activity of God _qua_ substance and activity of God _qua_ modes.
Chapter Two

Spinoza’s Four Causes:
A New Reading of the Causal Metaphysics of the Ethics

I. Introduction

While a flat-footed interpretation of Spinoza has it that he is simply a kind of occasionalist (if everything *just is* God, then God is obviously the only cause), the dialogues in the KV suggest that this flat-footed interpretation isn’t right. The dialogues seem to show that Spinoza was keen to *resist* the occasionalist argument that if God is creating and conserving creatures in all of their infinite detail at every moment in time, then there is simply nothing left for creatures to do. Spinoza appears to resist this argument by denying that God’s activity as a sustaining cause immediately yields anything specific; God’s sustaining activity simply ensures that there is something rather than nothing. The fact that there are individual creatures and not just one wholly simple, undifferentiated, self-sustaining being is due to the activity of finite modes, which, as *causa secundum fieri* or productive causes, can

---

cause being to become a certain way. Finite modes are anything at all because they are modes of the one self-sustaining being, but because they have finite and determinate natures, they can be immediate causes of further modifications of that being. To use the analogy from the second dialogue, a patch of sunlight on the floor is because of the continuous activity of the sun, but it is the particular shape it is because of the way other particular things —like a window— already are.

One question that the sketch in the KV leaves unanswered is the following: why do particular modes have the particular configurations and characteristic they do? By the Ethics, Spinoza provides an explicit answer. Modes have the configurations and characteristics they do because they have particular essences, and these essences, just like absolutely everything else, are caused by God. God is the efficient cause of the existence and essence of all things (1p25).

According to my reading of the Ethics, Spinoza continues to resist the argument to occasionalism discussed in the last chapter. Even though everything is God, this doesn’t mean that the sustaining activity of God qua substance simply supplants the productive activity of the modes of God. Spinoza makes the claim that God is the efficient cause of the existence and essence of all things at a point when he is turning away from issues of sustaining causality and towards issues of productive causality. I thus take the claim in 1p25 as a sort of dual-purpose signpost: it summarizes what has just been established about sustaining efficient causality, but it is couched in a way that makes it clear that it will be true about
productive efficient causality as well. That is, it is not just the case that \textit{God qua substance} is the efficient (sustaining) cause of the existence and essence of all things, but it is also the case that the \textit{modes of God} are efficient (productive) causes of the existence and essence of things.

So it looks like there are not just two efficient causes in Spinoza’s metaphysics, but four:

1) God (qua substance) is a sustaining cause (\textit{causa secundum esse}) of the \textit{existence} of things.
2) God (qua substance) is a sustaining cause (\textit{causa secundum esse}) of the \textit{essences} of things.
3) Modes of God are productive causes (\textit{causae secundum fieri}) of the \textit{existence} of things.
4) Modes of God are productive causes (\textit{causae secundum fieri}) of the \textit{essences} of things.

In the next two sections, I will describe each of these causes and explain where and how each of these causes figures in the first two parts of the \textit{Ethics}. In the third section, I will present my preferred interpretation of the relations between conception, causation, and inherence in Spinoza’s metaphysics. Importantly, we will see that a proliferation of causal relations will also result in a proliferation of conceptual relations. In the fourth section, I will turn to one immediate consequence of recognizing an expanded taxonomy of causes and kind of conception in the \textit{Ethics}: with more causes and conceptions in hand, we can see that a crucial axiom —the infamous fourth axiom of the first part, “cognition of an
effect depends on, and involves, cognition of its cause— is not as problematic and bizarre as it has hitherto been seen to be.  

---

2 *Effectus cognitio a cognitione causae dependet et eandem involvit.* (1a4, O II.46).

3 For clarity of exposition, I will mostly talk of substance and its modes conceived under the attribute of extension. However, what is true of substance and its modes under the attribute of extension will be true of substance and its modes under the attribute of thought: there will be four distinct kinds of causes and four corresponding kinds of conception. On such a model, ideas — modes of thought — will be productive causes of other ideas; ideas will have real causal oomph, which can help explain Spinoza’s rejection of acts of pure will (2p49). Just as we can conceive of an extended mode in multiple ways, picking up in each case on a different kind of cause, so we can conceive of a mode of thought in multiple ways, also picking up in each case a different kind of cause. In future work, I will explore how my interpretation impacts how we interpret Spinoza’s philosophy of mind, including his account of the affects in the third part of the *Ethics.*
II. Spinoza’s Four Causes

As a glance at the chapter on efficient causation Burgersdijk’s *Institutionum logicarum* makes clear, the category of efficient causes was often divided into various subcategories. But nowhere do we see the divisions I think are at work in Spinoza’s *Ethics*. Spinoza never lays it out so nicely, but I think we can say the following about each of the four causes.

Let’s start with the first sort of cause: God qua substance is a sustaining cause of the very existence of things. Modes of a substance only exist because substance exists. If substance were —*per impossibile*— to cease causing itself to exist, then modes would cease to be. It’s worth noting that this is also an *immanent* cause, since the substance cannot cause anything else to be or cause changes in

---

4 *Institutionum logicarum* I, ch. 17. Efficient causes can be divided 1) into the sort which requires an intervening action and into the sort which does not (since the effect simply emanates from the cause), 2) into immanent and transitive, 3) into free and necessary, 4) into the sort where the cause is “of its own council, and agreeable to its natural disposition,” and which produces the effect “as such,” and those which do not, and so are “accidental,” 5) into principal and less principal, 6) into first, which depends on nothing, and second, which depends on the first, 7) into universal and particular, and 8) into proximate and remote. Although the category of free efficient causes will be empty for a necessitarian like Spinoza, I think there are ways of seeing versions of each of the other categories in Spinoza’s work. The task of tracing out Spinoza’s indebtedness to the likes of Burgersdijk and Adriaan Heereboord has already begun. See the section edited by Piet Steenbakkers in the *Continuum Companion to Spinoza* (ed. van Bunge et al.) as well as H. Krop’s and J. Park’s contributions in *Spinoza et ses scolastiques. Retour aux sources et nouveaux enjeux* (ed. Manzini). What I hope to show in this chapter is that Spinoza is not simply working with the distinctions one finds in handbooks like Burgersdijk’s *Institutionum logicarum*.

5 Spinoza retains the idea of God as a *causa sui* in the *Ethics*. See 1p7d (O II.49).
anything distinct from it, since all there is and can be is the one substance. Whatever substance causes must be *within* substance.

God is the immanent cause of the infinite plurality of particular finite modes, but it is a little misleading to think of the *plurality of things* as being created by substance as a sustaining cause of existence. This activity ensures that there is something rather than nothing, but exactly what there is, or *how* what exists, *how many* things exist, or *when* things exist, is not the issue. Finite modes do come into existence and go out of existence in time, but despite this flux, it is not as though anything has ceased to *be* anything at all. Spinoza acknowledges in *1p15s5* that this is a hard thing for us to wrap our heads around sometimes:

If someone should now ask why we are, by nature, so inclined to divide quantity, I shall answer that we conceive quantity in two ways: abstractly, or superficially, as we [commonly] imagine it, or as substance, which is done by the intellect alone [without the imagination]. So if we attend to quantity as it is in the imagination, which we do often and more easily, it will be found to be finite, divisible, and composed of parts; but if we attend to it as it is in the intellect, and conceive it insofar as it is a substance, which happens with great difficulty, then (as we have already sufficiently demonstrated) it will be found to be infinite, unique, and indivisible.\(^6\)

*Imagining* the totality of what is involves distracting picture thinking: we consider what is as a sort of physical material, stuff to be divided, moved, or mixed up. If we conceive of what is in this way, we may not realize that there is just one being, which always is, regardless of the ways in which it happens to be modified:

---

\(^6\) O II.59.
…we conceive that water is divided and its parts separated from one another—insofar as it is water, but not insofar as it is corporeal substance. For insofar as it is substance, it is neither separated nor divided. Again, water, insofar as it is water, is generated and corrupted, but insofar as it is substance, it is neither generated nor corrupted.⁷

The take-away point is this: God is a sustaining cause because God is the cause of being simpliciter: if God were (per impossibile) to cease this activity, then there would not be anything at all.⁸

Now take the second cause: God qua substance is a sustaining cause of the essence of things. All essences necessarily follow from the nature of God just as geometrical properties necessarily follow from the nature of a geometrical figure.⁹ God’s essence is necessarily existent, and everything that follows from the nature of God follows by necessity. We thus get a necessitarian conclusion: anything that necessarily follows from that essence will also necessarily exist.¹⁰ But whereas existence is part of the essence of God qua substance, individual essences of

---

⁷ 1p15s5 (O II.59-60).
⁸ It is worth noting that insofar as we are only thinking of this cause, it may be accurate to think of Spinoza as a thinker in the Eleatic monist mold, as Leibniz, Hegel, and pretty much everyone else by the late 18th century thought of him. See, for example, Leibniz’s De ipsa natura (1698) (G IV 508-509), his annotations to Oldenburg’s letter from October 1676 (A VI.3.370), and §21 of the Discours sur la théologie naturelle des Chinois (1716). See also Maimon’s Streifereien 40-1 (Gesammelte Werke IV 62-3), Schopenhauer’s Parerga and Paralipomena (vol. 1, pp. 71, 76-7), Hegel’s Lectures on the History of Philosophy (vol. 1, p. 244; vol. 3, pp. 247-8), and Hegel’s Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion (vol. 1, p. 376).
⁹ See Viljanen (2011) for a discussion of the idea that following-from relation has its roots in geometrical thinking.
¹⁰ In reading Spinoza as a necessitarian, I disagree with Curley (1969). I agree with Garrett (1991) that Spinoza is best read as a necessitarian.
particular modes do not contain existence. These individual essences are, as the scholastics would put it, merely *propria*: properties that necessarily follow from God’s essence but which are not themselves part of God’s essence.\(^{11}\)

So an infinity of individual essences necessarily *follows from* God’s essence but is not part of God’s essence. As we might put it (being careful, of course, to avoid thinking that Spinoza’s God or substance is doing anything intentionally), God’s essence brings individual essences into being, and does so with necessity. And furthermore, if God’s essence were (*per impossibile*) to cease to be, then so would all individual essences.

Notice that we have what looks like a sustaining causal relation. First, individual essences come from God’s essence, *with necessity*. That there is a necessary connection here is key, since necessary connections were seen to be a

\(^{11}\) There is a common Aristotelian distinction between 1) qualities that make a thing the thing it is, which are the qualities that constitute a thing’s essence, 2) qualities that necessarily follow from the essence of a thing (but are not part of the essence itself), which are the propria, and 3) qualities which are at least partly caused by something external to the thing, which are a thing’s accidents. Only the essence provides an explanation of a thing’s nature, and thus only the qualities constituting the essence should figure in the thing’s definition, even though the propria necessarily follow from the essence. In the TDIE §95, Spinoza explains that propria must not figure in the definition of a thing because “the properties of things [*proprietates rerum*] are not understood so long as their essences are not known,” but “all the thing’s properties” (*omnes proprietates rei*, which mean propria in the context) must be inferred from a definition that gives the essence of a thing (TDIE §97). For a clear exposition of this particular aspect of the following-from relation in Spinoza, see Melamed (2009).
necessary condition for real causation.\textsuperscript{12} And although the existence of mode-individuating essences is a necessary component of a story about how individual modes come to be, the \textit{coming to be} of individual modes in time—productive causality or \textit{causalitas secundum fieri}—is not yet at issue.

To begin to see the coming to be of individual essences is a different matter from the sustaining of essences, it is useful to return to the geometrical analogy. Consider the relation between God’s essence and the individual essences of modes as one very much like a relation between truths about the defining properties of a triangle and various truths derived from those properties. Notice that we can think lots of truths follow from the nature of a triangle even if no one has yet thought about the relevant properties or worked out any proofs; there is a natural thought that such truths follow, even if no mathematician has ever worked it all out in time. There is another quite natural thought we might have as well: we might think that a good proof—one that facilitates understanding—will proceed in a certain way, with some things derived before others. That is, we might not just think that truths follow from an essence of a triangle, but we might think that the truths follow in a certain order.

Individual essences follow from God’s essence like these truths about a triangle: all essences follow, and follow in a certain order, \textit{regardless of whether}

\textsuperscript{12} Recall that one of Malebranche’s arguments to occasionalism starts from the idea that necessary connection is required for real causation. Since it is only between \textit{God’s} will and effects that there is a necessary connection, \textit{God} is the only real cause. See \textit{Œuvres complètes}, vol. II, 316.
those essences have come to be in time. The essences that are sustained by God have eternal, rather than durational being; they are the formal essences that do not presuppose the existence of the thing in time. That formal essences enjoy this sort of being is suggested by 2p8:

2p8: The ideas of singular things, or [sive] of modes, that do not exist must be comprehended [comprehendi] in God’s infinite idea in the same way as the formal essences of the singular things, or [sive] modes, are contained [continentur] in God’s attributes.

Cor.: From this it follows that so long as singular things do not exist, except insofar as they are comprehended in God’s attributes, their objective being, or ideas, do not exist except insofar as God’s infinite idea exists. And when singular things are said to exist, not only insofar as they are comprehended in God’s attributes, but insofar also as the are said to have duration, their ideas also involve the existence through which they are said to have duration.13

There is much more to be said about how Spinoza understands the ideas of things, but that will have to wait for another occasion. The thing to note here is that the corollary strongly suggests that the formal essences of nonexistent singular modes have a being distinct from the being of modes that exist in time.14 Furthermore, that the formal essences of singular things are “contained in” (continentur) God’s

14 As I see it, the formal essences of finite modes and “actual essences” of finite things—that is, those that exist in time— are both finite. I therefore disagree with Garrett (2009) that formal essences of finite modes are infinite modes. A thing “is said to be finite in its own kind that can be limited by another of the same nature” (1d2, O II.45). Presumably, the formal essence of one finite body is of the same nature as the formal essence of another finite body insofar as both bodies are modifications of the same attribute. But if the formal essences of these bodies are of the same nature, then they cannot be infinite.
attributes (2p8) is exactly what we should expect from sustaining activity in Spinoza’s metaphysics. God or substance (understood either as extension or thought) can only sustain the being of substance, since there can be nothing but the one substance. So sustaining activity will be immanent activity: what is sustained by substance must be within substance, since it cannot be outside of it.

But if the following of the complete objective ordering of modes’ essences from God’s essence is not something happening in time, but is rather timeless, why should we see this as a causal relation?

To think of God’s essence as a sustaining cause may seem strange to one accustomed — as many twenty-first century philosophers probably are — to think of causation as something in time. But it’s important to underscore that the efficient cause need not have this valence. It is simply the that from which an effect comes about, and, at least by the time Aquinas was writing about it, there is not a clause specifying that anything must happen in or over time.15

It seems we should not think of the first kind of causation as happening in time either. As Spinoza emphasized in a letter to Lodewijk Meyer in April 1663, time and duration are notions pertaining to the realm of modes, not the realm of

15 Cf. Aquinas, Summa contra gentiles II.21, Summa theologica III, q. 62, art. 6, “De potentia” q. 3, art. 8, and “De veritate” q. 28, art. 7.
substance.  While it is true that the first cause concerns the existence of modes (modes are something at all because their substance is), and the second cause concerns the essences of modes (which are because the essence of God is), we are not yet considering solely what happens among modes. Rather, we are considering what substance, qua substance, causes. Since we are not yet concerned with the realm of modes, thoughts about time and duration are simply out of place, even when it comes to the existence of the one substance. As he puts it in the explication of 1d8, “for such existence, like the essence of a thing, is conceived as an eternal truth, and on that account cannot be explained by duration or time, even if the duration is conceived to be without beginning or end.”

The next two kinds of causes do concern the relatively more familiar realm of modes, a realm of change, of succession, of causal relations in time, involving

16 “It is to the existence of modes alone that we can apply the term duration; the corresponding term for the existence of substance is eternity, that is, the infinite enjoyment of existence or-pardon the Latin-of being (essendi).” In that letter, Spinoza also insists that “measure, time, and number are nothing other than modes of thinking, or rather, modes of imagining”: that we are able to “delimit duration and quantity as we please, conceiving quantity in abstraction from substance and separating the efflux of duration from things eternal, there arise time and measure: time to delimit duration and measure to delimit quantity in such wise as enables us to imagine them easily, as far as possible. Again, from the fact that we separate the affections of substance from substance itself, and arrange them in classes so that we can easily imagine them as far as possible, there arises number, whereby we delimit them.” (O IV.54-56)

17 O II.46.
things—both objects and ideas—that endure for at least some time.\footnote{And for all time, in the case of modes “which exist necessarily and are infinite” (E1p23, O II.66). See 1p21: Omnia, quae ex absoluta natura alicujus attributi Dei sequuntur, semper, & infinita existere debuerunt, sive per idem attributum aeterna, & infinita sunt (O II.65). ‘Eternity’ when applied to modes is \textit{sempiternity}, “duration without any beginning of duration, or a duration so great that, even if we wished to multiply it by many years, or tens of thousands of years, and this product in turn by tens of thousands, we could still never express it by any number, however large. (Cogitata Metaphysica 10, O I.270). ‘\textit{Ab aeterno}’ indicates endless duration. See O I.48.}

Finite modes are required for \textit{other} finite modes to come to be, but there are two distinct aspects of this coming to be: we can think of this coming to be as the coming to be of a \textit{something}, and we can think of this coming to be of a \textit{something} that is \textit{a certain} way.

The \textbf{third} kind of cause is a cause of the coming to be of a \textit{something}: when a particular thing—either a particular body or a particular thought—comes to be, there comes to be something in time that was simply not there before. This coming to be of some finite thing in time is not due to the sustaining causal activity of God, since 1) the sustaining activity of God is not properly thought of as in time, and 2) God, as an infinite substance, can only cause what is infinite. Modes, as productive causes, rearrange and reconfigure other modes (or themselves) to bring about the existence of a new mode or a change in an existing mode. Importantly, we need not think that modes are only productive causes of modes distinct from themselves, since it seems that a mode can be a productive cause of the durational being of its later states.
According to Spinoza, each extended finite mode that enjoys durational existence has a nature or form, reflected in a specific “ratio of motion and rest,” which makes a mode or an individual composed of modes the thing it is and determines the kinds of interactions it can have with other modes (2p13lem1-7). That a certain extended thing has a particular ratio of motion and rest was determined by other things’ ratios of motion and rest, and these other things’ ratios of motion and rest were themselves determined by other things’ ratios of motion and rest, and so on. And the fact that a certain thing now has a certain ratio of motion and rest is explained in part by the fact that it had a certain ratio of motion and rest earlier. The fourth kind of cause concerns the coming to be of modes’ natures —essesences— that yield specific ratios of motion and rest when modes are considered under the attribute of extension as well as whatever the parallel ratio would be when modes are considered under the attribute of thought.¹⁹

In 3p7, Spinoza identifies the “actual essence” of a thing with the “striving by which each thing strives to persevere in its being,” where this being is *durational being*.:²⁰ The thing cannot exist without its actual essence and the actual essence cannot be without the singular thing that perseveres; this is in contrast with the formal essence sustained by God, which enjoys eternal existence and does not presuppose any actual —again, for Spinoza, this means *durational*— existence.

¹⁹ Cf. 2p7, “The order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things.”
²⁰ Conatus, quo unaquaque res in suo esse perseverare conatur, nihil est praeter ipsius rei actualem essentiam (O II.146).
Spinoza is not at all clear on this, but presumably, whatever the thing strives to do in time is to be found in the eternal realm as well, following from the formal essence of the thing as *propría*.\(^{21}\)

For our purposes, the thing to see is that these actual essences come to be in time, and their coming to be (as well as their ceasing to be) is explained by other actual essences. The striving of things to persever in their being sometimes causes other things to begin to exist. Furthermore, the persistence of a thing over time is explained in part by that thing’s actual essence; an actual essence is at least a partial cause of the existence of itself at a later time.\(^{22}\) In short, actual essences can be productive causes (*causae secundum fieri*) of actual essences.\(^{23}\)

\(^{21}\) It is important note how Spinoza is *not* thinking of essences, either formal or actual. According to Bennett’s reading of Spinoza, a thing’s essence is “those of its properties which [the thing] could not possible lack” (1984, p. 114). But while Spinoza thinks that essential features are those which a thing could not lack, this is not a sufficient condition for an essence. First of all, Spinoza thinks that what necessarily follows from God’s *essence* need not be part of God’s essence: that is, he allows for *propría*. Second, Spinoza says that although every mode is necessarily causally related to God, this relation of dependence does not pertain to the essence of a mode (2p10s2, O II.93). Spinoza also rejects an aspect of the Aristotelian conception of essence, since he does not think that it is in virtue of an essence that a thing is a member of a kind. For Spinoza, there are no kinds that are independent from the (often arbitrary) operations of human minds. For example, while ‘man’ might be predicable of an infinite number of individuals, ‘man’ is just a term for a confused idea wrought by a mind that simply cannot process a lot of details (2p40s1, O II.121).

\(^{22}\) I say “partial cause” of continued durational existence because the world does have to cooperate to the requisite extent. Even so, a thing can be a more or less *adequate* cause. Spinoza defines an *adequate* cause as one such that one can fully understand an effect simply by understanding the nature of the cause (3d1), and says that something is *active* to the extent to which something is an adequate cause and *passive* to the extent that it is an inadequate cause (3d2). So the more a mode’s
Of course, a finite mode cannot come to be a *thing* in time without being a *particular thing* with a particular actual essence, so the third and fourth causes always go together. Nevertheless, as we will see below, if there is a kind of conception corresponding to each kind of causation, it makes sense to think of them as distinct.

---

own actual essence is the cause of the character of its states, the more active that mode is (O II.139).

23 Essences causing essences does look a lot like formal causation, so it makes sense that many commentators have argued that formal causation figures in Spinoza’s thinking (see Gueroult (1968/1974), Joachim (1901), Carraud (2002), Viljanen (2008), and Huebner (2010)). I think that Spinoza was trying to present a metaphysics in which all causation is efficient causation, although I think he diluted efficient causation to accommodate what others might have called formal causation.

It is worth recalling Descartes’ exchange with Arnauld on the topic of God as a *causa sui*. In the first replies, Descartes had said that since it is “God himself who conserves himself, it does not seem too improper for him to be called *sui causa*” (AT VII.109). If God can be so called, then we can “think that he stands in the same relation to himself as an efficient cause does to its effect, and hence to be from himself positively” (AT VII.111). When pressed by Arnauld, Descartes insists that he never said that God is the efficient cause of his own existence, but only that God stands in the same relation to his existence as an efficient cause does to its effect. Descartes then cites Aristotle’s claim that the essence of a thing can be considered as a formal cause of some of a thing’s features and characteristics (AT VII.242). Because God’s existence is identical to God’s essence, God does not require an (external) efficient cause, but Descartes says that God’s essence is a formal cause of his existence, and, as such, “has a great analogy to the efficient [cause], and thus can be called an efficient cause as it were [*quasi causa efficiens*]” (AT VII.243).

