1. INTRODUCTION

I begin with a puzzle that I hope to resolve, or at least to clarify, by the time this paper ends. In *De Motu* 24, Berkeley presents, and seems to endorse, an argument that carries him from the premise that bodies are created by God in successive parts of time to the conclusion that God is the only true cause of their motion, which he defines simply as the successive existence of a body in different parts of space. Borrowing, I assume, from fuller presentations of similar lines of reasoning in occasionalist writers such as Malebranche, Berkeley contends that

1. This exploratory paper is based on a presentation to a seminar on “Causation in Early Modern Philosophy,” which I taught with Michael Della Rocca in the fall of 2006. I delivered later versions of the paper to the Society for Modern Philosophy at Yale, to members of the Department of Philosophy at the University of Tampere, to the Houston Circle for the Study of Early Modern Philosophy, and to a seminar at the University of Colorado, Boulder led by Dan Kaufman and Robert Pasnau. I am grateful to all of these audiences for their help. I am particularly indebted to David Scott, whose detailed and probing written comments helped me (or so I hope) to avoid some errors, though I have done scant justice to the many insightful things he had to say. I also thank John Carriero for his helpful advice on the final version. This paper is dedicated to Paul Hoffman, a friend and philosophical companion of more than thirty years. I remember with particular fondness the Latin reading group Paul led during his years at MIT, when we worked through Descartes’s *Meditations*, one of the texts I touch on here.

2. I cite Berkeley’s works by section number, as in the case of *De Motu*, or, where section numbers are unavailable, by volume and page number in A. A. Luce and T. E. Jessop, eds., *The Works of George Berkeley, Bishop of Cloyne*, 9 volumes (London: Thomas Nelson, 1948–57). *De Motu* appears in volume 4.
no other cause of the successive existence of the body in different parts of space [i.e., of motion as he defines it] should be sought other than that cause whence is derived the successive existence of the same body in different parts of time.

He concludes that “the cause of the existence of bodies is also the cause of their motion and rest.” The puzzle is this: If Berkeley believes in the continuous creation of bodies, it seems that he should also believe in the continuous creation of human minds. It is true that human minds, as Berkeley understands them, are substances, and that bodies, as collections of ideas, are dependent beings more akin, in their dependence on subjects in some way distinct from them, to modifications. But Berkeleyan minds are, like bodies, finite things, and if, as finite things, they depend on an infinite God for their existence, it seems that God should be, by parity of reasoning, the only cause of their successive existence in the parts of their unfolding lifetimes. It seems, in other words, that Berkeley should be an occasionalist regarding minds if he is an occasionalist regarding bodies. But in the case of minds, Berkeley emphatically repudiates occasionalism. How can continuous creation lead him to occasionalism in one case if it does not lead him to it, as it did Malebranche, in the other?

The puzzle can be generalized, because in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, continuous creation was a very popular doctrine—practically a pious platitude—among the philosophers we continue to read today. And when these philosophers accepted the doctrine, they accepted it across the board, applying it to every corner of the finite or created world. Why, then, did so few of them also accept occasionalism across the board? Why, indeed, did so few of them so much as struggle with an across-the-board occasionalism?

Besides contributing something to the solution of this general puzzle, and to the particular puzzle about Berkeley, I hope this paper will help me come to terms with my own instinctive reaction to the argument from continuous creation. I am not, by immediate instinct, overwhelmed by the argument, but it does give me pause. There really does seem to me to be something to it. But when I spell the argument out, it seems to depend on steps that are easily avoidable. I would like to discover what it is that inclines me (and, perhaps, my early modern predecessors) to take those steps, even though I want, at the same time, to understand more fully why I should not take them.

I will be arguing that Berkeley inadvertently points to an important stumbling block in the argument when he speaks of the existence of the same body in different parts of time. For what is it that makes the body God creates in one part of time the same as a body he creates in another one? As we will see, Jonathan Edwards thought continuous creation entails a denial of what might be called

3. But they are not modifications, as Berkeley insists at A Treatise concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge 49. They are in the mind, he says there, “not by way of mode or attribute, but only by way of idea.” The Principles appears in volume 2 of Luce and Jessop.

4. Acts 17: 28, which says that we “live, move, and have our being” in God, was used by many philosophers of the period either to illustrate the doctrine or to instill a sense of our absolute dependence on God.
“natural” identity over time: identity that flows from the very nature of things themselves. He therefore took the heroic course of asserting that God, in an act of legislation distinct from the creative acts responsible for the existence of things, makes distinct things one. Leibniz, as we will also see, took these allegedly distinct things already to be one, and thought that he could thereby block not only the inference to nonidentity (which no one other than Edwards seemed willing to make, at least not in general), but the more widely accepted inference to occasionalism. I will be suggesting that Leibniz was correct and that his insights may put us in position to solve both the puzzle I have raised about Berkeley and the more general puzzle I have raised about the early modern period as a whole. I hope to conclude with some tentative suggestions about Hume, who offers us what I think can be seen as a secularized version of continuous creation—a conception of what might be described as permanent or constant “revolution” (or borrowing from Leibniz in *Monadology* 47, “continual fulguration”). There is, in the finite or “created” world as Hume *sometimes* presents it in the *Treatise*, no true causation as Descartes, Malebranche, Leibniz, Berkeley, or Edwards understands it, and no true identity over time—neither the “natural” identity Descartes, Malebranche, and Leibniz all ascribe to finite things (or at least to finite spirits), nor the divinely stipulated or legislated identity Edwards takes God to impose on naturally non-identical things, nor even the conventional identity Berkeley believes we assign to “things” or bodies when his more basic “ideas of sense” fall into repeated patterns.

2. THE DOCTRINE IN DESCARTES; CONTINUOUS CREATION AS SUPPORT FOR RELIGIOUS FEELING

It is as readers of Descartes’s *Meditations* that most of us first encounter the doctrine of continuous creation. “A lifespan,” Descartes explains in the Third Meditation, “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 [*quasi*] creates me afresh at this moment—that is, which preserves me.” It is, he continues, “quite clear” from the nature of time “that the same power and action are needed to preserve anything at each individual moment of its duration as would be required to create that thing anew if it were not yet in existence. Hence the distinction between preservation and creation is only a conceptual one, and this is one of the things that are evident by the natural light” (*Oeuvres de Descartes* [AT] 7, 49; *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes* [CSM] 2, 33).  


What the Third Meditation seems to tell us is that the power needed to preserve a thing in any part of time is the same, in measure or extent, as the power needed to bring it into existence in the first place, and that the “action” (or exercise of power) needed to achieve the first is the same as the action needed to achieve the second. It is not clear, though, whether the first and second actions are, in Descartes’s view, numerically the same or merely the same in kind. It is, perhaps, equally unclear whether the power to preserve and the power to create are also numerically the