I think Spinoza would put things the other way around, saying that God’s sustaining efficient causation of (formal) essences—as well as modes’ (actual) essences’ productive efficient causation of (actual) essences—is *as it were* formal causation.
III. The Texts

Each of these kinds of causes can be discerned in the *Ethics*. Let’s begin with the sustaining causes. Recall that the traditional defining condition for divine *causalitas secundum esse* is captured by the following condition: if God were to cease such causal activity, then products of that causal activity would thereby cease to be. In Aquinas’s words:

Creatures are conserved in being by God…. For the being of each creature depends on God in such a way that, unless creatures are conserved in being by the operation of the divine power, they could not subsist for a moment but would be reduced to nothing.²⁴

That is, there is an asymmetric dependence relation between creatures and God and this asymmetry is the result of a certain kind of *causal activity*.

Creatures are simply modes of the one necessarily existing substance (1p25c), and by definition, modes cannot exist without the substance in which they inhere (1d5).²⁵ So if substance were to cease to be, then its modes would cease to be. It seems we have the requisite asymmetry, since substance is prior in nature to its affections. Modes are *anything at all* because they are modes of substance. But this is not yet a relation of *causa secundum esse*, since we have not said anything at all about causation. Yet such causation is there, and in fact, it is absolutely central to Spinoza’s notion of God.

²⁴ *Summa Theologica* I, q. 104, art. 1.
²⁵ O II.68, O II.45.
According to 1p7d, substance is not an uncaused thing, what the scholastics called an *ens a se*, a being that exists “from itself” because it has no cause, but rather a self-caused thing: “a substance cannot be produced by anything else (by p6c); therefore it will be the cause of itself.”26 By definition, God is a substance (1d6),27 so God must be a *causa sui*. This was a highly controversial thing for Spinoza to assert, since the notion of a *causa sui* was long thought to be intrinsically contradictory. And it does appear to be so, if one assumes that a cause must preexist its effects in time; with that assumption in hand, it would seem that for a thing to cause itself it has to exist before it exists.28 But if considerations of time are inapplicable to the activity of God *qua* substance, and if there can be

26 O II.49.
27 O II.45.
28 Scholastics were happy to call God an *ens a se* whose existence followed from his essence, but insisted, with Aquinas, that “there is nothing *caused* in God” (ST 1a q. 14 a 1, my emphasis). In earlier texts, Spinoza talks of God in ways that appear to come close to the Scholastic uncaused God. In the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, he writes, “*if the thing is in itself, or, as is commonly said, is cause of itself, then it must be understood through its essence alone*; but if it is not in itself, but requires a cause to exist, then it must be understood through its proximate cause” (§ 92, my emphasis). Later on, he continues, “*[an uncreated thing] should exclude every cause, i.e., that the object should require nothing else except its own being for its explanation*” (§ 97). While we may say that God is a cause of himself, what this means, strictly speaking, is just that God — and God’s existence — is understood through his essence alone; the only way to understand God is *a se*. See Laerke (2009).
efficient causation that is not in or over time, then it seems the ban on self-causation can be lifted.²⁹

So it seems that God is a sustaining cause of the existence of things; modes are anything at all because they are modes of substance, and substance is a cause of itself. Spinoza appears to be in agreement with his scholastic and Cartesian predecessors that God’s relation to things is a relation of causalitas secundum esse, but, unlike his predecessors, he thinks that such a relation is best understood in a metaphysics devoid of a transcendent God:

By other arguments…they clearly show that they entirely remove corporeal, or [sive] extended, substance itself from the divine nature. And they maintain that it has been created by God. But by what divine power could it be created? They are completely ignorant of that. And this shows clearly that they do not understand what they themselves say.³⁰

I take it that Spinoza is expressing puzzlement at how a transcendent God — completely disconnected and independent of creation— could convey esse or being to that creation at all. Spinoza can bypass this difficulty. If the one substance

²⁹ There is much more to be said about Spinoza’s views of the nature of the causa sui. Della Rocca (2008, p. 50) suggests that self-causation simply amounts to conceptual self-grounding, while Laerke (2009, pp. 174-198) suggests that Spinoza is thinking of divine self-causation as a form of efficient causation. I think Della Rocca is right to emphasize conceptual self-grounding, but I also think Laerke is right to emphasize the productivity of this cause; I think both can be right, because they are simply emphasizing different aspects of the kind of efficient causation at issue, causalitas secundum esse. This kind of causation will be accompanied by a conceptual relation that, in the context of substance’s auto-production, will amount to conceptual self-grounding. See section II of this chapter for discussion.

³⁰ 1p15s1 (O II.57).
always has and always will exist, then there is not the mystery of how God can create or transmit esse; substance always has and always was modified in some way, and while there will be the question of how those modes change, there will not be the question of how those modes came to be anything at all. Their very being is parasitic on the being of the one self-creating substance.

I suspect that Spinoza’s understanding of God as sustaining cause of existence has not received attention from commentators because it has been assumed that such a cause is out of place in Spinoza’s monist, necessitarian metaphysics. Traditionally, a transcendent God was a sustaining cause of created substances, and traditionally, it was metaphysically possible for God to cease sustaining created substances. Yet substance can be a sustaining cause of its modes if 1) the substance is prior in nature to its modes and 2) the substance is the cause of its modes. Furthermore, substance can be a sustaining cause even in a framework in which it is metaphysically impossible for God’s activity to cease. The issue is the extent of the ontological support, not the modal status of the activity ensuring that support.

So, far from dispensing with the sustaining cause, I think Spinoza is trying to provide a metaphysical system in which that cause is much less mysterious. Other metaphysicians might agree with Spinoza that God is a necessarily existing

\[31\] 1p11 (O II.52-3).
\[32\] Steven Nadler (2008) is an exception, but only briefly discusses the fact that Spinoza sees the relation between substance and modes as one of causalitas secundum esse.
being, but because they make God transcendent and creation dependent on the will of God, a will that could have willed in some other way, they introduce a space for questions Spinoza just doesn’t provide. With a transcendent God, one can wonder how such a God creates and sustains being distinct from himself; for Spinoza, there is no need to ask such a question because the only being that is is the one and only necessarily existing substance, God. And if God’s initial act of creation and his continued sustenance of creation is dependent on the will of God, then one can wonder why God made things as they are. Spinoza’s God simply does not have a will, and there is no reason why things are as they are, other than the fact that the way things are is the only way things possibly could be. There is no sense in asking why God creates and sustains this world rather than some other one.

By 1p16, Spinoza’s focus has been on the nature of substance: its ontological priority, singularity, infinitude, necessity, and role as the immanent cause of all things. He has already presented evidence that God should be understood as the sustaining cause of the very being of everything, and it seems 1p16 is the natural extension of that thought. God is the sustaining cause of all essences as well:

From the necessity of the divine nature there must follow infinitely many things in infinitely many modes (i.e., everything which can fall under an infinite intellect.)
Dem.: This proposition must be plain to anyone, provided he attends to the fact that the intellect infers from the given definition of any thing a number of properties [plures proprietates] that really do follow necessarily from it (i.e., from the very essence of the thing); and that it infers more properties the more the definition of the thing expresses reality, i.e., the more reality the essence of the defined thing involves. But since the divine nature has absolutely infinite attributes (by d6), each of which also expresses an essence infinite in its own kind, from its necessity there must follow infinitely many things in infinite modes (i.e., everything which can fall under an infinite intellect), q.e.d. 33

From the divine nature follows infinitely many modes, and this plurality can “fall under an infinite intellect.” It seems the plurality can be cognized as a plurality because individual essences differentiate the modes. Such individual essences are God’s propria: properties that necessarily follow from, but are not part of, the essence of God.

Admittedly, Spinoza is not explicit that the essences of things follow from the essence of God. However, I think his emphasis on what follows from God’s essence being what can be conceived by an infinite intellect suggests that we are not yet talking about how modes actually come to be in time. We are instead talking about what is true from an objective, timeless stance: that is, from the stance of the infinite intellect of God. Just as we can think that certain truths follow from the nature of a triangle even when no mathematician has yet worked out the proof in time, so there are an infinite number of formal essences of modes that follow from the nature of God, even before they are realized in time.

33 O II.60.
Spinoza does emphasize that all of this following from is efficient causation:

Cor. 1: From this it follows that God is the efficient cause of all things which can fall under an infinite intellect.\(^{34}\)

We do not quite have the analogy between the activity of understanding and the sustaining activity of God that we saw in the KV, but I think the best way to understand the efficient causation here is as sustaining efficient causation. What follows from God’s nature follows with necessity, and if God’s nature were (\textit{per impossibile}) to cease to be, then all that follows would also cease to be.

We can see that Spinoza means to emphasize God as the sustaining cause of the essences of things by considering the scholium to 1p25. In that scholium, Spinoza cites 1p16 as showing that God is the cause of the essences of things:

This proposition [that God is the efficient cause, not only of the existence of things, but also of their essence] follows more clearly from 1p16. From that proposition it follows that from the given divine nature both the essence [\textit{essentia}] and the existence [\textit{existentia}] of things must be inferred [\textit{debeat necessario concludi}]. In a word, in the same sense that God is said to be self-caused he must also be said to be the cause of all things.\(^{35}\)

\(^{34}\) 1p16c1 (O II.60).

\(^{35}\) O II.68. When Spinoza writes that 1p16 establishes that “both the essence and existence of things must be inferred” from the nature of God, I take it that he means that 1p16 itself establishes that \textit{essences} follow. By 1p16, it has already been established that God is the cause of the being of everything.
In 1p24c, Spinoza emphasized that God is the cause of the being of modes, and explicitly cites this as a scholastic locution. This is an obvious reference to sustaining causation or causalitas secundum esse. In 1p24c, the emphasis was on the very being of modes, but in 1p25, the emphasis is on the essence of those modes. God is a causa sui, and if modes are just modes of God, God’s activity as causa sui will amount to activity as sustaining cause. The point of 1p25 is to show that God is a sustaining cause of modes’ formal essences as well as a sustaining cause of modes’ being.

It is important to see that at 1p16, we are still focused solely on what God qua substance causes. God is a sustaining cause of the existence and formal essences of all things, and since all there is is God, such causation is immanent

---

36 “From this [the essence of things produced by God does not involve existence] it follows that God is not only the cause of things’ beginning to exist, but also of their persevering in existing, or [sive] (to use a Scholastic term) God is the cause of the being of things.” (1p24c, O II.67).

37 Morrison (2012) wonders why Spinoza takes this excursion through 1p16, and asks why Spinoza doesn’t just argue that since God is the cause of everything, he is the cause of the essences of things. Morrison supposes that Spinoza “first wants to show that he can derive 1p25 without assuming that essences are modes of God because that’s an assumption that would make his Cartesian readers uncomfortable. Specifically, Spinoza argues for the claim that God is the cause of everything by first arguing that everything is a mode of God (specifically, a proprium, or mode that necessarily follows from the thing’s essence). Therefore, one would feel comfortable inferring that God is the cause of the essences of things only if one were comfortable assuming that those essences are modes of God. However, many of his Cartesian readers would be uncomfortable assuming that essences are modes of anything.” (2012, p. 17). Perhaps Spinoza had Cartesian sensitivities in mind, but in my view, the better explanation for Spinoza’s argumentative strategy in 1p25 is that he is not simply concerned to argue that God is the cause of modes’ essences as well as their existence. He is also concerned to argue that God is a sustaining cause or causa secundum esse of the essences and existence of modes.
rather than transitive, as Spinoza underscores in 1p18.\textsuperscript{38} Spinoza goes on to say a bit more about what can follow from God \textit{qua} substance. In 1p21, he argues that what immediately follows from the absolute nature of God must also be infinite and eternal, in 1p22, he argues that whatever follows from what exists necessarily and is infinite must also exist necessarily and be infinite, and in 1p23, he argues that every necessarily existing infinite mode must have followed either from the absolute nature of God or from something else that had followed from the absolute nature of God.\textsuperscript{39} In 1p16c, we see that we can make claims about efficient causation from claims about the following-from relation, so 1p21 to 1p23 can be taken to describe strictures on what God \textit{qua} substance can cause as a sustaining efficient cause.

\textsuperscript{38} “God is the immanent [\textit{immanens}], not the transitive [\textit{transiens}], cause of all things. Dem.: Everything that is, \textit{is in God}, and must be conceived through God (by 1p15), and so (by 1p16c1) God is the cause of [all] things, \textit{which are in him}. That \textit{is the first} [thing to be proven]. And then outside God there can be no substance (by 1p14), \textit{that is} (by d3), thing which is in itself outside God. That was the second. God, therefore, is the immanent, not the transitive cause of all things, q.e.d.” (1p18, O II.63-4).

\textsuperscript{39} O II.65-67.
We also begin to see a transition toward discussion of the nature of modes. The infinite modes are discussed first, and given his conclusions about those modes in 1p21-1p23, the pressing question becomes how we are supposed to understand finite modes. Like infinite modes, finite modes’ (formal) essences will not involve existence. But how do finite modes come to be, and what can they themselves cause?

We know from 1p26 that modes do not determine themselves: “a thing which has been determined to produce an effect has necessarily been determined in this way by God; and one which has not been determined by God cannot determine itself to produce an effect.” 1p27 emphasizes that something that has been determined by God cannot render itself undetermined. So if modes are causes, they are determined causes.

The essences of modes are “determined” by God in that they follow with necessity from God. These essences in turn determine what effects modes’ can have. Yet at this point, the essences under discussion are formal essences. If we know that an individual mode’s formal essence —which Spinoza has just told us in 1p17s2 is an “eternal truth”— follows from God’s essence, then we know a

---

40 1p24 (O II.67). As I read the Ethics, both infinite and finite modes have durational existence. The infinite modes like motion and rest (as well as the ratio of motion and rest modifying this infinite mode) are sempiternal features of the material world. For a defense of this interpretation, see Schmaltz (forthcoming B). For a view that holds that the only kind of eternity in Spinoza’s metaphysics is sempiternity, see Donagan (1989).

41 O II.68.

42 O II.68.
timeless truth.\textsuperscript{43} We do not yet know truths about what happens in the realm of
duration and time: that is, within the realm of modes and “actual” essences.\textsuperscript{44}

To see the transition to concerns about how modes come to be in time,
consider 1p24c and 1p28. In 1p24c, Spinoza writes

From this [the idea that since God’s nature involves existence, God is a \textit{causa sui} existing only by the necessity of the divine essence] it
follows that God is not only the cause of things’ beginning to exist, but also of their persevering in existing, \textit{or} (to use a scholastic term)
God is the cause of the being of things. For —whether the things
[produced] exist or not— so long as we attend to their essence, we
shall find that it involves neither existence nor duration.\textsuperscript{45}

Spinoza does say in 1p24c that God is the cause of things’ beginning to exist
\textit{[incipiant existere]} and persevering in existence \textit{[in existendo perseverent]}. By
1p24c, though, Spinoza has not said anything about how God \textit{qua} infinite, eternal
substance could cause a finite mode that only endures for a finite amount of time to
\textit{come to be}. All we know is that substance is a sustaining cause of eternal being and
the formal essences of modes, and that finite modes cannot be caused by the nature
of God \textit{qua} infinite substance.

\textsuperscript{43} “…a man is the cause of the existence of another man, but not of his essence, for
the latter is an eternal truth.” (O II.63)
\textsuperscript{44} One might be tempted to read 1p17s as indicating that what follows immediately
from God (as described in 1p16) is in time: “so God’s omnipotence has been actual
from eternity and will remain in the same actuality to eternity.” The \textit{ab aeterno}
does indicate duration, but I think what Spinoza is saying is that throughout all time
it will be a timeless truth that God will be a sustaining cause, just as throughout all
time it will be a timeless truth that a triangle’s “three angles are equal to two right
angles.” (O II.62).
\textsuperscript{45} O II.67.
Spinoza introduces God’s being the cause of things beginning to exist in 1p24c, but does not discuss it again until 1p28. There, however, we find out that finite things can come to be only from other finite modes:

Every single thing, or any thing which is finite and has a determinate existence, can neither exist nor be determined to produce an effect unless it is determined to exist and produce an effect by another cause, which is also finite and has a determinate existence; and again, this cause also can neither exist nor be determined to produce an effect unless it is determined to exist and produce an effect by another, which is also finite and has a determinate existence, and so on, to infinity.46

So it is true that God is the cause of things’ beginning to exist, but only qua finite modes. We already know from 1p25 that God is the efficient cause of things’ essences and existence, and we have already seen how God can be the sustaining cause of essences and existence. By 1p28, Spinoza has shifted the discussion to productive causation. God qua finite modes is the cause of the coming to be of other finite modes.

In the second scholium to 1p28, Spinoza emphasizes that insofar as we consider immanent causal relations (i.e. those of sustaining causation), God cannot be said to be a “remote” cause, where a remote cause is understood as that “which is not conjoined [conjuncta] in any way with its effect.”47 God does not create modes as anything at all via some other thing; modes simply are because substance is. And similarly, God does not create individual formal essences via some other

46 O II.69.
47 O II.70. As we saw in the last chapter, this was the common understanding of remote causes.
essence, since once God’s essence is given, no other essence is needed in order for individual formal essences to follow.

Yet there is a sense in which we can consider God as a remote cause, “so that we may distinguish them from those things that he has produced immediately, or rather, that follow from his absolute nature.”48 As we saw in the previous chapter’s discussion of the parallel passage in the KV, that God can be considered a remote cause indicates that there is a sense in which a mode of God can be a cause in its own right. That is, God’s sustaining causal activity does not simply supplant modes’ productive causal activity.

The first explicit mention of the distinction between sustaining causation (causalitas secundum esse) and productive causation (causalitas secundum fieri) appears in the second scholium of 2p10, a proposition that states that the “being of a substance does not pertain to the [formal] essence of man, or substance does not constitute the form of man.” The crucial text reads as follows:

Everyone, of course, must concede that nothing can either be or be conceived without God. For all confess that God is the sole cause of all things, both of their essence and of their existence. That is, God is not only the cause of the coming to be of things (causa rerum secundum fieri), as they say, but also of their being (sed etiam secundum esse).49

It initially looks as thought Spinoza is just saying that

1) God as the cause of essences = God as the cause of the coming to be of things,

---

48 1p28s2 (O II.70).
49 O II.93.
and

2) God as the cause of existence = God as the cause of being.

That is, this first-pass reading has it that God as the cause of essences is God as a productive cause and God as the cause of existence is God as a sustaining cause. The latter equivalence looks like an uninformative tautology and the former equivalence looks a bit puzzling. Here is why. The main issue of 2p10 is man’s status as a mode, i.e., as something that does not necessarily exist. Because man does not necessarily exist, if a man does exist, then we have to seek an explanation for why that man came to exist — and why he persists — that is not to be found within man’s formal essence. If we remember 1p28, we will remember that each finite mode must be produced by another finite mode, and that mode by another finite mode, and so on to infinity. It is true that God is the cause of the formal essences of finite modes. But these essences of finite modes do not include existence, and 1p28 tells us that a finite mode can only come to be by already existing finite modes. To say simply that God as the cause of essences = God as the cause of the coming to be of things seems to elide two very important details: 1) God qua finite modes is the proximate cause of the coming to be of finite things, and 2) eternal formal essences do not explain what happens in time.

As Spinoza himself says later in the scholium, his “intention [in 2p10s2] was to give a reason why I did not say that anything without which a thing can neither be nor be conceived pertains to its essence — namely, because singular
things can neither be nor be conceived without God, and nevertheless, God does not pertain to their essence.\textsuperscript{50} This passage gives us a clue to how to read the earlier part of 2p10s2. Spinoza says his focus is on the necessity of all things being \textit{conceived} through God. As we will see in the next section, for Spinoza, conceiving implies causation: if y is conceived through x, then x is the cause of y. Even though the “that is” (\textit{hoc est}) invites us to interpret the passage as pointing to the equivalences discussed above, I think there is an interpretation that makes better sense: the passage is hinting at all the different ways in which God is a cause, thereby hinting at all the different ways in which a thing can be conceived through God. It isn’t enough to think of God as the efficient cause of essence and existence, since one also has to recognize that there are two kinds of efficient cause: the sustaining cause (\textit{causa secundum esse}) and the productive cause (\textit{causa secundum fieri}).

So far, we have just considered evidence that Spinoza thinks God qua substance is a sustaining cause of both the eternal existence and formal essence of things. Spinoza also wants to account for the \textit{coming to be} of finite modes, but 1p28 indicates that only finite modes can cause other finite modes to come into being. In order for it to be true that God is both a sustaining cause and a productive cause of finite modes, it seems that we have to acknowledge that ‘God’ fails to be

\textsuperscript{50} O II.94.
univocal in 2p10s2; it is only God *qua finite mode(s)* that can be a productive cause.

But are finite modes productive causes of both the existence and essence of finite modes? I think so. First of all, the demonstration of 1p25 (the proposition that states that God is the “efficient cause, not only of the existence of things, but also of their essence”) will be the same regardless of the *kind* of efficient cause we are considering. God *qua* finite mode, acting as a productive cause, will still be the efficient cause of essences *and* existence.

Furthermore, Spinoza highlights finite modes as causes both of 1) the initial creation and duration of other modes, which appears to highlight finite modes as productive causes of durational existence, and of 2) the particular *ways* in which other modes are, which seems to highlight finite modes as productive causes of essences in time. Consider 2d5:

> Duration is an indefinite continuation of existing. Explication: I say indefinite because it cannot be determined at all through the very nature of the existing thing, nor even by the efficient cause, which necessarily posits the existence of the thing, and does not take it away.\(^{51}\)

In this context, the existence under discussion is the existence of modes not as anything at all, but *as modes*; the “efficient cause” in this passage is most naturally read as another mode, which “posits the existence” of another mode. In 2p30,

---

\(^{51}\) O II.85.
Spinoza cites 1p28 and emphasizes that a mode’s\textsuperscript{52} duration does not depend on its own essence or on “God’s absolute nature,” but on other \textit{modes}.\textsuperscript{53} A mode’s duration is a matter of existence, but it is not a matter of eternal existence—that would be a matter of the being of God’s absolute nature. Finite modes can only cause what is finite, and God’s absolute nature is absolutely infinite. Thus if finite modes can be responsible for bringing anything into being, they can only be causally responsible for what exists as finite and in time.

When a finite mode comes to be in time, it must necessarily come to be with a nature or essence that differentiates it from all other modes. For example, a certain extended body is the body it is because it has an essence— an essence that manifests as a certain ratio of motion and rest among the parts of the body. The body came to be because other bodies—each with their own characteristic ratios of motion and rest— interacted in such a way to cause a thing with a new ratio of motion and rest to come to be, and the body will cease to be when other bodies’ interact with it in such a way that it can no longer maintain its ratio of motion and rest.

\textsuperscript{52} In this passage, the mode is a body or mode of extension.
\textsuperscript{53} “Our body’s duration depends neither on its essence (by 2a1), nor even on God’s absolute nature (by 1p21). But (by 1p28) it is determined to exist and produce an effect from such [other] causes as are also determined by others to exist and produce an effect in a certain and determinate manner, and these again by others, and so to infinity. Therefore, the duration of our body depends on the common order of Nature and the constitution of things.” (O II.114-5)
rest. What is crucial to see here is that the essences seem to be productive causes of essences.

Spinoza will identify the “actual essence” of a thing with its “striving [conatus] to persevere in its existence” in 3p7.55 In the case of the extended body, this striving, when successful, will manifest in its maintaining its ratio of motion and rest. How is the mode’s actual essence related to its eternally existing formal essence? The eternally existing formal essence, as an essence, will itself have propria. As I see it, the actual essence of the thing is simply the instantiation of this eternally existing formal essence. The actual essence’s propria are the precise ways in which it strives, ways that are also to be found sub specie aeternitatis in the formal essence of the thing. Sub specie aeternitatis, an infinite intellect will be able to discern all the ways in which formal essences are related and follow from each other; such an intellect will not only be able to see that the essences are ordered in a certain way, but also why they are so ordered. What is timelessly true will be reflected in what goes on in time: striving things will interact with each other, sometimes producing new things that strive.56

54 See the lemmas and axioms of the “Physical Digression” (O II.97-102).
55 O II.147. As mentioned earlier, “actual” here just means durationally existing.
56 When finite intellects succeed (to a necessarily limited extent) in seeing why some actual essence followed from other actual essences, their ideas will be limited approximations of the ideas an infinite intellect has. That is, it seems they will have ideas of the relations between eternal formal essences. There is much more to be said here about how having more ideas of this sort can ensure that more of a human mind is “eternal” (cf. 5p38-39), but discussion of this complicated issue will have to wait for another day.
The activity of modes as productive causes of the essences of other modes is dependent on the activity of God as a sustaining cause of the essences of all things. Just as the writing out of a correct proof in time can be thought to depend on timeless mathematical truths, so the causal activity of modes in time can be thought to depend on the timeless truths that follow from—and are sustained by—the nature of God. What is interesting is that there is a parallel with the activity of modes as productive causes of the existence of other modes. Modes can cause other modes to come into being in time only if there is being at all, but this very being upon which modes’ activity depends is timeless, eternal being. So it’s not just the case that God’s activity as a sustaining cause of essences is not in time—that seems easy enough to imagine, especially given that it seems we can understand how properties can “follow from” a triangle even if nobody ever bothers to work out the proofs in time—but it’s also the case that God’s activity as a sustaining cause of existence is not in time.57

57 To simplify exposition, I have not said much about the role of infinite modes’ role in the coming to be of other modes. As I understand it, infinite modes, like finite modes, have durational (here sempiternal) existence but eternal formal essences. I do not think that the infinite mode of, say, “motion and rest” (O IV.278) is to be understood as an atemporal law governing motion and rest, but rather as enduring universal features of extension. Infinite modes will be like background conditions, universally applicable forces, or perhaps as the structure of space and time that makes bodies behave in the regular ways they do.
This appears to be a different picture from the one that appeared in the KV. There, the picture was much simpler: modes simply mold and shape what is given by God in time. The picture in the KV appears to be more in line with Cartesian notions of divine sustenance, which have it that God conserves the world by continually creating it in time, where this is understood either as a continual recreation of the world over time or as a continuation of the same creative act over time. Cartesian accounts of divine sustenance privilege thinking in terms of duration: the world stays in existence because God continues to create the world.\(^{58}\)

But this, we can imagine Spinoza complaining, would be to fail to observe the “proper order of philosophizing,” as he puts it in 2p10s2:

They believed that the divine nature, which they should have contemplated before all else (because it is prior both in knowledge and in nature) is last in the order of knowledge, and that the things which are called objects of the senses are prior to all. That is why, when they contemplated natural things, they thought of nothing less than they did of the divine nature and when afterwards they directed their minds to contemplating the divine nature, they could think of nothing less than their first fictions, on which they had built the knowledge of natural things, because these could not assist knowledge of the divine nature.\(^{59}\)

If one is to do things properly, one ought not to think about the activity of God qua substance as one thinks about the activity of modes, that is, in terms of duration and

\(^{58}\) Consider what Descartes himself says about divine sustenance in Meditation III: “All of the time of my life can be divided into innumerable 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.” (AT VII.48-9). See also AT VII.111, AT VII.165, AT VII.168-9, AT VII.369-70, and AT III.429.

\(^{59}\) O II.93-4.
time. If we privilege thinking of *existence* as existence in time, then we will fail to see that the sort of existence that is ontologically prior to temporal existence is eternal existence. Recall 1d8:

D8: By eternity I understand existence itself, insofar as it is conceived to follow necessarily from the definition alone of the eternal thing.

Exp.: For such existence, like the essence of a thing, is conceived as an eternal truth, and on that account cannot be explained by duration or time, even if the duration is conceived to be without beginning or end.\(^{60}\)

As productive causes or *causae secundum fieri*, finite modes work with what is already given, but now we can see that the details are a bit more complicated than they were in the KV. That modes are in time and that modes have *actual essences* in time is dependent on the sustaining activity of God; God sustains foundational eternal being and all formal essences. But since this sustaining activity is not in time, we cannot simply think of finite modes working with what is immediately given by God in time. Rather, it seems we should think of finite modes as working on what is already given as finite and in time. In other words, on modes, rather than on substance itself.

Modes themselves are the proximate causes of temporal or durational existence. Since modes can work on *themselves*, then we can see how a finite mode can *itself* be a productive cause of its own continued (durational) existence. If finite modes are not just productive causes of *existence* in time, but of *essence* in time as

\(^{60}\) O II.46.
well, then we can see that a finite mode can *itself* be a productive cause of its continued durational existence *qua the thing it is*. So not only can we see how it makes sense, metaphysically speaking, to say that a mode can strive to persevere in its existence,\(^{61}\) but also how it makes sense, metaphysically speaking, to say that an actual essence can be a striving to stay in existence. The actual essence, as a productive cause of essence, will ceaselessly strive to recreate itself:

3p7: The striving by which each thing strives to persevere in its being is nothing but the actual essence of the thing.

Dem.: From the given essence of each thing some things necessarily follow (by 1p36), and things are able [to produce] nothing but what follows necessarily from their determinate nature (by 1p29). So the power of each thing, or [sive] the striving by which it (either alone or with others) does anything, or strives to do anything—that is (by 3P6), the power, or [sive] striving, by which it strives to persevere in its being, is nothing but the given, or [sive] actual, essence of the thing itself, q.e.d.\(^{62}\)

Here we can see what I think is an important thing to notice about God and the modes of God. Because God’s essence is necessarily existent, “God’s power is his essence itself.”\(^{63}\) God, qua substance, is necessarily a *causa sui*. But importantly, for modes existing in time as for God, existence and essence always go together: it’s just that God’s eternal essence always yields (timeless) self-creation, whereas any one finite mode’s actual essence does not always yield

\(^{61}\) *Unaquaeeque res, quantum in se est, in suo esse perseverare conatur* (3p6, O II.146).

\(^{62}\) O II.146.

\(^{63}\) 1p34 (O II.76-7).
durational self-creation. A mode’s actual essence, because it does not necessarily exist, can only be a striving to recreate itself in time.

It is worth seeing that there is something that exists in time that is a necessarily successful causa sui, however. All finite modes taken together can be considered as “one individual, whose parts, that is, all bodies, vary in infinite ways, without any change in the whole individual” (2p13lem7s). That whole-of-nature individual will itself have an actual essence that manifests itself in extension in a certain ratio of motion and rest. But since there is nothing outside of this individual, there is nothing that could destroy it, so this individual will always be successful in persevering in its durational existence. In other words, God qua all modes will be sempiternal.

But if modes can be the proximate or immediate causes of their own determinate being in time, is God qua substance still an immediate cause? Yes, but it seems God is an immediate cause of a mode’s being and essence from the eternal perspective: that is, insofar as God is a sustaining cause. Insofar as we are thinking of things as existing in time, God qua substance will be a remote cause. The

64 As I hope to show in the next few sections, even if essence and existence always do go together, whether we are considering God or modes, there are good reasons to think of them as separate kinds of causes. With four different kinds of causes, rather than two, Spinoza’s account of cognition is that much more subtle and supple.

65 There is more to be said about how this relates to Spinoza’s claim in 4p4 that “man’s power, therefore, insofar as it is explained through his actual essence, is part of God or [sive] nature’s infinite power, that is (by 1p34), of its essence,” but I will defer discussion of that complex issue to another day.
sustaining activity of God is necessary for modes to be and act in time, but this sustaining activity does not by itself suffice to bring determinate things into being in time.\footnote{See 5p22: “Nevertheless, in God there is necessarily an idea that expresses the essence of this or that human body, under a species of eternity. Dem.: God is the cause, not only of the existence of this or that human body, but also of its essence (by 1p25), which therefore must be conceived through the very essence of God (by 1a4), by a certain eternal necessity (1p16), and this concept must be in God (by 2p3).” (O II.295). The thing to note is that in this passage, God’s causation of existence and essence is not in time: only other finite \textit{modes} of God could bring about the existence of the finite human body in time (1p28).}

As was the case in the KV, the sustaining activity of God does not simply supplant the productive activity of modes. Even if everything that happens in time is completely determined, and unfolds in exactly the way prescribed by what follows from God’s essence, and even if anything only \textit{is} in time because there is eternal being, all that is happening in time is immediately caused by the activity of God \textit{qua modes}, not by the activity of God \textit{qua substance}.\footnote{See 5p22: “Nevertheless, in God there is necessarily an idea that expresses the essence of this or that human body, under a species of eternity. Dem.: God is the cause, not only of the existence of this or that human body, but also of its essence (by 1p25), which therefore must be conceived through the very essence of God (by 1a4), by a certain eternal necessity (1p16), and this concept must be in God (by 2p3).” (O II.295). The thing to note is that in this passage, God’s causation of existence and essence is not in time: only other finite \textit{modes} of God could bring about the existence of the finite human body in time (1p28).}
IV. Causation, Conception, and Inherence

Developing a view originally outlined by Don Garrett, Michael Della Rocca has suggested that Spinoza’s unwavering commitment to the Principle of Sufficient Reason in turn commits Spinoza to a strict identification of the relations of inherence, causation, and conception. Such an identification has some bizarre consequences. For example, insofar as a carpenter is a (partial) cause of a table, or the sun the partial cause of the growth of the tree, that table at least partly inheres in the carpenter and the tree inheres in the sun. Della Rocca insists that Spinoza would just bit the bullet and accept the bizarre consequences.

In this section, I will first explain why Della Rocca was drawn to the view that Spinoza simply identified causation, conception, and inherence and present some problems for that view. I will then present my preferred interpretation of the relation between causation, inherence, and conception in more detail. In my view,

67 As we have already seen, a mode is the way the one substance is. To begin to understand the relationship between Spinoza’s modes and substance, it can be helpful to look to traditional examples: the roundness of a ball is a state or mode of the ball, the redness of the rose is a state or mode of a rose, a wave is a state or mode of the ocean. Such modes are thought to inhere in their substances, and it seems Spinoza also intends his modes to inhere in the one substance. We should be careful not to think of substance as analogous to these material objects, however, since thinking in this way may prompt us to think of substance as in time qua substance. It may also prompt us to think of inherence as a relation of spatial containment, which it clearly is not because ideas —which do not have spatial properties— can figure in inherence relations. For Spinoza, it seems existing at a certain time (or even existing for all time) is itself a way substance can be.

68 Garrett (2002). Della Rocca (2008) and (2008a). Della Rocca does not just see these three notions as coextensive, but identical. In this section, I will argue that the notions aren’t even coextensive.
inherence need not accompany all varieties of causation; inherence only accompanies the two sustaining, immanent varieties of causation, and does not accompany the two productive, transitive varieties of causation.\textsuperscript{69} I do think that causation and conception do go together, and that the more kinds of causes in Spinoza’s metaphysics, the more kinds of conception.

This discussion will set us up for section five. There, I will describe the four kinds of conception that could be plausibly matched to each of the four kinds of cause I think we can discern in the text. I will then argue that recognizing a variety of kinds of causes and a corresponding variety of kinds of conception can help us see why Spinoza does not have to bite any bizarre bullets because he asserts the fourth axiom of the first part, “conception of an effect depends on, and involves, conception of its cause.”\textsuperscript{70}

Let’s begin with that axiom. In 1p6, Spinoza argues that a substance cannot be produced by another substance. He proves this proposition in two ways, but the second proof is key for our purposes. Here is the proof: if a substance $S$ could be produced by another substance $S'$, then the cognition of $S$ would have to depend on the cognition of its cause, $S'$ (by 1a4).\textsuperscript{71} By the definition of a substance as that

\textsuperscript{69} Melamed (2012) also argues that if we are to recognize the reality of modes and of \textit{natura naturata}, then we must recognize that there will be bifurcations of causality. But whereas Melamed only identifies two kinds of cause, I identify four.
\textsuperscript{70} \textit{Effectus cognitio a cognitione causae dependet et eandem involvit}. O II.46.
\textsuperscript{71} O II.48.
whose conception does not require the conception of another thing (1d3), S would not be a substance after all.

This proof uses 1a4 to move from “x is the cause of (produces) y” to “the cognition of y involves the cognition of x”; Spinoza clearly reads that axiom as stating that effects are conceived through their causes. So here is one thing Spinoza seems to mean by 1a4:

1) **Causation implies conception**: if x causes y, then y is conceived through x.

Bennett, Wilson, and Della Rocca have also pointed out that Spinoza appears to mean something else by that axiom, namely,

2) **Conception implies causation**: if y is conceived through x, then y is caused by x.\(^{72}\)

---

The evidence that Spinoza takes the fourth axiom in this way comes from the demonstration 1p25. As we saw above, that proposition is the important claim that God is the efficient cause of both the existence and essence of things. Its demonstration says that if you deny this claim, then God is not the cause of the essences; and so (by 1a4), the essence of things can be conceived without God, which is absurd.\textsuperscript{73} The key thing to note is that here the fourth axiom is taken to state \textit{if x is not the cause of y, y can be conceived without x}. Notice that this looks like the contrapositive of the claim \textit{if y is conceived through x, then y is caused by x}.

With both 1) and 2) in hand, it looks like we can confidently assert that 1a4 should be taken to mean:

\begin{itemize}
\item [3)] \textbf{Causation-Conception Biconditional: } x causes y, iff y is conceived through x.
\end{itemize}

In his (2002), Garrett suggests that the ‘\textit{in se est}’ in \textit{Unaquaeque res, quantum in se est, in suo esse perseverare conatur} (3p6, “Each thing, insofar as it is in itself, endeavors to persist in its own being”) should be read as saying that although God is the only thing that is \textit{completely in se}, finite things can be \textit{in se} to

\textsuperscript{73} O II.67-8.
some degree. As Spinoza’s definition of substance suggests, inherence implies conception:

4) **Inherence implies conception**: if y is in x, then y is conceived through x.

Garrett points out that Spinoza also appears to accept the other direction of implication as well:

5) **Conception implies inherence**: if y is conceived through x, then y is in x.

---

74 O II.146. Curley translates 3p6 as “Each thing, as far as it can by its own power, strives to persevere in its being.” It makes sense that Curley should propose this particular translation: Curley thought that to interpret the relationship between substance and its modes as one of inherence is to commit a category mistake: “Spinoza’s modes are, prima facie, of the wrong logical type to be related to substance in the same way Descartes’ modes are related to the substance, for they are particular things (E1p25c), not qualities. And it is difficult to know what it would mean to say that particular things inhere in substance. When qualities are said to inhere in substance, this may be viewed as a way of saying that they are predicated of it. What it would mean to say that one thing is predicated of another is a mystery that needs solving” (1969, p. 18). Curley then goes on to say that viewing particular things as God’s properties results in what Curley sees as an odd conclusion: if God is the cause of all things, and a mode is a property of God, then God is the cause of his own properties. Curley wonders how it could be that a subject could cause itself to have the properties it has: “How can the relation of inherence which a property has to its subject be anything like the relation an effect has to its cause?” (1988, p. 36). For compelling arguments that the substance-mode relation is one of inherence and predication, see Melamed (2009).

75 “What is in itself and is conceived through itself, that is, that whose concept does not require the concept of another thing, from which it must be formed” (quod in se est, & per se concipitur: hoc est id, cuius conceptus non indiget conceptu alterius rei, a quo formari debeat). O II.45.

76 To make it absolutely clear, the relation of being in is not one of spatial containment. Ideas can be in other things, even though for Spinoza, ideas have no spatial properties.
Garrett thinks that 5) is restricted to cases in which y is completely conceived through x. Finite modes m and p may be partial causes of finite mode o, and so o may be partially conceived through m and p. Yet o is not in m or p. Finite modes m, o, and p are only in the substance through which they can be completely conceived. As Garrett writes,

Spinoza’s view seems to be that whatever is completely caused by x must be completely in x, but that we need not accept as a general principle that whatever is only partly caused by x is partly in x. That is, what Spinoza calls “immanent causation” implies inherence, but what he called “transient causation” does not.77

I think Garrett is absolutely right to think that immanent causation unifies causation and inherence. Consider 1p18:

God is the immanent, not the transitive, cause of all things.
Dem.: Everything that is, is in God, and must be conceived through God (by 1p15), and so (by 1p16c1), God is the cause of [all] things, which are in him. That is the first [thing to be proven]. And then outside God there can be no substance (by 1p14), i.e. (by 1d3), thing which is itself outside God. That was the second. God, therefore, is the immanent, not the transitive, cause of all things. Q.e.d.

77 (2002, p. 157 n31). Garrett prefers to translate causa transiens as transient cause. I prefer transitive cause, but this is just a matter of taste.
That God is the immanent cause of all things relies on the claim that all things are *in* God (1p15) and the claim that God is the efficient cause of all things (1p16c1). Immanent causation does seem to involve both inherence and efficient causation.\(^78\)

So according to Garrett, conception and causation can be partial, and although a finite thing can be *in itself* to some degree, it cannot be *in another* (*in alio*); being in another is an all or nothing matter. I agree with Garrett in thinking that it is not possible for one thing to be partly in itself and partly in another. After all, it seems natural to read 1a1 — *Omnia, quae sunt, vel in se, vel in alio sunt* ("Whatever is, is either in itself or in another") — as saying that one thing cannot be both in itself and in another, since ‘vel’ often indicates exclusive disjunctions.

Della Rocca, however, thinks that 5) should not be restricted. Della Rocca’s Spinoza is a fierce, uncompromising advocate of the Principle of Sufficient Reason who will not restrict applications of 5), even if that means embracing

\(^78\) If my interpretation is right, then the kind of efficient causation associated with immanent causation is sustaining causation (*causalitas secundum esse*). It is worth pointing out that inherence was usually associated with *material* causation, not efficient causation. This might explain why some of Spinoza’s readers ascribed to him the (heretical) view that God is the material cause of the world, even though Spinoza never says that the one substance (or attributes) is the material cause of the modes. Spinoza’s assimilation of inherence with efficient causation is a radical break with scholastic tradition, which considered efficient and final causes as external and material and formal causes as internal (see Suarez, DM XVII, 3). Spinoza explicitly states that efficient causes can be *internal as well as external* in the January 1675 letter to Tschirnhaus (Letter 60, O IV.270). See Carriero (1995) for further discussion.
counterintuitive results like a house being *in* the builder who built it.\(^7^9\) Della Rocca thinks that Spinoza accepts the

6) **Inherence-Conception Biconditional**: \(x\) is in \(y\), iff \(x\) is conceived through \(y\).

In fact, Della Rocca thinks that Spinoza’s definition of mode as “the affections of a substance, or that which is in another through which it is also conceived” states this very biconditional.\(^8^0\) Given 3) (\(x\) causes \(y\), iff \(y\) is conceived through \(x\)), we have yet another biconditional:

7) **Inherence-Causation Biconditional**: \(x\) is in \(y\), iff \(x\) is caused by \(y\).

It seems clear that inherence implies causation: modes inhere in substance, and substance causes all things.\(^8^1\) But does Spinoza believe that causation implies inherence? Della Rocca argues that if causation did not imply inherence, then there

---

\(^7^9\) At least in (2008a) and (2008b).

\(^8^0\) 1d5. As far as I can tell, however, Spinoza does not use 1d5 to argue that conception implies inherence.

\(^8^1\) Most of the time, when Spinoza uses 1a4, he is using it to argue from causation to conception. 1p25d is the important exception, and we might think that Spinoza had simply made a mistake; he really didn’t want the conception to causation half of the biconditional. I do think, however, that Spinoza accepted the biconditional. While one might think that inherence provides a case in which conception does not imply causation (Spinoza just says in 1d5 that what is *in* something else has to be conceived through that thing), this is not the case. Inherence is always accompanied by causation. In thinking that Spinoza accepted the biconditional, I am disagreeing with a recent suggestion by Morrison (2012) that Spinoza did not accept that conception implies causation. Morrison is eager to salvage the “natural understanding” of the conceived through relation in Spinoza, an understanding that he sees as threatened by the idea that conception implies causation. One of my aims in this chapter is to argue that there is not just *one* relation of “conceiving through.” Another aim is to argue that even if there are multiple relations, none of them are especially unnatural.
would be an *inexplicable* bifurcation of causation into causation that is accompanied by inherence and causation that is not so accompanied.82 Such a bifurcation would be a brute fact, and brute facts are the kind of thing that a fierce proponent of the PSR would not want to countenance. Furthermore, since the causation-conception biconditional seems to be incontrovertible, there would also be a bifurcation of conceptual relations. Della Rocca thinks that there is just one kind of conceptual dependence relation: “the table is conceived through God and the table is conceived through the carpenter. In the former case, the conceptual dependence is complete; in the latter case, the conceptual dependence is not complete. But in both cases, on the conceptual level, the kind of dependence seems to be the same.”83

As we will see later, I think there are good reasons to think that there isn’t just one kind of conceptual dependence. Right now, I want to turn to the reasons for thinking inherence, causation, and conception should not be identified. In my view,

82 Della Rocca (2008a, p. 45) and (2008, p. 265).
83 (2008a, p. 45). Besides this argument from the PSR, Della Rocca thinks that a passage in the *Theological Political Treatise* (TTP) supports 7). In the TTP, effects seem to be treated as *properties* of its cause: “The more we know natural things, the greater and more perfect is the knowledge of God we acquire, or *(since knowledge of an effect through its cause is nothing but knowing some property of the cause)* [quoniam cognitio effectus per causam nihil aliud est, quam causae proprietatem aliquam cognoscere] the more we know natural things, the more perfectly do we know God’s essence, which is the cause of all things” (G III.60, my emphasis). Here it looks like to be a property of a thing is to be an effect of that thing; properties inhere in things, and so it seems effects do too. I do not think we need to read it this way, however. It could be that the *way* that we know an effect through its cause is by knowing a property of the cause, but this can be true even if the effect is not identified with the property of the cause.
while it is true that if x is in y, y causes x, and true that if x is in y, x is conceived through y, their converses do not hold. Causation implies conception and conception implies causation, but neither causation nor conception implies inherence.\textsuperscript{84}

The first problem seems to be that if we identified the three, then it would turn out that all causation would be immanent causation, thus rendering the category of transitive causation empty. In 1p18, Spinoza underlines that God (qua substance) is the immanent, not the transitive, cause of all things. As we saw above, immanent causation is efficient causation whose effect is \textit{in} the cause. A transitive cause, in contrast, is efficient causation whose effect is not in the cause. If every effect is \textit{in} its cause, then there is, strictly speaking, no transitive causation. Of course, we might think that immanent causation is just the perfect case, the case in

\textsuperscript{84} Melamed (2012) agrees. In that paper, Melamed also argues that there is a bifurcation of causation, one kind accompanied by inherence and the other one not, and a corresponding bifurcation of conception. However, Melamed does not discuss the possibility of a further division into causation of essences and causation of existence, nor does he mention the distinction between \textit{causa secundum esse} and \textit{causa secundum fieri}. Melamed’s main target is Della Rocca’s three-fold identification. Melamed agrees with me that a bifurcation of causation is not an illegitimate brute fact in Spinoza’s metaphysics, since the bifurcation is grounded in another bifurcation central to Spinoza’s thinking, the bifurcation of \textit{natura} into \textit{natura naturans} and \textit{natura naturata}. Of course, this just raises the further question of why there is the bifurcation of \textit{natura naturans} and \textit{natura naturata}, i.e., why God has modes in the first place. We might wonder why (and how) what is absolutely unique [\textit{unicum}] (1p14c1, O II.56) and indivisible can yield what is multiple, divisible, and enumerable. I am not sure yet what Spinoza would say about this issue, but I suspect the starting points of research should be Spinoza’s views on infinity and number. See Letters 12 and 50. For recent discussions of the issue of the impropriety of calling God ‘one,’ see Laerke (2008) and Nachtomy (forthcoming).
which effects are completely in the cause. Transitive causation would be causation in which effects are not completely in the cause, but might be in another as well. So a sandcastle is only partly in the child who builds it, so the child still counts as a transitive cause. But notice 2d7:

By singular things I understand things that are finite and have a determinate existence. And if a number of individuals so concur in one action that together they are all the cause of one effect, I consider them all, to that extent, as one singular thing.\(^{85}\)

Many individuals (the child’s parents, her brother, the sea, the spade and the bucket, and so on) acted together to cause the sandcastle, so these many individuals can be considered as one. The sandcastle, then, might not be fully in the child, but it would be (if we follow Della Rocca) completely in this amalgamated individual. If this is the case, though, the sandcastle is still completely in its cause, and so it looks like transitive causes, if they are anything, are just portions of an immanent cause. Isn’t it still true, however, that the proponent of the threefold identity should say that were we to regard the child’s unique contributions to the sandcastle, we

\(^{85}\) O II.85.
would see that *those effects* are completely in the child? If that is true, though, it looks like we are back to the same problem: there is no transitive causation.86

A second set of problems arises once we consider that traditionally, inherence is not a relation that takes place over time. In the realm of *natura naturata*, some modes exist before others and things do happen over time. The so-called “physical digression” in the second part of the *Ethics* — which describes all the regular ways in which bodies (modes of extension) interact in time — makes this especially clear.87 Proponents of the identification of conception, causation, and inherence would be forced to say that insofar as future things are caused by past things, future things must inhere in the past.

As we have seen, Spinoza is not always one to cling to traditional conceptions, so we might imagine that he was working with a more idiosyncratic

86 Melamed (2012) also makes this objection. See Melamed (2012) for discussion of Carriero (1995) as well. Carriero argues that for Spinoza, modes are particular qualities (tropes) of the substance. In the sandcastle example above, the child and her brother cooperate to build the sandcastle. If we accept the inherence-causation biconditional, we will say that the sandcastle inheres in both children. This raises a question, though: how do two modes (the children) share a mode of a mode (the sandcastle)? If we supposed they shared the mode qua distinct individuals, then it seems we would have trouble saying that the mode was a particular quality (since it is shared by two modes). Spinoza clearly rejects the reality of universal qualities (2p40s1, O II.120-1), so it really is unclear in what sense the mode is shared. If we think that the children share the sandcastle qua amalgamated individual (see 2d7, O II.85), then it seems can suppose that the sandcastle is a particular quality. However, if the sandcastle only inheres in the children qua amalgamated individual and not as individual children, then, given the inherence-causation biconditional, the children are only causes insofar as they work together, and are not, taken individually, causes.

87 Beginning at O II.97.
notion of inherence. But consider the following tale of two modes, A and B. One day in 2002, A, which is yeast, budded to create B. A and B were living at a biology laboratory in which scientists were doing experiments on yeast, and sadly, A was destroyed immediately after producing B. Spinoza allows that a mode like B can go on existing after another mode is destroyed. However, it would be difficult for Spinoza to maintain this if B is in A. If B were in A, then B would be a mode of A, and as a mode, B would not be able to exist without the thing of which it is a mode. Would Spinoza bite this bullet too, and say that B can inhere in A, even after A ceases to be? It seems unlikely, since a mode only exists if its substrate does.

As we saw above, the first two causes, God as a sustaining cause (causa secundum esse) of the existence of things and God as a sustaining cause (causa secundum esse) of the essence of things, are not causes within the realm of modes. Because they concern what God qua substance is up to, these causes are not causes in time. This is in contrast to the causes that are in time, the productive causes

---

88 See 1p17s2 (O II.105-6).
89 1d5 (O II45). This would be the case of a mode of a mode.
90 Melamed (2012, p. 373) discusses a similar objection.
(causae secundum fieri) of existence and essence. If we were to subscribe to the inherence-causation biconditional, then we should expect there to be two different kinds of inherence, one to match the causes out of time and another to match the causes in time.

Yet Spinoza thinks that the causal sequence of modes stretches to infinity in both the direction of the past and the direction of the future. If we accept the inherence-causation biconditional, then a later mode would be in an earlier mode, which would be in yet an earlier mode, and so on to infinity. For the kind of inherence relationship obtaining between modes, there would not be a point at which the inherence relations in alio terminates in something in se. This is to be contrasted with the inherence relation obtaining between modes and substance, which would terminate in substance (by definition in se). This would raise the question of how that infinite chain of modes gets to be at all, since what is in another — what is a mode — relies on something else for its very existence. In order

Melamed has suggested that it is God’s activity qua substance that causes the essences of things and modes’ activity that causes the existence of things (2012, p.380). In my view, it’s true that God qua substance causes the essences of things and it’s true that modes cause the existence of things, but it’s important to recall that God’s sustaining of the essences of particular things is not in time, so pointing to this kind of causation would not explain why a mode has a particular essence at a particular time. It’s also crucial to recall that modes’ productive causality of the existence of other modes is in time. Certainly, whatever modes are doing presupposes the activity of substance as a causa sui—as a cause of their being being at all. But I think it is misleading to say that modes are the cause of existence, since they are just the cause of durational existence. Substance is the cause of eternal existence.

1p28 (O II.69).
for modes to be, their substance must be, so one might suppose that modes get their existence from just one of the inherence relations in which they participate: the inherence relation terminating in substance and not the interminable inherence relation obtaining between modes. The problem with this, however, is that one inherence relation only gets to be because another one is. It looks, then, as though there are not two genuinely independent inherence relations after all.\textsuperscript{93}

Given the problems with thinking that causation implies inherence, I think we should dispense with the inherence-causation biconditional, holding only that inherence implies causation. If we still maintain that causation implies conception and conception implies causation, as I think we should, then we should also dispense with the inherence-conception biconditional and hold only that inherence implies conception.

So, to sum up, the two kinds of immanent sustaining causes will be accompanied by inherence, but the two kinds of transitive productive causes will not be so accompanied. Substance’s sustaining causal activity is not properly thought of as happening in time, and so it seems that modes do not inhere in substance qua things existing \textit{in time} either. And this makes sense: if we think of \textit{modes existing in time} as inhering in substance, then we might be led to think — mistakenly, of course — that substance itself is in time.\textsuperscript{94} Although only the

\textsuperscript{93} Once again, Melamed (2012) beat me to the punch on this point. See p. 377.
\textsuperscript{94} As will become clearer in the next section, it seems that things will only be seen \textit{as modes of substance} when they are considered \textit{sub specie aeternitatis}. 
immanent sustaining causes are accompanied by inherence, all the kinds of causes are accompanied by conception. As I will discuss in the next section, if we think that each kind of cause corresponds to a kind of conception, then the fourth axiom of the first part can be read in four different ways.

V. Four Kinds of Causes and Four Kinds of Conceptions

John Morrison has recently complained that if 1a4 (cognition of an effect depends on, and involves, cognition of its cause) were about every type of cognition and every type of causation, then Spinoza would be committed to some implausible claims:

If the unrestricted interpretation were correct then the causal axiom would have some implausible implications. For example, because Mount Washington’s shape was caused by a glacier, this axiom would imply that all cognition of Mount Washington’s shape involves cognition of that glacier, including all beliefs, memories and sensations. This implication seems implausible. For thousands of years people seem to have believed, remembered, and seen that Mount Washington had that shape without ever thinking about glaciers, let alone that particular glacier. Given the pivotal role of the causal axiom in Spinoza’s arguments for his most famous doctrines, including theism, substance monism, necessitarianism, and parallelism, these implications cast doubt on the philosophical

---

95 Effectus cognitio a cognitione causae dependet et eandem involvit (O II.46). ‘Cognitio’ is sometimes translated as knowledge, but this is misleading, since knowledge implies truth, and 1a4 need not just apply to true ideas. It can apply to both veridical and non-veridical thoughts, to perceptions as well as intellections. See Wilson (1999). Because 1a4 does not just apply to true or adequate cognitions, it is not merely a restatement of Aristotle’s insistence in the Physics (94a20) that we only have knowledge of thing when we know its cause.
significance of the entire book. After all, it is easy to derive counterintuitive doctrines from counterintuitive axioms.⁹⁶

I agree that some perceptions or thoughts about Mt. Washington’s shape will not depend on or involve⁹⁷ perceptions of or thoughts about things like the Taconic Orogeny or subsequent glacial erosion, and I agree that such cognitions will be cognitions of immanent causes. So I agree with Morrison that the axiom should not be read as saying that cognition of an effect depends on and involves cognitions of all of its causes.

However, I do not think that 1a4 only applies to immanent causation. In this section, I will describe four distinct kinds of conception that I think can be matched to each kind of causation.⁹⁸ The upshot is that 1a4 can be read in four distinct ways, corresponding to four distinct causes.⁹⁹ What we will see is that the axiom will be true of any given cognition, since any cognition of an effect will be a cognition of at least one of the effect’s causes. I say “at least” because some cognitions may be

---

⁹⁶ Morrison (2013 manuscript, p.1).
⁹⁷ Involvit was often interchanged with implicat in the scholastic and early modern periods. 1a4 could therefore be translated as “cognition of an effect depends on and implies cognition of its cause.” See Gabbey (2008).
⁹⁸ Newlands (2010) argues that conception is more fundamental to Spinoza’s metaphysics than causation. In this chapter, I am setting such questions of priority aside.
⁹⁹ A few important notes: first, modes are always conceived under the attribute in which they fall. Second, each attribute is by itself sufficient for conceiving substance. See Della Rocca (2002). In what follows, I will focus mostly on modes conceived under the attribute of extension, but the arguments can be extended to apply to modes conceived under the attribute of thought as well.
complex, depending on and involving more than one kind of cause.\textsuperscript{100} In any case, if 1a4 can be seen to fit a seemingly exhaustive taxonomy of kinds of cognition, then I think we can better understand why Spinoza included 1a4 among the axioms—that is, among those things that are supposed to be self-evidently true.\textsuperscript{101} With my interpretation in hand, we will also be able to see with greater clarity the distinct dimensions along which cognitions can be improved: any actually existing thing we encounter in the world will have four different kinds of causes, and so it seems that the ideal kind of cognition of such a thing will depend on and involve all of these causes.\textsuperscript{102}

\textsuperscript{100} For clarity of exposition, I will have to simplify Spinoza’s account of cognition somewhat. For Spinoza, “the object of the idea constituting the human mind is the body, or [sive] a certain mode of extension which actually exists [in time] and nothing else” (2p13, O II.96). A mind’s ideas, whether adequate or inadequate, will be ideas of the human body. Of course, human beings can have ideas about things besides the body, but only via ideas of the body.

\textsuperscript{101} In Letter 3, Oldenburg complains that some of Spinoza’s axioms are not actually “indemonstrable principles, known by the light of nature, and requiring no proof.” In Letter 4, Spinoza responds that he doesn’t think the axioms are indemonstrable. He attempts a few proofs, but he does not attempt to prove 1a4.

\textsuperscript{102} Spinoza gives another list of kinds of cognitions in 2p40s2 (O II.122). In the first category, opinion or imagination, there are the random, confused, disorderly cognitions of perception and “knowledge from signs, for example, from the fact that, having heard or read certain words, we recollect things, and form certain ideas of them, like those through which we imagine the things.” In the second category, there is reason: “from the fact that we have common notions and adequate ideas of the properties of things (see 1p38c, 1p39, 1p39c, and 1p40).” In the third category, there is intuitive knowledge [scientia intuitiva], which is the only kind of cognition Spinoza deems worthy of the honorific ‘scientia.’ This kind of “knowing proceeds from an adequate idea of the formal essence of certain attributes of God to the adequate knowledge of the [formal] essence of things. There is more to be said about how the taxonomy of cognitions I describe in this section fits with this taxonomy, and I hope to deal with this issue in much more detail in future work.
1a4 points to a relation between ideas or concepts, and so it does seem appropriate to think of the relation it indicates as a conceptual relation (even though it no form of *concipere* appears in 1a4). Importantly, the objects of those ideas can be related by either immanent causation or transitive causation. Consider these passages from 2p6d and 2p45d:

For each attribute is conceived through itself without any other (by 1p10). So the modes of each attribute involve the concept of their own attribute, but not of another one; and so (by 1a4) they have God for their cause insofar as he is considered under the attribute of which they are modes, and not insofar as he is considered under any other.

…because (by 2p6) [modes] have God for a cause insofar as he is considered under the attribute of which the things are modes, their ideas must involve the concept of their attribute (by 1a4), that is (by 1d6), must involve an eternal and infinite essence of God.

An extended mode must be conceived through its substance’s attribute of extension. Substance is related to its modes by relations of immanent causation, so 1a4 does seem to apply to ideas the objects of which are connected by immanent causation. It can also apply to objects connected by transitive causation, as 2p7d and 2p16d suggest:

[That the order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things] is clear from 1a4. For the idea of each thing caused depends on the cognition [*cognitione*] of the cause of which it is the effect.

---

103 See 2p7d (O II.89-90).
104 O II.89, O II.127. Just a reminder: for Spinoza, an attribute is just what the intellect perceives to be the essence of substance (1d4). God has an infinity of attributes, but we finite human minds only know of extension and thought.
For all the modes in which a body is affected follow from the nature of the affected body, and at the same time from the nature of the affecting body [by A1"]. So the idea of them (by 1a4) will necessarily involve [involvit] the nature of each body. And so the idea of each mode in which the human body is affected by an external body involves the nature of the human body and of the external body.\(^\text{105}\)

If 1a4 applies to both immanent and transitive causes, then it will apply to both sustaining and productive causes. If I am right, there are two kinds of sustaining causes and two kinds of productive causes. But are the kinds of conceptions corresponding to the kinds of causes recognizable ways of explaining or thinking about things?

Take the first cause: God, \textit{qua} substance, is the sustaining cause (\textit{causa secundum esse}) of existence. As we saw above, although this sustaining activity is not in time, it is a prerequisite for there being any productive activity (\textit{causalitas secundum fieri}) in time: things can only come to be (in time) if there is (eternal) being.

What sort of conception could plausibly be associated with this causal relation? In the KV, Spinoza describes two different kinds of definition, the first of which is useful for us to look at:

The first… are those of attributes, which pertain to a self-subsisting being, these need no genus, or anything, through which they might be better understood or explained: for, since they exist as attributes

\(^{105}\) O II.89, O II.104. It is notable that Spinoza tends to use ‘\textit{concipere}’ for that conceptual relation relating to immanent causation; there is thus a linguistic cue to think of the conceptual relation between substance and modes as importantly different from the conceptual relation between modes.
of a self-subsisting being, they also become known through themselves.\textsuperscript{106}

Recall that for Spinoza, an attribute is what the mind perceives to be the essence of substance. God has an infinite number of attributes, but thought and extension are the only ones known to us.\textsuperscript{107} When we think about \textit{what there is}, where such thinking is wholly general and so does not involve thoughts about particular things, we must understand what there is in terms of one of these attributes. \textit{What} is is extended, but there is not just extension that \textit{is}, since there is \textit{thought} too.\textsuperscript{108} However, the definitions of thought or of extension cannot be understood through a “genus,” since there is no more basic category to be mentioned in a definition.

When we think about what there is, the conceptual relation is between two identical ideas whose objects are the same: substance. This makes sense because the cause that is mirrored by this kind of conception is the immanent relation of \textit{causa sui}. Substance causes substance.

While we might not think in such terms very often, the frame of mind here need not seem too foreign. Think of the frame of mind adopted when, say, you’re in your dorm room as a college freshman and you wonder to yourself (or to your patient and bemused roommates) \textit{what it means to be extended} or \textit{what it means to}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{106} O I.46-7.
\item \textsuperscript{107} O I.26.
\item \textsuperscript{108} Spinoza was enough of a Cartesian to have the intuition that thought cannot be understood in terms of extension, or extension in terms of thought— he simply did not follow the Cartesians in thinking that a substance can only have one (principle) attribute.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
be thought. This is just an effort to think about being in the most general way possible. But notice that such efforts usually bring you right back to where you started: if you are thinking of extension, then you thereby think of extension, and if you are thinking of thought, then you thereby think of thought. It seems this will be true, even if you are not thinking of extension or thought as in time, and this makes sense; if the cause is not in time, then the associated cognition will be sub specie aeternitatis.

So here is a first way of reading 1a4, which corresponds to first kind of cause:

1) Cognition of an effect —there is extension or thought— depends on and involves [implies] cognition of its cause —there is extension or thought (i.e., substance).

Now recall the second kind of cause: God is the sustaining cause of the formal essences of things. As was the case with the first kind of conception, the essence of God will be conceived as either extension or thought. The kind of conception that can plausibly be associated with this causal relation is, I think, fairly familiar: I cannot cognize some particular configuration of shapes without thereby cognizing extension, and I cannot cognize some particular idea without thereby cognizing thought. Importantly, such cognitions do not have to be of anything that has or is enjoying spatiotemporal existence; in visualizing the shape of a fictional beast with the head of a kitten, the body of an antelope, and the tail of an ankylosaurus, I am thereby visualizing something extended. This makes sense
because the cause associated with this kind of cognition is not in time, and does not explain how some particular kind of thing comes to be in time.

Here is a second way of reading 1a4:

2) Cognition of an effect — there is some way something could be (i.e. there is some formal essence) — depends on and involves [implies] cognition of its cause — there is extension or thought (i.e., substance).

Now consider the third kind of cause: modes are the productive causes of the durational existence of things. Modes can rearrange and reconfigure other modes to bring about the existence of a new mode, or an existing mode can strive to act so as to persevere in its durational being. I think the kind of cognition that can plausibly be matched to this cause can be glossed as follows: when I cognize the actual existence in time of a finite mode, I thereby cognize it as having been caused by something finite and also in time. Just as one has to be able to cognize extension in order to cognize a particular extended thing, we one has to be able to cognize something as caused in order to cognize it as actual (i.e. in time).

Here we can see a contrast to the previous kind of cognition, which did not involve the cognition of the finite mode as having been at some time created. Here is another important thing to note about this kind of cognition: I do not have to cognize how the cause is or was. Because I cognize the effect as actual, I know that it has an actual cause, and so I posit the actual existence of a featureless something as its cause. Further investigation might enable me to think of this something as
having certain features, but the starting point will be the simple thought that the effect had *something* actual at a certain time as its cause.\(^{109}\)

So the third way of reading 1a4 is this:

3) Cognition of an effect —the actual existence in time of a finite mode— depends on and involves [implies] cognition of its cause —the actual existence of some productive cause, *whatever it is*.

The last cause on the list is this: modes are the productive causes of the actual essences of things. That some body exhibits a particular ratio of motion and rest can be explained by the particular ratios of motion and rest of the bodies that conspired to create it, and when that body ceases to exhibit that ratio, that will be explained by facts about other bodies’ ratios of motion and rest. And that the body now has a certain ratio of motion and rest is explained in part by the fact that it had that ratio a moment ago. The “actual essence” of a thing is the thing’s striving to persevere in its existence; if this striving is successful, an extended body will continue to manifest its ratio of motion and rest. It seems, then, that actual essences are productive causes of actual essences.

As discussed above, the actual essence is accompanied by durational existence; a thing’s actual essence cannot exist without the thing existing, and a thing cannot exist without its actual essence. God’s essence is also (albeit necessarily) accompanied by existence, but the two are still usefully thought of as

\(^{109}\) Note that in positing a featureless *something*, we do not assume that this something is just *one thing*. Further investigation can reveal that laws of nature (infinite modes), plus *many* finite things, conspired to produce the effect.
distinct. The same goes for the actual essences and durational existence of finite things. One can think about the ways some particular thing is and must be without thinking that that thing exists in time.

Here is the fourth and last way of reading 1a4:

4) Cognition of an effect — the configurations and features of finite modes (their essences) — depends on and involves [implies] cognition of its cause — configurations and features (essences) of other finite modes.

I can have cognitions of Mt. Washington’s (admittedly not very dynamic) ratio of motion and rest without having cognitions of any other mode’s ratio, but in thinking of Mt. Washington in this way, it seems I am cognizing it as simply a thing with a certain shape. That kind of cognition might involve cognitions of the second and third kind: in conceiving of the shape of Mt. Washington, I thereby conceive it as being extended, and in conceiving the shape of Mt. Washington as existing in time, I thereby conceive it as having been caused by other modes (whatever they are). But importantly, I can have cognitions of Mt. Washington that do involve the ratios of motion and rest of other modes. I can have cognitions of Mt. Washington that depend on and involve other essences. These sorts of cognitions might involve continental uplifts, glaciers, hikers’ hiking boots, and the like, and such cognitions may be more or less sketchy. Mt. Washington’s shape is the way it is because of the ways a whole lot of other modes were and are — in fact, it is the way it is because of the characteristic strivings of an infinite number of other modes. Given that I am finite with finite capacities, cognitions of Mt.
Washington will never involve cognitions of all of the other modes that conspired to yield Mt. Washington’s precise shape at this precise moment.

Importantly, cognitions of this fourth kind do not require that the thing cognized be cognized as existing in time. I can consider Mt. Washington’s shape without thereby thinking that the mountain actually exists; I can concentrate solely on the way the mountain is and the ways other things were or behaved to yield that particular way of being a mountain. That thinking about essences is not inextricably tied to thinking about them as existing in time enables us to have cognitions about the corresponding formal essences of things. Insofar as my thoughts about how the ways other things were yielded the way Mt. Washington is are true, it seems I am cognizing some eternal truths: i.e., the formal essences of things.\(^{110}\) Spinoza certainly thinks we can have such cognitions, since in 5p38-9, Spinoza appears to say that we can increase the eternal part of our minds by having more ideas of the formal essences of things.\(^{111}\) It also seems that being able to consider essences apart

---

\(^{110}\) Cf. 1p17s2 (O II.63). I should note that such cognitions of the formal essences are not themselves cognitions of the second kind, since they simply concern the relations among formal essences. Cognitions of the second type depend on and involve substance. It is an additional cognitive achievement to see that formal essences follow from the essence of God. Much more work will have to be done, but it initially appears that scientia intuitiva, cognition “proceeding from the adequate idea of the formal essence (essentia formalis) of some attributes of God to adequate cognition of the essences of things” (2p40s2, O II.122) is cognition of the second type (cf. 5p31d).

\(^{111}\) O II.304-306. In future work, I hope to figure out exactly how this is supposed to work. I suspect Schmaltz (forthcoming B) is on the right track when he suggests that in acquiring more ideas of formal essences, we increase the part of our mind that has a sempiternal existence as part of the infinite mode of thought.
from their durational existence enables us to reason hypothetically, an incredibly useful thing to be able to do, since such thinking enables us to figure out what modes with certain features or characteristics *would cause* in certain circumstances.

To sum up, what we can get out of the first kind of cognition is that there is the sort of being that is absolutely fundamental: eternal being. Such cognitions of being are not of being *in time*, but are *sub specie aeternitatis*. Without these cognitions, we may be apt to reverse the proper order of philosophizing, thus losing sight of there being just one eternal, self-creating substance. The second kind of cognition is also *sub specie aeternitatis*. What we can get out of the second kind of cognition is that the particular ways things are are dependent on the way substance is; the formal essences of all things follow from the essence of God, and follow with necessity. What we can get out of the third kind of cognition is that whatever actually exists in time was caused to exist by what exists in time. We may not have any idea what the character of a certain cause is, but we can see *that* there must have been an actual cause at some time. Finally, what we can get out of the fourth kind of cognition is that the particular ways things are is due to the ways other things were or are.\(^{112}\)

---

\(^{112}\) There are, then, two ways of seeing something as *being*. One way just considers the being of a thing as a being *at all*, and corresponds to cognitions of the first kind. The other way considers the being of a thing as being in a particular place and time, and corresponds to cognitions of the third kind. Spinoza says something very similar in 5p29s: We conceive things as actual in two ways: either insofar as we conceive them to exist in relation to a certain time and place, or insofar as we conceive them to be contained in God and to follow from the necessity of the
One reason one might have been suspicious of 1a4 was that it seems to imply that *cognitio* is implausibly intellectually demanding, especially since *cognitio* need not be knowledge. This is why I was careful in the previous paragraph to say that we *can get* certain propositional knowledge out of the experience of having such cognitions. I did not mean to imply that the cognitions were themselves experiences of entertaining such content; cognitions can depend on and involve or imply\(^{113}\) other cognitions without it being the case that it is seen *by the cognizer* that there is such dependence and involvement or implication. My cat can have a perception of something extended, which depends on and involves perception of extension *in general*, but it takes a more reflective intellect to see *that* extension — an attribute of the one substance — is a sustaining cause of all the particular ways things are extended. And that deep-thinking freshman thinking about the very nature of being may not see that she is thinking about a *causa sui*.

Spinoza holds that to represent a thing is to explain it, but it seems there is not just *one* available kind of explanation, even if it is also the case that a *better* explanation will be a very rich representation, one incorporating thoughts from all four kinds of cognition.\(^ {114}\) Sometimes, depending on how impoverished our cognition of something is, it will seem that we don’t really have an explanation in divine nature. But the things we conceive in this second way as true, or real, we conceive under a species of eternity, and their ideas involve the eternal and infinite essence of God.” (O II.298-9)

\(^{113}\) Again, *involvit* can be translated as ‘implies.’

\(^{114}\) For discussion of Spinoza’s view of representation as explanation, see Della Rocca (2008a).
virtue of having some sort of representation of the thing. Consider the case when I just bump my foot on something in a dark room. I certainly come to think that something actually exists at a particular time (now!) and place (right here!), and this thought will depend on and involve or imply that the thing has an actual finite cause. However, it might seem like whatever representation I come to have of the thing does not count as an explanation.

But I think Spinoza would say that this is an explanation on its own, since it is an explanation of the actual existence of the thing. Of course, we might supplement this rather scantly explanation with an explanation that explains in more detail how the thing came to be the thing it is where it is. But since this detailed explanation by itself need not be an explanation of anything actually in existence, the representation we started with turns out to be pretty important after all.

Spinoza can accommodate intuitions that improvement in understanding is not always along the same dimension: sometimes an improvement in understanding comes from a realization that there is a different kind of cause at work. We might begin our lives as reflective thinkers just thinking about causal chains of things in time. We come to recognize that each thing we see around us has a cause, and that there is no end or beginning to the sequence of causes. Even as we recognize that we finite minds cannot have knowledge of an infinite series of causes, we expend energy figuring out what all those causes must have been like. We come to see that there are features manifested pervasively and permanently in what is extended and
what is thought, certain ways bodies must behave or certain ways ideas must be related in order to be intelligible.

We may get very good at providing very detailed causal histories of everything around us (and perhaps we get very good at providing the histories of our ideas too), but at some point, the following question might occur to us: why does any of this exist at all? The causes we have focused on up to this point take it for granted that there is being at all and particular ways that being can be, but now our attention turns to explaining what had hitherto been taken for granted. We thereby turn our attention from productive causes to sustaining causes, and we take our thinking out of time to consider what is necessary for there to be anything in time in the first place. We see that there are two ways of approaching the question: things in time 1) are and 2) are a certain way. We realize that not only does the very being of everything have to be sustained, but essences must be as well. Yet we will also realize that what is most fundamental — what is doing the sustaining — is a cause of itself, that “whose essence involves existence, or [sive] that whose nature cannot be conceived except as existing.” That of course, is the beginning of a book presumably presented in the proper order of philosophy: the *Ethics*.115

---

115 O II.45. We can now see more clearly how Spinoza can say that “each idea of each body, or of each singular thing which actually exists, necessarily involves the eternal and infinite essence of God” and that “the human mind has an adequate cognition of God’s eternal and infinite essence” (2p45 and 2p47, O II.127-8). These cognitions will be *sub specie aeternitatis* (2p45s, O II.127).
So, to do things properly, we have to turn our attention from transitive, productive causes to the ontologically more fundamental immanent, sustaining causes. If we fail to see that God, \textit{qua} substance, is the cause of the existence and essence of all things, we will not be able to see all the cognitions we had about things in time as what they are. First, we will fail to see that all those cognitions were not cognitions about substances, but rather cognitions about \textit{modes} of the one substance. All the finite things we encounter are finite modes of God, and the laws of extended nature and thought that always and everywhere apply are infinite, sempiternally existing modes of God.\textsuperscript{116}

Second, we will fail to see that there is “absolutely nothing in things on account of which they can be called contingent.”\textsuperscript{117} If we focus only the infinite sequence of finite modes, then we will not see that all the particular ways things are —their essences— could not possibly have been otherwise. God, \textit{qua} substance, must sustain the very being of the existence and essence of all those particular

\textsuperscript{116} Spinoza says frustratingly little about the infinite modes of God, but he does tell us that that they follow immediately or mediately from the “absolute nature of some attribute of God” (1p23, O II.66). In letter 64, he describes an infinite mode as the face [or appearance, \textit{facies}] of the whole universe, “which, although varying in infinite ways, yet always remains the same” (O IV.278). This has not struck commentators as terribly illuminating. See Melamed (forthcoming, ch. 4) for a useful discussion of the infinite modes.

\textsuperscript{117} 1p33s1 (O II.74).
things; the *infinity* of essences is sustained by God.\textsuperscript{118} All these essences that are sustained *sub specie aeternitatis* dictate what happens in time, and what is sustained *sub specie aeternitatis* follows with necessity from an absolutely necessary being, so is also absolutely necessary. That God ensures that there is *being* at all ensures that essences sustained *sub specie aeternitatis* will come to be in time. In short, there is simply no way the sequence of actual finite modes could be other than it in fact is: “in nature there is nothing contingent, but all things, from the necessity of the divine nature, have been determined to exist and operate in a certain way.”\textsuperscript{119}

### VI. Conclusion

One might complain that the metaphysical views I have attributed to Spinoza are simply too baroque. If Spinoza had so many different kinds of efficient cause in mind, why wasn’t he more explicit about them? Perhaps Spinoza simply

\textsuperscript{118} The infinite series of finite things *follows* [*sequit*] from God’s absolute nature. For Spinoza, “follows” (*sequit*) indicates causation. As I have argued in this chapter, for essences to follow from God’s nature will be for God to be the sustaining cause of them. To say that the infinite series of finite things follows from God’s absolute nature reconciles Spinoza’s claim in 1p21-23 that finite modes cannot follow from the absolute nature of God’s attributes (since any particular finite mode does not) with the claim in the appendix to Part 1 that *all things* have to follow from the absolute nature of God’s attribute (since the totality of finite modes does). See O II.65-7 and O II.77.

\textsuperscript{119} 1p29 (O II.70). I follow Garrett (1991) in thinking that Spinoza is a necessitarian and that one thing that helps secure that necessitarianism is the fact that the totality of finite modes can follow from the absolute nature of God. See Lin (2012) for further discussion.
thought he didn’t have to do much signaling. In the period, the distinction between 
sustaining efficient causation (*causalitas secundum esse*) and productive efficient 
causation (*causalitas secundum fieri*) was a basic distinction found in the common 
textbooks and manuals of the day. It seems likely, then, that Spinoza could rely on 
his readers to follow him as he refined the classical distinction, making use not only 
of sustaining and productive causes of existence, but also sustaining and productive 
causes of *essence*. It also seems that the issue of how to reconcile God’s sustaining 
of the very being of creatures with creatures’ causal efficacy was also under 
discussion in Cartesian circles in the 1660s. So perhaps Spinoza’s motivations for 
introducing an expanded taxonomy of causes would have been fairly clear to his 
readers; his readers would have seen that Spinoza wanted to make it the case that 
even if all extended objects and all ideas are just modes of God, and even such 
modes depend on God for their very being and essence, these modes can 
nevertheless be genuine efficient causes. Modes are causally responsible for 
bringing things into existence in time and for the ways modes are in time.

The ordinary realm of things in time is a realm of genuine efficient 
causation. If you want to explain why some particular thing is the way it is in time, 
then you must cite the productive activity of other particular things in time; it is not 
the case that God, *qua* substance, is the immediate cause of absolutely everything. 
Although we have to recognize that the one substance is an eternal sustaining 
cause, we do not have to think that what is finite simply gets washed out by what is
infinite, that sustaining activity precludes any productive activity. That is, it looks like Spinoza is actually trying very hard to resist a metaphysical picture according to which the one substance is, to borrow Hegel’s memorable words, “so to speak a dark shapeless abyss in which all determinate content is swallowed up as radically null and void.”\footnote{\textit{Finstere, gestaltlose Abgrund, der allen bestimmten Inhalt als von Haus aus nichtig in sich verschlingt} (1991, p. 227). Whether Spinoza can answer all of the acosmist objections is something I want to explore in future work. For twentieth and twenty-first century discussions of Spinoza’s alleged “acosmism” (and the German Idealists’ readings of Spinoza as such), see Donagan (1988), Huebner (2010), Joachim (1901), Kojève (1969), Macherey (1979), Melamed (2010), and Walther (1991).}
Chapter Three

Leibniz’s View of Divine and Secondary Causation

I. Introduction

In the last two chapters, I presented a new reading of Spinoza’s causal metaphysics. In this chapter, I turn to some well-trodden interpretive ground, to Leibniz’s views about the extent and manner of God’s causal involvement in nature.

Scholarly consensus has it that Leibniz was a concurrentist, i.e. someone who maintains that God and creatures are both immediate co-causes of each and every effect in nature.\(^1\) Since concurrentism seemed to be the way to grant creatures genuine causal powers while not making God’s involvement in creation too remote to be theologically objectionable, it was the dominant way of thinking about divine and creaturely causation in the early modern period. Leibniz certainly wanted to balance the metaphysics of causation with the requirements of theological respectability, and he certainly used words like *concours* and *concursus*, and so it is natural to suppose he thought along concurrentist lines.

However, I think we miss the ingenuity of Leibniz’s thinking if we take his words at face value. I will argue in this chapter that texts often taken to betray Leibniz’s concurrentist inclinations in fact reveal an allegiance to a position that is

\(^1\) For a sample, see Bobro (2013), von Bodelschwingh (2011), Lee (2004), McDonough (2007), Sleigh (1990), and Whipple (2010).
not at all easily categorized as concurrentism, but is closer to what has come to be called mere conservationism: God’s causal contribution to the ordinary course of nature is limited to the creation and conservation of creatures. I will also show how Leibniz’s metaphysics makes mere conservationism—an extremely unpopular position in the early modern period—less problematic. I aim to answer two main questions. First, does Leibniz have an understanding of conservation that is compatible with creaturely action? And second, does Leibniz have a way of avoiding common objections to mere conservationism?

---

2 As will be discussed in more detail below, Leibniz denies intersubstantial causation, so the sort of genuine causal activity Leibniz wants to secure for individual substances is immanent, rather than transitive or transeunt.

Leibniz wrote an enormous amount, and he sometimes changed his mind or at least experimented with different positions, so I cannot claim that the position I will ascribe to Leibniz is the only position we might find in his corpus. However, I do think that there is a discernible strand of Leibniz’s mature thinking that does look mere conservationist, and it is worth trying to figure out why such a view could be attractive to him.

II. Three Views of Divine and Secondary Causation

The broad outlines of Leibniz’s version of the creation story are well known: out of an infinite number of possible worlds, each and every one of them represented down to the smallest detail in God’s infinite understanding, the best one is selected for creation by God, who, in his perfect benevolence, could not but choose the best of all possible worlds. The broad outlines of his project of theodicy are also well known: we denizens of this best world have limited vantage points and woefully finite capacities that prevent us from seeing exactly how that which seems ugly and evil is necessarily a part of the best possible world.

This chapter concerns a question that arises downstream of initial creation but that is related to the task of theodicy, insofar as theodicy seeks to explain how
creaturely and divine action can be distinguished in such a way that God is not the
author of sin. Here is the question: once the world is created, how does Leibniz
think that God acts in nature, and how does God’s activity relate to the activity of
created things?

Theories developed in response to this question have traditionally fallen
into three main categories: occasionalism, mere conservationism, and
concurrentism. Occasionalism is the view that God is the only “genuine” cause of
effects in nature, even if creatures can serve as *occasions* for God to bring about the
effects he does in the way he does. Whatever a genuine cause amounts to,\(^4\) or
whatever it means to say that a creature can serve as an occasion for God to act,\(^5\)

\(^{4}\) The occasionalist Malebranche gives what looks like a definition of a genuine
cause in *De la recherche de la vérité*: “A genuine cause is a cause between which
and its effect the mind perceives a necessary connection…. Now there is nothing
but the infinitely perfect being between whose will and the effects the mind
perceives a necessary connection. So there is nothing but God that is a genuine
cause” (OCM II.316/LO 450). However, necessary connection by itself just tells us
that an effect follows necessarily from God’s eternal will; it does not secure the
needed asymmetrical causal dependence of an effect on God’s eternal will. To
secure that, it looks like Malebranche needs another condition: a genuine cause acts
by an efficacy grounded in its own nature, unlike merely occasional causes, which
“act” only by way of the efficacy of a genuine cause. Cf. *Christian and
Metaphysical Meditations* (OCM X.48).

\(^{5}\) According to Malebranche, a “natural cause is…only an occasional cause, which
determines the Author of nature to act in such and such a way, in such and such a
situation” (OCM II.313/LO 448). To understand this, however, would require a
detailed excursion into Malebranche’s views on laws of nature, the “general
practical” and “always efficacious volitions” of God (OCM VIII.704, 654). At least
for Malebranche, it looks like creaturely occasional causes do not just constitute
reasons for God to choose to bring about some particular effect. Instead, occasional
causes seem to be an inextricable part of the story of how efficacious general laws
of nature bring about particular effects: “in order for the general cause to act by
the main thesis is straightforward: God alone is the oomph-y, productive, efficient cause of natural effects. So whatever changes that a body seems to cause in a mind, whatever changes a mind seems to cause in a body, or whatever changes one body seems to cause in another are all due to God alone, who moves bodies around or produces sensations in minds on the occasion of certain appropriate events or circumstances. One might have thought that making God the sole productive cause would be a way of enhancing God’s glory, but few people have seen it that way. Besides being perceived as contrary to common sense, and besides making it very hard to see how God is not the cause of sin, occasionalist positions were seen as depreciating creation and, by implication, God.

As you will recall from chapter one, the vast majority of scholastic and early modern thinkers, occasionalists included, took Acts 17:28— which states that it is in God that creatures “live, move, and have their being”— to indicate that not only does God initially create creatures, but that he must also keep them in existence. By the seventeenth century, God’s conservative activity was seen as a kind of continuous creation, and the distinction between God’s initial act of creation and his subsequent conservative activity was a distinction in reason alone. As the late scholastic Suárez puts it, “‘creation’ connotes a denial of previously possessed esse [being], whereas ‘conservation,’ to the contrary, connotes the

---

laws or by general volitions, ... it is absolutely necessary that there be some occasional cause that determines the efficacy of those laws, and that serves to establish them” (OCM V.67R 139).
possession of the same esse that was previously had. If you were to take a snapshot of God’s action at some arbitrary moment of a creature’s existence, you would not be able to tell whether it was creation or conservation, since whether or not there was esse before that moment is extrinsic to the divine action under scrutiny. The two other kinds of positions were attempts to balance the requirement that creatures be dependent on God for their very being at every moment of their existence with the requirement that creatures can be genuine, and not merely occasional, causes.

A few adopted the view that God’s contribution to the ordinary course of nature was limited to such conservation. This is what Alfred Freddoso has dubbed the “mere conservationist” position: God’s causal contribution to the ordinary course of nature is just that he creates and conserves natural substances with their active and passive causal powers. Provided God keeps them in existence, creatures are genuine agents contributing to natural effects on their own, without any additional divine causal action. This was an incredibly unpopular position, perceived to be both theologically suspect and philosophically questionable. Its unpopularity in the early modern period cannot be underestimated. It seems that Durandus of St. Pourçain, an early fourteenth-century Dominican theologian, was its only well-known proponent.

---

6 Disputationes Metaphysicae, 21, §2, paragraph 7.
7 See Freddoso (1991) and (1994).
Concurrentism is the third variety of position, and was by far the most widely endorsed position in the late scholastic and early modern periods. It was attractive to those who wanted to assert both that creatures are causes and that God is intimately involved in the production of natural effects; it was seen as the position that maximized God’s sovereignty over nature without sacrificing the idea that creatures are genuine causes. The following characterization captures the core of the concurrentist position. Like occasionalists and mere conservationists, concurrentists hold that creatures depend on God for their very being at every moment of their existence. Like mere conservationists and against the occasionalists, concurrentists maintain that creatures can be genuine secondary causes. But unlike the mere conservationists, they insist that a creature’s production of an effect requires a divine action going beyond the divine conservation of the creature’s being. On this view, creatures and God cooperate: creatures are

Suarez provides one way to think about how God’s sustaining activity can be distinguished from his concurring activity. The conservation of a creature at different times occurs by means of the same divine activity: God initially creates a creature, and his continuation of that very same action is his conservation of the creature. However, the acts by which God concurs with creature’s actions are each distinct: they “will vary according to the variety of the actions” (Disputationes Metaphysicae, 22, §4, paragraph 8). On Suarez’s view, even though creatures cannot act without God’s concurrence, they could continue to exist (Disputationes Metaphysicae, 21). Notably, God’s concurrence is required even for a substance to exercise powers that follow necessarily and naturally from its substantial form: without divine concurrence, the fire of Nebuchadnezzar’s furnace exists but doesn’t burn the three youths (Disputation 21, § 11, paragraph 1; Daniel 3:8-30). This is an attractive account of such contra naturam miracles, since God does not need to actively oppose the natural power of the fire to burn; such active opposition would seem to indicate that God was not absolutely sovereign over nature.
immediate causes of natural effects, but God is and must also be an immediate contemporaneous co-cause of each and every natural effect, and neither causal contribution by itself would suffice to bring about the effect. One way to understand the difference between mere conservationists and concurrentists is in terms of this immediacy of causal involvement: concurrentists think that God is an immediate cause of every effect in nature, while mere conservationists think that God, as the creator and conserver of acting creatures, is only a remote or mediate cause of natural effects.9

To begin to get an intuitive grip on the idea that there may be two levels of divine causal involvement, it may also be helpful to think in terms of intentions God might have before he creates the world: there is one intention of God simply to sustain the being of a creature throughout its lifetime, but there are additional, distinct intentions of God to concur in such-and-such a way at such-and-such a time, or to withhold such concurrence. It should be noted that there was debate about the character of such a concurrence, and that not everyone thought that the concurring act of God was tailored to the unique, determinate actions of creatures (for an example of someone who denies specific concurrence, see Molina, Concordia, part 2, disputation 26, §11).

9 God and creatures are supposed to be active causes according to both the mere conservationist and concurrentist schemes. An active power delimits the effects a creature can produce (or conserve) directly through its own power in the right kind of circumstance, with the right kind of suitably disposed patients. A passive causal power delimits the effects that can be produced (or conserved) in the creature when it is acted upon in the right kind of circumstance, with the right kind of suitably situated agents. A causal contribution might be entirely active, entirely passive, or active in one respect while being passive in some other respect (as is the case when a creature brings about changes within itself). As we saw in chapter one, a cause c is an immediate cause of an effect e at some time t iff the following conditions obtain: 1) c exists at t, 2) c is an active cause of e at t, and 3) there is no set S such that a) c and e are both members of S, and b) each member S is an active cause of the effect at t, and c) c is an active cause of e only because c causally contributes to the members of S existing at or before t. A cause c is a merely remote cause of e at t.
For Leibniz, the extent and manner of God’s involvement in creation was a
central problem requiring a delicate answer. Leibniz was concerned to assert the
genuine causal efficacy of creatures while maintaining the thesis that creatures are
utterly dependent on God for their being at every moment of their existence, all
while successfully avoiding occasionalism and another ism that Leibniz likened to
atheism: Spinozism, according to which creatures are mere modes of God.10

Commentators have assumed that Leibniz, as someone who tried to balance
the demands of piety with a commitment to creaturely action, adhered to the
position that was perceived in the early modern period to have the best chance of
securing such a balance: concurrentism.11 I will take a careful look at the Discours
de métaphysique (1686), De libertate, fato, gratia Dei (circa 1686), De ipsa natura
(1698), the Théodicée (1710), as well as a selection of other texts, and argue that a
close reading of Leibniz’s arguments in those texts do not reveal concurrentist
sympathies, but rather mere conservationist ones. It will also become clear why
Leibniz’s adoption of mere conservationism might not be all that surprising: his
distinctive metaphysics make mere conservationism more tenable than it would

iff the following conditions obtain: 1) c is an active cause of e at t, and 2) c is not
10 See De ipsa natura (1698), G IV 508. I do not have space here to discuss
Leibniz’s in detail complex attitude toward Spinozism, or the question of how close
Leibniz’s views are to Spinoza’s, despite Leibniz’s efforts to distance himself from
the Dutch philosopher’s doctrines of ill repute. See Laerke (2008).
11 The idea that Leibniz is a concurrentist of some variety has been advanced by
(1990a), Vailati (2002), and Whipple (2010).
otherwise be. The upshot is important: if Leibniz has found a way to make mere conservationism theologically and philosophically respectable, then he has found a way to say that even at the very fundamental level of substances, the nature of substances can provide a complete characterization of the workings of the natural world. Of course, God will have to be referenced as the conserver of the being of the world, but one need not add a clause about how creatures act only with some additional concurring activity of God.

---

12 A few disclaimers: this topic touches on many topics in Leibniz’s metaphysics, and to simplify things, I will set aside discussion of his youthful flirtations with more occasionalist-sounding arguments. For arguments that appear to show that God is the cause of natural motion, see the *Confessio naturae contra atheistas* (1668?, A VI.1.492), the letter to Thomasius from April 1669 (A II.1.35/L 102), and the dialogue *Pacidius Philalethi* (October 1676, A VI.3.566-7). I will also postpone any detailed discussion of the complexities of Leibniz’s privation view of sin, his taxonomy of evils, and the question of whether God is *morally* responsible for evils in the world. Along with other commentators working on the issue of Leibniz’s views of divine and secondary causality, I am simply concerned with the question of the extent to which God is *causally* involved in the physical activity of creatures, bracketing the question of whether or not such activity is morally good or bad. For a detailed treatment of the development of Leibniz’s thoughts on evil, see Rateau (2008), and for a discussion of the difference between the “moral” and “physical” issues, see Schmaltz (forthcoming A). I will also sometimes refer to whatever is active in a creature as “primitive active force” or “substantial form,” not settling the difficult further questions of how primitive forces are related to derivative forces, or whether and how the activity in certain periods is tied to monads, substantial forms, or bodies. For two very different treatments of the latter question, see Garber (2008) and Adams (1994).

13 For the purposes of this chapter, I will say that substances are the basic constituents of the world, leaving it open whether such substances are the monads that are clearly present in Leibniz’s ontology by the end of his life. While there are complicated issues to be resolved about what exactly Leibniz held to be at the metaphysical ground-floor at various periods in his career, and how such a fundament is related to other levels of reality (like the phenomenal), these issues are not relevant to the arguments discussed in the paper.
In section II, I present aspects of Leibniz’s view of substances that will be important for the arguments of the paper. In section III, I explain why I think it is reasonable to suppose that Leibniz uses “concurrence” and cognate terms to mean conservation. In section IV, I describe the problems an account of conservation needs to avoid. In sections V and VI, I offer a new way of understanding Leibniz’s view of God’s conservative activity, explain how it avoids occasionalism, and show that it accommodates creaturely *efficient* causality as well as creaturely formal and final causality. In section VII, I argue that certain traditional objections to mere conservationism do not have teeth.

III. Complete Concepts, Concrete Correlates, and the Reality of Activity

Leibniz admits at the start of *Discours* §8 that “it is rather difficult to distinguish the actions of God from those of creatures; for some believe that God does everything, while others imagine that he merely conserves the force he has given to creatures.” We are told that “what follows will let us see the extent to which we can say the one or the other.” What follows is a conception of substance.¹⁴

As we will see, Leibniz’s conception of substance is —just as Leibniz says it is— the key to understanding his views of the nature of divine causal involvement in creation. Although Leibniz’s conception of substance does undergo modifications over the course of his mature period, a basic framework is set up in

¹⁴ A VI.4.1539-40.
the 1680s that remains throughout, and it is this basic framework that will be relevant to the arguments of this chapter.  

The basic framework, which Leibniz begins to lay down in the *Discours*, is the following. For any substance, there is a concept associated with it so complete that it contains everything that can be predicated of it, where ‘everything’ is unrestricted: when God considers Alexander’s complete concept, “he sees in it at the same time the basis and reason for all the predicates which can be said truly of him.” Leibniz does not just claim that there is a complete concept of Alexander to be found in God’s infinite understanding, however. There is a concrete correlate of the concept in the soul of Alexander that provides a foundation for a true attribution of a property: “…when we consider carefully the connection of things, we can say that from all time in Alexander’s soul there are vestiges of everything that has happened to him and marks of everything that will happen to him and even traces of everything that happens in the universe, even though God alone could recognize them all.”

Carefully considering the connection of things, we see that each individual is related to every other individual in its world, and each individual soul

---

15 See Garber (2008).
16 A VI.4.1540. In thinking complete concepts are so exhaustive, I follow Rescher (1979) and disagree with Mates (1972, 1986). Mates insists that complete concepts include only “simple” or “purely positive” predicates, arguing that to think complete concepts included more would be inconsistent with Leibniz’s “doctrine” of the reducibility of relations. However, Jauernig (2010) has argued that it is distorting to think that Leibniz was always thinking in such reductionist terms. See footnote 18 below.
17 Ibid.
encodes information about the rest of the universe. Furthermore, \textit{whatever} can be truly predicated of Alexander can \textit{always} be predicated of him (with the appropriate time index), and Leibniz’s thought is that this is only so provided there is \textit{always} something grounding this predication. For Leibniz, a soul or substantial form is that which creates a genuinely persisting individual: it is an indivisible entity that comes into existence when God creates the world and goes out of existence only when God chooses to annihilate it. The concrete correlate of Alexander’s complete concept was around \textit{somewhere} in 456 BCE, even though Alexander wasn’t born until 356 BCE. This concrete correlate’s existence ensures

\textsuperscript{18} What does it mean to say that each soul encodes information about the rest of the universe? Leibniz is well-known for his denial of “purely extrinsic denominations” (see, for example, \textit{Primae veritates} (1689), A VI.4.1646). It does seem that relational (and non-intrinsic) properties are somehow grounded in non-relational (intrinsic) properties, but to say that they are so grounded should not be taken to imply that grounding amounts to reduction. Anja Jauernig (2010) has argued convincingly that although Leibniz can sometimes be accurately characterized as a reductionist, and although he does think that there are intricate dependence relations between different kinds of properties, he is more often than not expressing non-reductionist views. It is not the case that all relations and extrinsic properties strongly supervene on intrinsic properties, it is not the case that a complete description of the world is possible in purely non-relational terms, and it can only be said with some qualifications —qualifications about what there is at the phenomenal level of reality and how those phenomenal facts are reflected at the most fundamental level— that all there is in the world are individuals and their intrinsic properties. Cf. Mates (1986), Parkinson (1965), and Cover and Hawthorne (1999).

\textsuperscript{19} In the correspondence with Arnauld, it becomes clear that Leibniz denies transworld identity. Consequently, there would not be a world index: no actual individual would exist if the universe had been different from the actual world in any way at all. There is an extensive literature on this topic, but see Adams (1994, ch. 3).
that it is true in 456 BCE that Alexander will be conqueror of Babylon in 331 BCE.\textsuperscript{20}

Leibniz uses this conception of substance in an argument against occasionalism.\textsuperscript{21} The argument is this: God does not need to directly produce properties in a substance if each substance already contains within it dispositions to bring forth all the right properties at all the right times: “all that ever happens to us are only consequences of our being;”\textsuperscript{22} “…every present state of a substance occurs to it spontaneously and is only a consequence of its preceding state” and “what happens to the soul is born to it in its own depths.”\textsuperscript{23} Contra the occasionalists, creatures, not God, are the true immediate sources of all of their properties, even if it is true that God produces and sustains the substance from whence these properties spring.\textsuperscript{24}

\textsuperscript{20} Cf. the 28 November/8 December 1686 letter to Arnauld (A II.2.120-1).
\textsuperscript{21} For more on Leibniz’s efforts to refute occasionalism, see Jolley (2005), Rutherford (1993), and Sleigh (1990a). In the \textit{Discours} period, Leibniz also argues from the complete concept doctrine to the denial of intersubstantial causation, but this is not an enduring argumentative strategy. Leibniz continued to deny intersubstantial causation and continued to think that individual substances had complete concepts associated with them, but he ceases to link them in this way after the 1680’s. See Garber (2008, ch. 5).
\textsuperscript{22} \textit{Discours} § 14, A VI.4.1550.
\textsuperscript{23} G II.47, G II.58.
\textsuperscript{24} Malebranche had argued that a true cause is one in which a mind sees a necessary connection between a cause and its effect; by Malebranche’s lights, only in an infinitely perfect being can one see a necessary connection between will and effect. God is the only infinitely perfect being, so God is the only true cause (see Malebranche (1997), 450.). One might think that since Leibnizian substances have marks and traces that ground the enduring truths captured by the complete concept, there is a similar necessity involved in creaturely causality. And one might worry
Besides providing a way of refuting occasionalism, another consequence Leibniz draws from this conception of substance is that there is no intersubstantial (transeunt) causation between created substances. Although it may appear that one substance can cause another substance to undergo some change, the true metaphysical story is that the substances involved only cause changes in their own states.

A crucial requirement is that such creaturely action is not just a succession of states explained by if-then claims. If creaturely activity were just that, then an occasionalist could claim that creatures were active: a creature’s properties at one time could serve as prompt for God to create other properties in the creature at a later time. Real creaturely causation has to involve some oomph: “…for in action, motion, and thought, there is not a simple modality — that is, a relation — but some new reality is superadded, for there is a real difference between the thing that acts and the thing that does not.”

Insofar as activity is real, it must be created and conserved by God. In fact, God creates and conserves this oomph in virtue of creating and conserving creatures, since creatures are essentially active.

that such necessity would not only destroy human freedom, but also make it such that even God could not change anything once substances were created. The ever-astute Arnauld had exactly these worries, which he raised in his correspondence with Leibniz. For an illuminating commentary on the debate, see Sleigh (1990a, ch. 4). For more about the question of the relation between substances and their properties, see Adams (1994, ch. 3) and Mondadori (1985).

25 From De libertate, fato, gratia Dei (1686?), A VI.4.1604.
26 In a letter to Des Bosses in February 1706, Leibniz emphasizes the reality of creaturely active power. Because the active power is real, it must — like everything
IV. “Concurrence”

So substances, endowed with a “fecundity or nisus for producing their actions and for being effectual,” are unceasingly active, and active in accordance with an “inherent law (even if it is not known to the creatures in which it exists), that is real—be conserved by God. But this active power does have a special sort of being, a being that is not mere potentia. He had already put forth such a position in 1694 in the Acta eruditorum, writing that “active force…contains a certain act or entelechy and is thus midway between the faculty of acting and the [completed] act itself” (G IV.369). What ensures it stays in this middle state is an exigency for action grounded in the laws of nature established through divine wisdom; it will ceaselessly strive to act in ways conforming to the acting substance’s complete concept. (LDB 10-11).

27 He even says that the very substance of things consists in a “force for acting and being acted upon” (G IV.508). Leibniz will go on to emphasize that the thesis that “actions pertain to supposita” follows from the notion of action. It also hold reciprocally: “not only is it the case that everything that acts is an individual substance, but also that every individual substance acts without interruption, including even body itself, in which one never finds rest” (G IV.509). Only something that can be the subject of predication can be active, and only true unities can be genuine subjects of predication (and so an infinitely divisible Cartesian corporeal substance or a succession of disconnected states cannot be a suppositum, and so cannot constitute a substance per se). The unifying substantial form is essentially active, and so whenever there is unity, and thus a genuine subject of predication, a something that can act, there will be action. “The first entelechy must be found in corporeal substance, a first subject of activity, namely a primitive motive force which, added over and above extension (or that which is merely geometrical), and over and above bulk (or that which is merely material), always acts but yet is modified in various ways in the collision of bodies through conatus and impetus. And this substantial principle itself is what is called the soul in living things and the substantial form in other things; insofar as, together with matter, it constitutes a substance that is truly one, or something one per se…since if these true and real unities were eliminated, only entities through aggregation, indeed (it follows from this), no true entities at all would be left in bodies.” (G IV.511). See also the Specimen dynamicum (1695, GM VI.235).
from which both actions and passions follow” —such an “inherent law” is just the dictates of the concrete correlate of their complete concept.28

Recall that Leibniz had said in Discours §8 that there is one group of thinkers who think God does everything and another group that thinks God just conserves the force he has given creatures. It is clear that Leibniz does not belong to the first group. Commentators seem to have assumed that Leibniz was introducing two equally unattractive options here.29 But if Leibniz had wanted to steer between mere conservationism and occasionalism, it seems he would have criticized mere conservationism too. Instead, we are told over and over in a variety of texts that God creates essentially active substances that will, by way of all those ordered dispositions given to them by God, produce all of their states, provided God conserves them. Concurrentists would agree with mere conservationists that

28 G IV.506-7.
29 Besides the assumption that Leibniz was following the theologically respectable trend of adopting concurrentism, there is another reason why interpreters might see Discours §8 as introducing two equally unattractive options. In §7, Leibniz had described how God has set up the world so that it always conforms to the most universal of God’s laws, even while it may not always conform to more subordinate regulations (such breaches of the subordinate regulations are miracles). There is talk here of God’s concurrence with reasoning creatures: Leibniz urges that we must make a distinction between God’s willing good actions and merely permitting evil ones, although in both cases he must “concur because of the laws of nature which he has established.” (A VI.4.1538-9). It sounds like God is acting in time and in consort with creatures, doing something more than maintaining the existence of substance and their powers to act. However, it is not clear to me that this additional activity of God over and above conservation is simultaneous with creaturely acts. Leibniz is happy to talk of God’s consideration of the relative merits of possible worlds and the selection, after consideration, of the absolute best one. Couldn’t this consideration and sometimes endorsement of what creatures will do pre part of God’s pre-creation consideration of the world and its inhabitants?
creatures must be conserved by God and that creatures are immediate sources of activity. However, they would add that there is an additional activity of God over and above God’s activity of conserving essentially active substances. On close inspection, though, when Leibniz talks of God’s “concurrence,” it looks like he just has the conservative activity in mind.

Consider this passage from a letter written to Arnauld in April 1687:

…Everything occurs in every substance as a consequence of the first state which God bestowed upon it when he created it, and…his ordinary concourse consists only of preserving the substance itself in conformity with its preceding state and the changes that it bears…. I believe that bodily substance has the force to continue its changes according to the laws that God has placed in its nature and maintains there.\(^{30}\)

In my view, this was usually the way Leibniz employed the language of concurrence. He tends to use it to describe the action by which God makes creatures real by giving them esse, not to describe cooperation with (or additional action upon) already existing creatures.\(^{31}\) Consider a letter written to Arnauld in July 1686:

\(^{30}\) G II.91-3, my emphasis. Leibniz says something very similar in Discours §30: “In concurring with our actions, God ordinarily does no more than follow the laws he has established, that is, he continually conserves and produces our being in such a way that thoughts come to us spontaneously or freely in the order that the notion pertaining to our individual substance contains them, a notion in which they could be foreseen from all eternity.” (A VI.4.1575).

\(^{31}\) Leibniz would not be the only one to use ‘concurrence’ to mean conservation. In the 1640s, Descartes commonly uses ‘concurrence’ (concurus, concours) to mean God’s preservation of the being of substances. Consider this passage from the Principia Philosophiae: “By substance we can understand nothing other than a thing which exists that requires no other thing to exist. and indeed only one
[The hypothesis of occasional causes has it that] God were ordinarily to intervene in another way than by maintaining each substance in its course of action and in the laws established for it.\textsuperscript{32} This passage appears to imply that —contra the occasionalists— God ordinarily just maintains each substance “in the course of action and in the laws established for it.”\textsuperscript{33} In \textit{De libertate, fato, gratia Dei}, written about a year after the \textit{Discours}, we also see a lot of talk of “\textit{concursus},” but in the following kind of argumentative context: if God’s “\textit{concursus}” is not necessary, then God does not continually conserve the world after creation. Such usage suggests that the divine activity is just continuous creation, not cooperation over and above such creative activity.\textsuperscript{34} Furthermore, when Leibniz \textit{does} talk explicitly of cooperation, he sometimes

\begin{quote}

substance can be understood to entirely require no other thing, namely, God. In fact, [with] all others, we perceive that they cannot exist except with the help of God’s concurrence” (I, 51: AT VIII.24. See also AT IX.47.). Another such use of ‘concurrence’ can be found in the August 1641 letter to Hyperaspistes: “…there is no doubt that if God ceased from his concurrence, everything which he created would immediately depart into nothingness because before they were created and he lent them his concurrence they were nothing” (AT III.429–30).
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{32} G II.57-8., my emphasis.

\textsuperscript{33} In this passage, Leibniz raises one of Leibniz’s favorite complaints against occasionalism: “the hypothesis of occasional causes does not, it seems to me, satisfy a philosopher. For it introduces a sort of continual miracle, as though God were constantly changing the laws of bodies, on the occasion of the thoughts of minds, or changing the regular course of the thoughts of the soul by arousing in it other thoughts, on the occasion of the movements of bodies; and in general as though God were ordinarily to intervene in any other way than by maintaining each substance in its course of action and in the laws established for it.” (G II 57-8). Whether this is a fair criticism of the most sophisticated versions of occasionalism (Malebranche’s version included) is not something I can settle here.

\textsuperscript{34} A VI.4.1604.
presents it as a way one can talk, when one thinks of limitations and privations as “realities”:

…but when one comprises limitations and privations under the term realities one may say that the second causes cooperate in the production of that which is limited; otherwise God would be the cause of sin, and even the sole cause.35

Notice that when Leibniz does cite the mere conservationist Durandus by name, he is not clearly critical of the position. Consider Théodicée 27:

Some have believed, with the celebrated Durandus de Saint-Pourçain…that the cooperation of God with the creature (I mean the physical cooperation) is only general and mediate, and that God creates substances and gives them the force they need; and that thereafter he leaves them to themselves, and does nothing but conserve them, without aiding them in their actions. This opinion has been refuted by the greater number of Scholastic theologians, and it appears that in the past it met with disapproval in the writings of Pelagius. Nevertheless a Capuchin named Louis Pereir of Dole, about the year 1630, wrote a book expressly to revive it, at least in relation to free actions. Some moderns incline thereto, and M. Bernier supports it in a little book on freedom and free will.36

Here, Leibniz summarizes Durandus’ view, acknowledges that it has been “refuted” by Scholastic theologians and criticized by Pelagius, and reports that there have been some efforts to revive a similar view. The passage continues:

But one cannot say in relation to God what ‘to conserve’ is, without reverting to the general opinion. Also it must be taken into account that the action of God in conserving should have some reference to that which is conserved, according to what it is and to the state wherein it is; thus his action cannot be general or indeterminate. These generalities are abstractions not to be found in the truth of

35 T 392 (G VI 359), my emphasis. It is important to note that this text was written more than twenty years after the correspondence with Arnauld.
36 G VI.139.
individual things, and the conservation of a man standing is different from the conservation of a man seated…. we must bear in mind 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.\footnote{G VI.139.}

Leibniz reminds us that for God ‘to conserve’ is for God to continually create. Divine action cannot be “general or indeterminate”: it must somehow “make reference” to the very specific thing that is being conserved. That is, what is conserved must not be some general or indeterminate thing—a Socrates that is neither sitting nor standing—but an individual in all of its specificity. Also, divine action cannot be “mediate”: it cannot be the case that vis-à-vis any creature, that creature only depends on God \textit{via} some other creature. In any case, the passage is not a clear rejection of a mere conservationist view, but simply looks to be a statement of what conservation needs to be like.\footnote{It is worth noting that there is one especially problematic text for my interpretation. In his January 25, 1706 letter to Leibniz, Des Bosses asks Leibniz the following questions. First, if Leibniz recognizes the necessity of divine “concurrence,” how can he prevent “that power…located in the very endeavor to act” from just being a mere potentiality? That is, if a creature cannot act without God also acting, then isn’t the creaturely “endeavor” just another word for a potential to act? (LDB 5-7). And second, if Leibniz does not recognize the necessity of divine concurrence, then how can we avoid falling back on the position of Durandus, according to which God’s influence is merely mediate? In his response of February 2, 1706, Leibniz says that God’s activity is \textit{immediate}, and he does refrain from directly criticizing mere conservationism. But his use of concurrentist language is frustratingly inconsistent in this text. He sometimes uses “concurrence” to mean something like conservation: “I also believe that neither active force itself nor even a bare faculty would exist in things without divine
In section VI, I will argue that we have good reasons to think that Leibniz’s view of non-general and non-indeterminate divine conservation is not what previous commentators have thought it was, and that thinking of Leibniz’s view in this new way helps us see exactly how creatures can be productive efficient causes. In section VII, I will return to the issue of the immediacy of God’s causal involvement. Leibniz can, unlike Durandus, be a mere conservationist who avoids the charge that God’s causal influence is too mediate or remote. But first, let’s take a closer look at what conservation must be like.

V. Some Problems to be Avoided

It is very clear that Leibniz held that God conserves essentially active creatures that have within them the marks of all they will be and the traces of all they have been. It is not at all clear that Leibniz thought that God concurs with creatures, if that is taken to imply an additional level of divine causal involvement over and above such conservation. If God’s activity in nature is just conservation of active substances, then Leibniz has relieved himself of the concurrentist’s burden concurrence, since however much perfection there is in things, it flows forth from God by a continual operation.” But he does sound more straightforwardly concurrentist a few lines later. Leibniz thinks that creaturely active power is something more than mere potential for action, and that the reason it has this special sort of status is the presence of a “certain exigency for action and hence for divine concurrence for action, albeit an exigency that can be resisted” (LDB 10-11). Saying that the exigency for divine concurrence can be resisted by God does sound a lot like the concurrentist thesis that God can withhold his concurrence while still conserving the creatures. Although he talks of such exigency elsewhere (see T 388: G VI.346), as far as I know, he does not talk of God resisting this exigency in other texts.
of explaining how exactly creatures and God cooperate. The pressing question now is this: what exactly is the character of this conservative activity of God?

Like most of his contemporaries, Leibniz held that conservation was nothing but continued creation. But here are two potential problems facing anyone who thinks that God continually creates creatures: 1) continuous creation does not in fact conserve the kinds of things that could be agents, and 2) even if continuous creation were to create the kinds of things that could be agents, it still collapses into occasionalism. What kind of understanding of conservation must one have to avoid both problems?

The first problem arises when one thinks of continuous creation as continual recreation: continuous creation is a series of separate acts of creating ex nihilo, so God’s conservation is not to be understood as the continuous granting of esse to an already created creature. Here is the problem: if a thing’s qualities, capacities, or forces — whatever it is that makes a thing causally efficacious — are constantly dropping out of existence as time-slice objects are unceasingly replaced, then it seems that they are not around when they need to be to exert any causal influence.

---

39 See Freddoso (1994) and Lee (2004) for good discussions of the difficulties facing concurrentists.
40 See, for example, G III.566 and G IV.588f.
41 Descartes’ formulation of the doctrine in the Third Meditation has invited this kind of reading: “A lifespan can be divided into countless parts, each completely independent of the others, so that it does not follow from the fact that I existed a little while ago that I must exist now, unless there is some cause which as it were creates me afresh at this moment—that is, which preserves me.” (nisi aliqua causa me quasi rursus creet ad hoc momentum, hoc est me conservet) (AT VII.49).
The idea is that something that is created at the same time as the effect cannot be a productive cause of that effect because whatever productive causal work was already done by God.\textsuperscript{42}

There are a few ways to respond to this problem. One way is to deny that continuous creation is recreation. Thomas appeared to think that since God conserves creatures “not by a new action, but by a continuation of that action whereby he bestows being,”\textsuperscript{43} then the diachronic identity of the persisting creature is ensured not by various qualitative, spatial, or causal relations between states of the successively created objects, but by the persisting creature being \textit{the very same object} at every moment. If continuous creation maintains the same object over

...
time, then it is at least \textit{there} to be an agent. In various places, this appears to be Leibniz’s view of continuous creation and his response to worries that God’s continuous creation of creatures cannot be continuous creation of agents.\textsuperscript{44}

Another way to respond is to challenge a model of causation that is likely lurking behind the intuition that continuous recreation poses more of a threat to creaturely causation than continuous maintenance. On this late scholastic model of causation, two distinct substances, an agent and a patient, exist before the effect and endure until the effect has been completely realized. In addition to the substances, there is the action of the agent and the passion of the patient: action and passion may be simultaneous or they may be identical, but they are at least conceptually distinct. The cause is not, however, the action, but the acting \textit{substance} that has to preexist the action and \textit{endure} until the effect has completely come to be. With this conception of causation in mind, recreation does seem problematic, since substances do not stick around long enough to serve as causes of effects. But one could replace this old model with one according to which a thing can be the cause of another thing, even if the causing thing comes into existence at exactly the same moment as the caused thing. In some places, this appears to be Leibniz’s response to worries along the lines of 1). Consider T 388:

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 \textit{in signo rationis}, and that this is

\textsuperscript{44} See Gr 307.
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. (G VI.346).45

Problem 2), that continuous creation collapses into occasionalism, is a bit harder to solve. We have already seen the following kind of argument in previous chapters, but here is a version adapted from Malebranche (the original argument concentrated on position in space, but it can be generalized to any quality):46

1) Creatures persist because God conserves them, and conservation is continuous creation.
2) God must conceive of what he creates.
3) God must conceive of a body existing in a particular place, position, and time —in fact, he must conceive of a body in all of its determinacy.
4) So God cannot bring a body into existence unless he brings it into existence as it is in all of its particularity at a particular time.
5) If God must create the body in all of its determinacy, then God is not just the cause of the body’s existence, but of each of its particular determinations as well.47
6) Another being can cause some determination only if it has more power than God.48
7) No power can be greater than God’s.
8) So no finite body or mind is able to cause a change in a body.

45 G VI.346. Leibniz might be comfortable dispensing with the requirement that a cause be temporally prior to its effects because he thinks time is phenomenal. But since time reflects an underlying order, causes will still need to be prior to effects in this underlying order.
46 Dialogues VII, 115–6. The argument in the dialogue also emphasizes that God cannot will what he cannot conceive.
47 This premise is left implicit in the Dialogues VII presentation of the argument.
48 This is also left implicit in the Dialogues VII version of the argument.
Therefore, a finite body or mind can only be the occasional cause of a change in a body; they can be the occasions for God to act in determinate ways, according to the laws by which he acts. Commentators have thought that part of Leibniz’s lack of worry about occasionalism seems to be due to his thinking of continuous creation as continuous maintenance, rather than as recreation. Recreation would require God to build the world up from scratch at successive moments, a picture that does invite the conclusion that God does everything in such a world. McDonough (2007) argues that even if Leibniz were to have a recreationist view, this would not mean that creatures could not be agents in their own right, since “the causal order through which creatures are created/conserved must not be confused with the order in which their own causal powers are exercised.”

I agree with McDonough that we can distinguish, in some intuitive way, causal orders. Take his evocative example of a freezer and ice cubes within it:

A freezer “conserves” the ice cubes at every instant, but they are nonetheless able to resist deformation and penetration in virtue of their own (preserved) causal powers; in Leibniz’s examples, God conserves finite spirits at every instant, but they are nonetheless able to play a genuine causal role in the production of their own accidental modifications in virtue of their (preserved) active natures.

---

50 McDonough (2007, p. 50).
51 Ibid.
McDonough adds that even if we think of God’s conservation as *specific* — tailored to each and every one of the requirements for each entity — we will still be able to discern causal orders, and this is enough to avoid the threat of occasionalism.\textsuperscript{52}

Suppose continuous creation is directed at maintaining every creature in all of its infinite non-relational and relational specificity at every moment throughout time. Because the creative and conservative divine action is just *one* action, it just maintains what has already been created. But even if the action is just *one* action, it is an infinitely complex action: creature takes on new features over time, and God creates and conserves the creature as having these features at certain times. The substance is maintained as *changing in specific ways*. McDonough insists that we would still be able to distinguish between an order of creation/conservation and an order of creaturely activity, and perhaps this is so. But more needs to be said about why we are not just *considering* a creature to be a cause of changes for which, in all metaphysical rigor, God is entirely responsible. The maintenance sense of continuous creation makes it plausible that there is a persisting thing that *could* be causally efficacious, but if the divine conservative activity is specific, then I think we need a more detailed story explaining in what sense creatures’ actions are not just God’s actions thought of in a different way.

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid.
In the next section, I will argue that for Leibniz, there is an important sense in which God’s conservative activity is not specific, and this makes it much easier to understand how there can be creaturely activity that is not just God’s activity.

VI. How to Understand Divine Conservation and Creaturely Activity

According to Leibniz, the continuous creation of creatures does look to be specific. Consider this passage from Théodicée §27:

…. it must be taken into account that the action of God in conserving should have some reference to that which is conserved, according to what it is and to the state wherein it is; thus his action cannot be general or indeterminate. These generalities are abstractions not to be found in the truth of individual things, and the conservation of a man standing is different from the conservation of a man seated.53

This much is clear: is not as though only some essential core of a substance—a core that then goes on by itself to act—is conserved by God. God conserves every substance down to the last detail as well as the “reality of the action.”54

We might understand specific conservation along the following lines. God surveys the infinite number of possible worlds in his understanding and selects the best one for creation. We can think of the idea of the best possible world as an infinitely complex idea of all of that world’s infinitely complex substances—each

53 G VI.118. Cf. Causa dei § 11: “[God’s] concurrence is special, because it is directed not only at the existence and actions of a thing, but also at the manner and qualities of this existence, in so far as there is something of perfection in them, which always proceeds from God.” (G VI.440). Here, as elsewhere, I think “concurrence” means conservation.

54 G VI.118.
encoding information about the rest of its world-mates over all of time.\textsuperscript{55} Such an idea is a sort of blueprint. According to this conception, God creates the world with this blueprint in hand, as it were, building up each substance from the ground up in all of its infinite complexity. After creation, God refers to that blueprint and directs his creative energies accordingly, molding and directing \textit{esse} to produce each and every detail of each determinate substance.\textsuperscript{56}

But there is another way to understand how God’s activity of continuously creating creatures can be specific. According to this alternative conception, at initial creation, God creates an infinitely complex world of substances. At initial creation, \textit{esse} is \textit{structured} into substances. The source of this structure, of course, \textsuperscript{55} The world is an “aggregate of finite things” (G VII.302). It appears that God’s essence will not be included in such a sum of essences, although it does appear that concepts of possible things contain certain decisions of God. So God does not just choose to actualize certain possible substances, but also to actualize certain possible divine decisions, where such decisions are noncomparative decisions dealing only with the world to which they belong (G II.49-51). It is important for Leibniz’s treatment of contingency that God’s choice among possible worlds is not enfolded in the concept of the possible world.

\textsuperscript{56} Robert Adams appears to be thinking of conservation along these lines: God does not produce any state of a creature that does not have its source in the nature of the creature (1994, p. 98). Adams points out that Leibniz is sometimes careful to avoid explicitly stating that one state of a substance can have a metaphysically real influence on subsequent states, citing G IV.568 as a representative sample of such carefulness: “For it is God who conserves and continually creates their [creatures’] forces, that is to say, a source of modifications that is in the creature, or indeed a state by which it can be judged that there will be a change of modifications.” I would say that in such passages Leibniz is more interested in avoiding a position that is too deist than in denying that forces can have metaphysically real influence over the modifications of a substance over time. If one were to take a snapshot of a substance, one would be able to predict further modifications, but one would not be able to say that such modifications would be actualized unless one knew that God was going to conserve that substance.
is the infinitely complex idea in God’s understanding. Now think of this structure itself as a sort of sieve, keeping in mind that since this structure just is the various ways in which esse is limited, it will not have being in its own right (limitations are just privations of being).\(^57\) God’s conservative activity post-creation consists in his feeding esse through this sieve, as it were. In one sense, God’s action is indeterminate: the esse is not determinate before it is fed through the sieve. However, because there is the sieve, there is still “some reference to that which is conserved, according to what it is and to the state wherein it is.”\(^58\) The sieve ensures

\(^{57}\) Leibniz understands the relationship between perfection and limitation along Neoplatonic lines: imperfection or limitation does not arise from a distinct source or principle, as Manicheans would have it, but is rather just a lack of perfection (See Gr 365/AG 113-114). The negations of divine perfections make up creaturely limitations, and those limitations make up a creature’s non-moral imperfections. For some creatures —rational ones— imperfections constitute a capacity for sin. Once creatures are created, endowed as they are with activity, they will cause what is prescribed by their complete concept, including sins. The limitations of perfections ground the sin, but do not by themselves cause the sin, since creaturely oomph is required. That the limitations ground —but do not by themselves cause— sins is indicated by Leibniz’s carefulness in avoiding overtly causal terminology. Around 1689, in De libertate, contingentia, et serie causarum, Providentia, he writes, “Sins arise [oriuntur] from the original limitation of things” (VI.4.1657). In De libertate, fato, gratia Dei, he says that sometimes “the imperfection is so great that it constitutes the basis [rationem] of a sin (VI.4.1605). At T 31, he does use a term that is more causal (viennent), but in the Latin summary of that book, he reverts to a less causal locution: the “true root [radix] of the fall is in the original imperfection or weakness of creatures (G VI.451).

\(^{58}\) In the Latin summary of the Théodicée, Leibniz says that God’s activity is “special because it is not only directed to the existence of the thing or of the act, but also to the way and the qualities [modum et qualitates] of existing in so far as there is in them some perfection, which always flows from God, the father of light and the giver of all good” (G VI.440). On my reading, God’s activity is still directed at both the existence of things and the way of existing. It’s just that the manner of the directing is a bit different in each case. God’s conservative activity of granting esse
that the result of God’s inpouring of esse is a collection of infinitely determinate substances. If actions are differentiated by their results, then there is another sense in which God’s action is not indeterminate.

The sieve analogy is misleading, however, since esse is not just structured into static configurations. Activity also calls for divine support. At initial creation, substances are created with the marks of everything they ever will be, as well as an ability to be genuinely active. This is a crucial element of the structure, since it ensures that when God gives esse to the structure post-creation, the result is the creation of active substances.

It seems there is a more satisfying illustration of Leibniz’s thinking available. Retain the idea that at initial creation, esse is structured into substances, and that the source of this structure is an infinitely complex idea in God’s understanding. Also retain the idea that God’s conservative activity consists in his feeding generalized esse into a structure that just is the limitations of esse, and, as such, does not have independent being. But take care to think of the structure as having that crucial element that ensures that when God feeds esse into it post-creation, activity is also supported. Instead of thinking of the structure as an inert sieve, think of it as the sort of structure a collection of living seeds would have.

is just directed to existence. At creation, God created substances that had within them the entire plan for their development in the best of all possible worlds. God directs the way of existing in virtue of an “original command,” in virtue of impressing in creatures their laws of development when he created the world. 

Cf. G IV.468-70 and LDB 10-11.
An ordinary seed is such that provided it is kept alive and given the needed resources in the right circumstances, it will grow and change in characteristic ways: an aster seed will develop into an aster plant, an oak seed into an oak tree, and so on. Importantly, even if the seed will only sprout given certain circumstances and resources, the sprouting is due to the activity of the organism itself. At initial creation, \( \textit{esse} \) is structured into Leibnizian substances that are like so many seeds. Of course, they are unlike ordinary seeds in not interacting with their environment, in having an infinitely complex plan for their independent development throughout all of time, and in relying on God to give them being (rather than just nutrients and sunlight). These differences aside, we still have a useful analogy: just as an ordinary seed \textit{changes itself} in the ways dictated by its genes provided resources and circumstances are right, a Leibnizian substance will \textit{change itself} in accordance with the dictates of its complete concept provided \( \textit{esse} \) is supplied. Such creaturely activity is not, strictly speaking, \textit{productive}, since it does not \textit{create} anything new. As Leibniz puts it, creaturely activity consists in the changing of limits:

\begin{quote}
The production of modifications has never been called \textit{creation}…. God produces substances from nothing, and the substances produce accidents by the changes of their limits.\textsuperscript{60}
\end{quote}

Far from being a static sieve, the structure into which God feeds general \( \textit{esse} \) is dynamic, and dynamic because of the activity of creatures. God supplies the \( \textit{esse} \),

\textsuperscript{60} G VI.351.
but it is creatures that modify the structure of this *esse* in virtue of changing their
own limits in conformity with the dictates of their complete concepts.

Here is the picture we have so far. At initial creation, *esse* is structured into
an infinitely complex world of substances. Importantly, this structure is such that if
*esse* is supplied, *activity* will also be supported. Post-creation, God supplies general
*esse* to a structure that *changes itself*. But here is an important question: why does
this constantly shifting structure persist as a structure at all? In other words, why
does general *esse* continue to be limited?

There is a reason for the structure to exist in the first place at creation, since
that structure consists of the initial states of all the substances comprising the best
possible world God has chosen to create. In the absence of a reason for that
structure to cease to exist, it will persist: it may not “follow of necessity” that
because a substance —a particular limited configuration of *esse*— is at one point
that it *will be* at some later point, but it can “follow naturally…that is, of itself, per
*esse*, if nothing prevents it.” It is not part of the essence of a created substance to

---

61 Here we can see that for Leibniz, God’s activity of sustaining the very being of
the world is in time. This is in contrast with the view we saw in the last chapter: for
Spinoza, God *qua substance’s* sustaining of the existence of everything is not in
time.

62 T 383 (G VI.342). It is crucial that this structure will be “natural” and not
“necessary”: “For if it were a necessary emanation, like that of the properties of the
circle, which issue from its essence, it must then be said that God in the beginning
produced the creature by necessity; or else it must be shown how, in creating it
once, he imposed upon himself the necessity of conserving it” (ibid.). Either kind
of necessity would limit God’s freedom. To say that the creation of a creature was
necessary is to say that God did not in fact have a *choice* of possible worlds. This is
exist, but as long as God continues to supply *esse*, the particular configuration that
is a substance has an inertia to it: it persists just as “the same movement endures	naturally unless some new cause prevents it or changes it, because the reason which

________________

unpalatably Spinozist. Consider T 173: “[Spinoza] appears to have explicitly taught
a blind necessity, having denied to the Author of Things understanding and will,
and assuming that good and perfection relate to us only, and not to him. It is true
that Spinoza’s opinion on this subject is somewhat obscure….as far as one can
understand him, he acknowledges no goodness in God, properly speaking, and he
teaches that all things exist through the necessity of the divine nature, without any
act of choice by God. We will not waste time here in refuting an opinion so bad,
and indeed so inexplicable. My own opinion is founded on the nature of the
possibles, that is, on things that imply no contradiction” (G VI.234-5). Leibniz
complains that Spinoza’s necessitarianism entails that God cannot be truly said to
be morally good. Moral goodness is only properly ascribed to free agents, and
agents are free only if there is contingency. Spinoza’s account does not make room
for contingency, so he has to deny that God is free, and if God is not free, God
cannot be morally good. Leibniz’s account of per se possibility —according to
which worlds (and substances) are possible in their own nature if they are free from
inconsistency— can rescue God’s freedom and moral agency. Leibniz thinks there
are three conditions for freedom: 1) that the agent is the causal source of its action
(spontaneity), 2) that the agent is aware of alternative courses of action
(intelligence), and 3) that these alternative courses of action are possible
(contingency) (T 288-290: G VI.302-4). There are per se possible worlds in God’s
infinite understanding (so condition 3) is satisfied), God surveys those possible
worlds before selecting the best one for creation (so condition 2) is satisfied), and
God creates the best possible world through an act of will (so condition 1) is
satisfied). What should be emphasized here is that what Leibniz finds so repugnant
about Spinozistic necessitarianism is its *blindness*. Leibniz is perfectly happy to
allow even God’s choice of the best possible world to be necessitated, provided the
necessity is moral necessity. Moral necessity is not blind because one is prompted
by good reasons to act as one does, and as Leibniz writes at the end of his life in his
last letter to Clarke, moral necessity “does not derogate from liberty. For when a
wise being, especially God who has supreme wisdom, chooses what is best, he is
not the less free on that account; on the contrary, it is the most perfect liberty not to
be hindered from acting in the best manner.” Leibniz (2000, p. 37).
makes it cease at this instant, if it is no new reason, would have already made it
cease sooner.”

To sum up, on the first way of understanding God’s conservative activity,
specification has its source in the nature of God’s esse-giving: God himself shapes
the esse into its determinate form after initial creation. On the second way,
specification has its source in creaturely limitation: God gives esse, but that esse is
shaped into determinate form by creatures after initial creation. Since the ability to
actively bring about changes in their modifications is also supported by God’s
giving of esse, the structure of creation is a dynamic, self-changing structure.

I think that Leibniz’s thinking conforms to the second, rather than the first,
way of understanding God’s conservative activity. Théodicée §27 accommodates
this reading, but what about passages in which Leibniz seems to say explicitly that
God’s activity is specific? One passage is Causa Dei §11, in which Leibniz says
that God’s activity is not only “directed [dirigitur] to the existence of the thing or
of the act, but also to the way and the qualities [modum et qualitates] of existing
insofar as there is in them some perfection, which always flows from God, the
father of light and the giver of all good.”

I am tempted to say that Leibniz was not being terribly precise in his short
summary of the Théodicée. In order to explain the conservation in the second sense,

---

63 T 383 (G VI.342).
64 A passage from the Tractatio de Deo et homine (1702) contains very similar
formulations (G III.30).
Leibniz would have needed more of his metaphysical machinery; he just didn’t present the needed notions of active substances and complete concepts by §11.

A stronger case for the second sense can be made by noticing how well it makes sense of a series of texts. That Leibniz is thinking in this way seems to make better sense of his insistence in places like the *De ipsa natura* (1698) that creatures do things after initial creation because God has “impressed” on them not only the law dictating how the creature is to act but the ability to act as well.65 God has to support the being of creatures, but Leibniz tells us in *De ipsa natura* that it would be unbefitting of God to make a command at creation that failed to be heeded. It would be equally unbefitting of God to have to “labor” in the world to ensure that creatures obey his original command.66 Leibniz’s original institution of laws can only be presently effective if that command “left behind some subsistent effect at the time, an effect which even now endures and is now at work.”67 So if

the law God laid down left some trace of itself impressed on things, if by his command things were formed in such a way that they were

65 The *De ipsa natura* appeared in the September 1698 issue of the *Acta Eruditorum* and was intended as a contribution to the debate between J. C. Sturm, an advocate of corpuscular philosophy à la Boyle and G. C. Schelhammer, an advocate of an occasionalist theory of motion. Schelhammer had defined motion as the “successive existence of a thing moved in different places”; the supposed communication of motion from one thing to another is simply due to God creating a series of appropriately coordinated and contiguous successive states in accordance with laws of nature that resulted from an original divine command. Leibniz’s critique centers on this instantaneous original command, and he wonders how such an original command could have any lasting impact in a world filled with the inert, passive Boyle-Sturm-Malebranchean matter.

66 G IV.506.

67 Ibid.
rendered appropriate for fulfilling the will of the command, then already we must admit that a certain efficacy has been placed in things, a form or a force, something like what we usually call by the name ‘nature,’ something from which the series of phenomena follow in accordance with the prescript of the first command.  

The first understanding of continuous creation encourages readings according to which creatures do nothing more than supply reasons for God to continuously create the world down to every last detail. But we might worry that this requires too much divine “labor.”

The second way also appears to make better sense of passages like the following:

I do not believe that our mind, even if it continually depends on God in its existence and action like every creature, requires his specific concurrence [peculiari… concursu] for its perceptions, over and above the laws of nature. Instead, I believe that it deduces its later thoughts from previous ones by an internal force and in the order prescribed by God.

No “concurrence…over and above the laws of nature” is required. Laws are enfolded in the creature and the creature acts (and perceives) in ways conforming to these laws, and so it seems that “concurrence” could just be the conservation of the creature on whose substantial form such laws have been pressed. Leibniz emphasizes here that the creature is active (it deduces) and acts as it has been programmed to act. God’s conservative activity does not need to be specific

---

68 Ibid.
70 Letter to Michael Gottlieb Hansch, 1707. L 593.
because the creature is made in such a way to ensure that its activity will generate a specific result.\textsuperscript{71}

The view also cleanly accommodates passages like the following:

the perfection that is in the action of the creature comes from God, but that the limitations that are found there are a consequence of the original limitation and of the preceding limitations that have occurred in the creature.\textsuperscript{72}

That the action is anything at all is due to God’s inpouring of esse. It has some degree of perfection because whatever God has contributed is in itself perfect. The particular limited character of the action is a consequence of the nature of the acting creature. In \textit{De libertate, fato, gratia Dei}, Leibniz gives us an analogy:

If I strike a little feather with great force, even if my action is quite perfect, still, the action of the little feather that arose out of the hit will be quite imperfect and weak, since the limitation proceeds from its own nature, which is not capable of great speed.\textsuperscript{73}

\textsuperscript{71} Some passages suggest that God does have to contribute something specific. Consider this passage from a 1712 letter to Lelong: “By the force that I bestow on substances, I do not understand anything other than a state from which another state follows, if nothing prevents it. But I admit that one state does not follow another, unless God intervenes there by a continual production of perfections” (translation from Sleigh (1990b, p. 182). It sounds like Leibniz is saying that God continually produces not just being in general but specific perfections. I will have to consider more post-\textit{Théodicée} texts to see if Leibniz begins to change his view, but it seems to me that this passage could be read in such a way that it is compatible with the metaphysical views I ascribe to Leibniz. In supplying esse to creation, God thereby creates specific perfections, but that there are the perfections there are at that time is due to the activity of creatures themselves.

\textsuperscript{72} G VI.348.

\textsuperscript{73} A VI.4.1606. I interpret T 30 (G VI.141) as offering a similar illustration of the same sort of principle: “Let us now compare the force that the current exercises on boats and communicates to them with the action of God, which produces and conserves whatever is positive in the creature, and which gives them perfection, being, and force. Compare, I say, the inertia of the matter [of the boat] with the
That the feather flies at all is due to the “quite perfect” hit; that creatures are at all (and active at all) is due to God’s contributing of esse. “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.”

For Leibniz, a substance is active whenever it “passes to a greater degree of perfection” and passive whenever it “passes to a lesser degree” of perfection. On the first way of understanding conservation, God supplies specific esse, building creatures from the ground up in all of their determinacy. Here is a major problem, however. On this conception, it seems that God’s conserving activity produces natural imperfection of creatures and the slowness of the laden boat with the defects that are found in the qualities and in the actions of the creature, and we will find that there is nothing as just as this comparison.” This is often cited as a text in which Leibniz shows his concurrentist colors, but I think the passage is intended to elucidate the nature of God’s conservative activity, rather than explain how we ought to understand God’s concurring activity over and above conservation. That the emphasis is on conservation is made clearer by T 31, which appears to make explicit what was to be gleaned from the analogy in T 30: “And when it is said that the creature depends upon God in so far as it exists and in so far as it acts, and even that conservation is a continual creation, this is true in that God gives ever to the creature and produces continually all that in it is positive, good and perfect….The imperfections, on the other hand, and the defects in operations spring from the original limitation that the creature could not but receive with the first beginning of its being, through the ideal reasons which restrict it. For God could not give the creature all without making of it a God; therefore there must needs be different degrees in the perfection of things, and limitations also of every kind.” (G VI.141-2)

Cf. T 298 (G VI.307).

74 T 388 (G VI.346).

75 A VI.4.1554.
directly any perfections in the states of the creatures, and so it seems difficult to see how creatures could be the perpetually active things Leibniz thinks they are. The second way of understanding conservation makes it much clearer how creatures can be both active and passive. While God supplies general esse, ensuring creatures are anything at all, creatures are themselves directly causally responsible for changes in their limits. Some of these limit-changes will be such that they result in something “more perfect” while some of these will be such that they result in something “less perfect.” We need not settle the difficult question of what exactly perfection amounts to here. All we have to see is that however the metric of perfection is understood, by changing its limits, a creature can be causally responsible for both changes for the better and changes for the worse. Here is an example, necessarily imperfect because a Leibnizian creature may not change its “limits” by changing how it is extended (since it may not be extended at all): an almost-spherical creature can change its limits to become even more spherical, thus passing to a greater degree of perfection, but it could also change its own limits to become even less spherical, thus passing to a lesser degree of perfection.76

76 Adams suggests that “what God (directly) produces, we may say, is not just the creature's nature or substantial form or capacity to produce, and 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…. Conservation, on my interpretation of Leibniz's view, does not involve God’s producing any state of the creature that does not also have a “source” in the nature or substantial form of the creature” (1994, pp. 97-98. Cf. Robinet (1986, p. 440)).
VII. Avoiding Some Problems

Besides appearing to fit texts, there are other reasons to think that Leibniz was thinking of God’s conservative activity in the second way: this second way gives Leibniz resources for blocking a dreaded slide to occasionalism. In Leibniz’s mind, blocking occasionalism allows him to block Spinozism: if creatures really do do things, then they can really be distinct from God.

Consider again the first way of thinking of God’s conservative activity. At every moment, God builds things from the ground up in all of their infinite detail; as God gives esse, he molds and directs it. Yet this view of God’s conservative activity does make it difficult to see what creatures can do.

The problem can be expressed elegantly using the distinction we have seen in previous chapters between two kinds of efficient cause, that of being (esse) and that of becoming (fieri). To review: a causa secundum fieri brings about effects that persist even after the productive causal activity of the cause has stopped, while a causa secundum esse is not just required for the creation of the effect, but for its continued existence as well. God’s relation to creation is one of causa secundum esse, but the question is whether that activity simply supplants creaturely causalitas.

The interpretation I provided in this section is very much in the spirit of Adams’ comments. I have simply tried to provide an account of Leibniz’s metaphysics that makes sense of God’s “producing the creature’s producing.”
secundum fieri. If God continually creates all creatures in all of their infinite specificity, then what room could there be for causalitas secundum fieri?

On the first way of understanding God’s conservative activity, God’s activity causa secundum esse is maximally specific. If this is the understanding of the activity, however, the slide to occasionalism looks very hard to block. Again, one response to such a slide is to say that Leibnizian creaturely causality is still genuine causality—it is genuine formal or final causality—but it isn’t at all efficient causality.77

On the second way of understanding God’s conservative activity, God’s activity causa secundum esse is not specific after creation. If it is not specific, then the argument above to occasionalism does not get started. One need not, then, be prompted to conceive of creatures as merely formal or final causes rather than as productive efficient causes. Creatures can be efficient causae secundum fieri.

That Leibniz insists that creatures are causes of changes in limits suggests that he was thinking of them as causae secundum fieri. Creatures can rearrange but not create: the “production of modifications has never been called creation.”78 God’s understanding is the ultimate source of the detailed plan for creatures’ actions and God is alone responsible for the initial creation of the world ex nihilo. Nevertheless, after creation, it is creatures who mold and direct the esse that God

78 G VI.351.
continuously gives. They mold and direct the esse in the ways they do because of their modifications, but crucially, they are also the ones to change those modifications.

One thing to note is that although God is contributing esse that is then directed by the creature, and so his activity is in one sense “general,” it is not general in any way Leibniz would find objectionable. Leibniz’s targets are those who “would have it only general, for fear of impairing the freedom of man…” 79 The objectionable view is that God creates and conserves some amorphous creature that then goes on to determine itself or its actions without a sufficient reason for so determining. 80 For Leibniz, to exist requires infinite determinacy, so it doesn’t make sense to claim that a thing could exist without already being so determined.

79 T 381 (G VI.341).
80 Even though all of a substance’s states are born out of its own depths in the order prescribed by a complete concept and foreseen by God, Leibniz thought that this did not threaten freedom. For Leibniz, there are three basic conditions for freedom: 1) that the agent is the causal source of its action (spontaneity), 2) that the agent is aware of other possible courses of action (intelligence), and 3) that these alternative courses of action are possible (contingency). In this dissertation, I am primarily interested in how Leibniz can secure the metaphysical spontaneity of all substances, and will not discuss how the spontaneity of an intelligent, rational being is different from the spontaneity of a nematode. I will note that I am not persuaded by Murray’s (1995) argument that Leibniz thought that creatures’ spontaneous actions are not metaphysically or physically necessitated, even if they are morally necessary. According to Murray, the choice of the will follows infallibly from a substance’s desires for things appearing to be good, but these desires do not physically determine the will; there are sufficient reasons for free choice, but there are no physical antecedents necessitating the choice. Certainly, a few passages (C 20) suggest a view like Murray’s, but most other texts refute the claim that freedom requires an absence of physical determination. See T 302 (G VI.296) and T 367 (G VI.333).
On the view of conservation I’m attributing to Leibniz, this problem doesn’t arise, since every creature that is conserved is fully determinate—it’s just that its determinacy comes from its own activity in accordance with the specific law of development impressed upon it at original creation.

Another thing to note is that although I have tried to make the case that substances can be thought of efficient causes (fieri), nothing I have said precludes substances from being formal and final causes of their own states as well. It seems clear that substances are such causes. First of all, a substance’s nature has the specifications within it that determine its subsequent states, so can be thought of as a formal cause. Second, it seems that substances produce all of their states by way of teleological strivings for those new states: they “act according to the laws of final causes, through appetitions, ends, and means.” A substance’s nature is the source of these teleological strivings, so is also a final cause. It also seems clear that the fact that creatures act for their own ends is a crucial element of Leibniz’s project of theodicy. If creatures act for ends, if they each follow the decrees of its “own soul or form, striving towards its good, that is, towards perfection,” they are not just sources of activity, but genuine authors of their actions. This will be true even if God “is the mind which leads everything toward general perfection.”

---

81 Or, in the case of monads, their perceptions.
82 Monadologie §79. See also M §15, G VII.330.
83 See G II.262 and G IV.396.
84 A VI.4.1367. See Carriero (2008) and von Bodelschwingh (2011) for further discussion of how the fact that a creature’s substantial form supplies final and
In Leibniz’s mind, securing creaturely activity is a key to avoiding Spinozism. If creatures are active, he reasons, then they can be substances in their own right, substances whose endurance is a matter of deep metaphysical reality:

That which does not act does not merit the name of substance. If the accidents are not distinct from the substances; if the created substance is a successive being, like movement; if it does not endure beyond a moment, and does not remain the same (during some stated portion of time) any more than its accidents; if it does not operate any more than a mathematical figure or a number: why shall one not say, with Spinoza, that God is the only substance, and that creatures are only accidents or modifications? Hitherto it has been supposed that the substance remains, and that the accidents change; and I think one ought still to abide by this ancient doctrine…

If created things were simply instantaneous time-slices, then whatever unity they could have would not be as metaphysically real: time-slices might be united in virtue of a mind perceiving that those slices stand in appropriate relations of temporal and spatial contiguity, but that kind of unification is merely phenomenal.

Formal causes ensures that the creature is not a mere instrument of God but rather a genuine author of its actions. Von Bodelschwingh, thinking that Leibniz is best understood as a concurrentist, argues that a creature’s nature supplies both the final and formal cause for the action that God and the creature jointly produce. God concurs with the efficient cause without concurring with the creature’s final cause (a final cause that is explanatorily prior to the efficient cause). I disagree with von Bodelschwingh’s assertion that creatures cannot be spontaneous as sole efficient causes of their actions, since on my reading, creatures can be the sole efficient causes secundum fieri of their actions. But I do agree with her that they can be the sole providers of formal and final causes of an action, and thus spontaneous in the sense that they are sufficient explanations for why a particular action rather than another takes place.

85 T 393 (G VI.350-1). Cf. G IV 509. Note that Leibniz was not comfortable with the idea of a metaphysical distinction between accidental and essential features of a substance, if that distinction entails that a creature could be the very creature it actually is if it were to differ in the least respect (see Sleigh (1990a) and Mondadori (1985)).
If creatures are only unified into the things they are in this phenomenal way, then there is no reason to say that they are not, as a matter of metaphysical fact, just modifications of one substance.

Interpreting God’s conservative activity as in itself general gives us a tidy way of understanding the activity of substances: they are formal, final, and efficient (fieri) causes. Provided God supplies esse, creatures are independent sources of activity, acting as they do in virtue of what had been “impressed” into them at initial creation. The activity in the created world is independent of God in quite a strong sense. Creatures are not mere prompts for God to mold and direct esse in certain particular ways that result in particular modifications in the world: they are themselves responsible for the molding and directing of esse. In Leibniz’s mind, this is enough to avoid Spinozistic monism.

There might be another upshot to interpreting the causal activity of substances as involving formal, final, and efficient causation. Leibniz thought that there are two distinct, complete, yet “interpenetrating” explanations of everything.

---

86 We should be careful not to read too much into this metaphor, since strictly speaking, God does not impress certain key qualities into a pre-existing creature (or, for that matter, impress all qualities onto an individual at creation). Whatever impression happens at initial creation: God creates an individual by actualizing an already-complete concept found in his understanding. There are no bare particulars to be fleshed out: individuals are only individuals in virtue of the properties they have.

87 If securing creaturely activity secures creatures’ status as genuine substances distinct from God, then, Spinoza reasons, Spinozistic monism is avoided (see also De ipsa natura G IV 509). However, if my interpretation of Spinoza in the first two chapters is right, Spinoza the monist was also trying to secure the genuine activity of finite things — modes — by making them causae secundum fieri.
in the world: one that goes by way of efficient causes, and another that goes by way of final causes.\textsuperscript{88} Sometimes he talks of there being two parallel and harmonious explanations for the behavior of bodies in the world — one in terms of mechanics or efficient causation and another in terms of the final causation of souls pertaining to corporeal substances.\textsuperscript{89} If I am right to say that efficient causation is not just to be associated with corporeal bodies,\textsuperscript{90} but with fundamental substances as well, then there may be another sense in which there are parallel and harmonious explanations for everything in the world: it isn’t just that there are parallel explanations for everything at the ontological level of bodies, but there are parallel explanations for everything at an even more fundamental level as well.

\textbf{VIII. Avoiding More Problems: Why Mere Conservationism Might be Enough}

In previous sections, I offered an interpretation of Leibniz’s views of divine conservative activity that accommodates the efficient causality of creatures, where that efficient causality is understood as \textit{causalitas secundum fieri}. Even if creatures’ actions follow a plan prescribed by God (a plan found in the idea of the

\textsuperscript{88} Leibniz uses the metaphor of “two kingdoms” of explanation in a variety of places, not always for the same purpose. See GM VI 243, A VI.4.1367, AVI.4.1402-3, G IV.391, G VII.272-3. See also Garber (2008, pp. 255-266).

\textsuperscript{89} For this sort of interpretation of the “two kingdoms,” see G IV.391.

\textsuperscript{90} For passages associating efficient causation with bodies, see G VII.344, G VI.542, GM VI.1243.
world in God’s infinite understanding), and even if God is continuously supplying the being that keeps the world in existence, God does not do everything. Because God’s contribution of esse is general, there is room for creatures to be genuine efficient causes (causa secundum fieri) of their own actions in time. In this concluding section, I will argue that Leibniz’s metaphysics appear to enable him to evade objections lobbed at mere conservationists. This gives us even more reason to think that Leibniz could have balanced the demands of piety with a commitment to creaturely action by being a mere conservationist.

So what were the problems? One widespread objection was that mere conservationism consisted of an inconsistent triad of views: 1) that the activity by which God creates creatures and their powers is the same as the activity by which

---

91 I think we can see some parallels between the essences of all things that are eternally sustained by Spinoza’s God and all the ideas of all possible worlds that can be found in Leibniz’s God’s understanding, especially if we think of Leibniz’s God’s understanding as eternally sustaining the ideas of the worlds within it (one crucial difference, of course, is that Leibniz’s perfectly beneficent God chooses to create the best world, while Spinoza’s God does not choose to create any one thing rather than any other thing: there is just one way the world can be, and it necessarily follows from the nature of God). But it is important to note that in both metaphysical systems, creatures—Leibnizian substances or finite modes—act in ways that bring about in time what is prescribed sub specie aeternitatis.

92 While intelligent creatures act according to what is prescribed by their complete concept, it is important that their reasons for action incline without necessitating. Leibniz does not want it to be the case that it follows with a “geometric” —read Spinozistic—necessity that an agent does action p instead of r, even if it is “certain” that the agent will end up doing p (see Discours §13). Because action r does not imply a contradiction, the agent is not necessitated to do p. There is an intrinsic connection between the subject and the predicates describing the actions that could be truly ascribed to the subject, but this connection is not necessary in the way that 2+2=4 is necessary. In order for there to be this connection at all, the agent must have chosen that action.
he conserves them; 2) that while God’s activity is required for the conservation of creatures and their powers, 3) God’s activity is not required for the creation of the effects of creaturely causes. The mere conservationist has to believe, then, that even though God creates and conserves through one and the same activity, God’s activity is required for the conserving, but not the creating, of a creaturely effect.\textsuperscript{93}

I think Leibniz could say that this objection really only has bite if creatures produce effects whose existence is new and distinct from their own existence. Suppose there is a new and distinct entity that has been created by the creature’s efforts alone but is then kept in existence by God. This would conflict with the idea that creation and conservation are one and the same act: if God is conserving then he has created, and so it seems that we cannot, after all, deny God a role in the creation of the effect originally credited only to the creature. Leibniz would deny that the effects produced by substances are distinct in the way that would get the objection going. After all, “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.”\textsuperscript{94}

Perhaps Leibniz could go even further and say that since the changes a creature brings about are not creations, they do not need really need to be conserved by God. God does supply esse and in so doing conserves a world (a

\textsuperscript{93} Francisco Suarez, \textit{Disputationes metaphysicae}, disputation 22, § I.6–7. See also Luis de Molina, \textit{Concordia}, part 2, disputation 25, § 14.  
\textsuperscript{94} G VI.351.
world that is *esse* structured in infinitely complex ways, ways that persist in the absence of reasons for non-persistence). But the *changes* in that world, caused by that structure itself (that is, substances), are not created, so we need not say that if God is conserving the world then he has created the changes in that world.

One might think, though, that there is still a problematic asymmetry, since it looks like at *initial* creation, God’s activity is special. If God does build things from the ground-up in all of their infinite specificity at initial creation, it seems ad hoc to say that his conservative activity post-initial creation is general. However, I don’t think that we do need to conceive of initial creation in this way: couldn’t God actualize the world by supplying *general esse* to the concept of the world found in his understanding? The concept in his understanding supplies the structure; his activity of supplying *esse* need not be responsible for that structure.

Another popular objection to mere conservationism was that it made God’s causal involvement too remote. If creatures produce accidents without God’s involvement, then those things depend on God mediately, through their substances, while those substances depend on God immediately. Vis-à-vis those accidents, God’s involvement is not as immediate as it could be, and this violates the demand of piety that if a greater role could conceivably be assigned to God, then it should actually be so assigned.95

---

95 Francisco Suarez, *Disputationes metaphysicae*, disputation 22, § 1.13.
The issue is not just about the remoteness, however. Such a position quickly slides into deism, as Leibniz himself argues in *De libertate, fato, gratia Dei.*\textsuperscript{96} If one allows that creatures can create distinct things, then one is on a slippery slope that can lead to the toppling of solid arguments for the existence of God. The argument is this. If God is not needed for the creation of that distinct thing, then there is no reason to say that God is needed for the persistence of the world after creation. Why? If a creature C can create a thing T on its own, then there is no reason to suppose that God was needed to create C. God could just create the initial state of the world, complete with creatures endowed with their powers to create other things, and then keep completely out of it from then on, not even acting to continuously create the world: we could say that God does “absolutely nothing (unless by chance he acts miraculously) once he has granted creatures the power to act.”\textsuperscript{97} If God is involved at all, then he is just involved at creation, but the problem is, it looks like it “cannot be demonstrated” (at least by the light of reason) that the world even has a beginning. Although the precise workings of the world make it “probable” that the world was created by God, it is still metaphysically possible that this world just “by chance has fallen to our lot.”\textsuperscript{98}

I suspect Leibniz’s response would be along these lines. There is an important distinction to be drawn between a substance and its accidents —the

\textsuperscript{96} See A VI.4.1604.
\textsuperscript{97} A VI.4.1604, my emphasis.
\textsuperscript{98} Ibid.
substance can endure while the accidents do not. However, while a substance may produce changes in itself, the results of these changes are not things (like separable accidents) that have a separate existence from their substances. “Every action of a creature is a change of its modifications,” and such modifications are, as the word ‘modification’ itself suggests, modes of a substance: ways that substance can be. God’s influence on an effect can only be mediate if there is the possibility of something coming between God and the effect. But if a substance’s effects are just modes of that substance, and not something really distinct from it, then it seems the substance does not play the mediating role that makes God’s influence remote rather than immediate.

---

99 Recall T 393 (G VI.351): “Hitherto it has been supposed that the substance remains, and that the accidents change; and I think one ought still to abide by this ancient doctrine.”
100 T 377 (G VI.340).
101 Around 1689, Leibniz wrote that “the system of occasional causes should be admitted in part, and rejected in part. Each and every substance is the true and real cause of its immanent actions, and has a force of acting [vis agendi], and though it is granted that it is sustained by divine concourse, yet it cannot happen that it is only passive; this is true both for corporeal and incorporeal substances. But, on the other hand, each and every substance (except for God alone) is only the occasional cause of its transeunt actions on other substances” (A6.4.1640-1). Strictly speaking, each substance is only a cause of changes within itself, and this is true whether we are talking of incorporeal or corporeal substances. A corporeal substance is a soul linked to a body, where that body is itself composed of smaller corporeal substances, each of which is also a soul linked to a body, and so on to infinity. What is worth noting here is that it is extremely puzzling how we are supposed to understand immanent causation within a corporeal substance. How does the soul of a corporeal substance cause changes in its own body (itself a collection of substances) if there is no causal interaction between distinct substances? In a letter to de Volder from January 1700 (G II.205-6), Leibniz hints that the answer to this question lies in the fact that there are two ways to think of a corporeal substances.
So it seems that we need not try to figure out how Leibniz thought God acted with creatures, where this acting with is an activity distinct from his activity of conserving creatures, since Leibniz’s distinctive metaphysics give him resources that make a mere conservationist position more theologically respectable than it might otherwise be. My suspicion is that Leibniz often used concurrentist language because he was savvy: more explicit mere conservationist language would have prompted many to dismiss his positions outright as contrary to piety. Leibniz knew that mere conservationism could lead to problems, and he did not want his readers and interlocutors to misread him as resuscitating a theologically problematic Durandus-style view.\textsuperscript{102}

In some 1677 notes on a conversation with Steno, Leibniz presented an argument purporting to show that concurrentism collapses into occasionalism, and previous commentators have assumed that Leibniz spent the rest of his career trying to formulate a concurrentist account that does not collapse into

\textsuperscript{102} But what about \textit{contra naturam} miracles? The concurrentist is able to say that since God can just withhold his concurrence with the fire in Nebuchadnezzar’s furnace, God need not be said to actively oppose the fire’s natural power from without. Withholding concurrence is more befitting of a God who is supposed to be absolutely sovereign over all of nature. As far as I know, Leibniz does not discuss \textit{contra naturam} miracles. If Leibniz endorsed concurrentism, this omission would be surprising, since concurrentism’s way of dealing with such miracles was perceived as one of its major strengths.
occasionalism. I think there is something to be said for thinking of Leibniz’s development differently. In my view, Leibniz’s suspicion that concurrentist positions are untenable never evaporated. Instead, the view Leibniz ends up with is best characterized as mere conservationism, albeit a mere conservationism that — thanks to some very unorthodox metaphysics— can avoid some of the usual objections.

103 In that report, Leibniz argues that a concurrentist who thinks that creatures have an ability to do something on their own ends up having to accept an occasionalist position: “properly and accurately speaking, it should be said not that God concurs in the action, but instead that he produces it.” Suppose that God and a person cooperate in producing an effect. One part of that effect is produced directly by God while the other distinct part is produced by the person. With respect to the person’s portion of the act, does God cooperate with the person in its production? If we say that God need not cooperate, then we are in effect adopting a mere conservationist position. If we want to cling to the idea that there is divine and creaturely cooperation, then we have to choose the other horn of the dilemma. But if we say that God must cooperate, an infinite regress results, since that creature’s contribution is itself split into a divine contribution and a creaturely contribution, and so on. The conclusion is that “he who produces half the thing, and in turn, half of the remaining half,” and so on to infinity, “produces the whole.” A VI.4.1382.
Bibliography


-------- (1968—) Gesammelte Werke (Hamburg: Meiner).


(http://www.consecutiotemporum.org/category/numero_2/)


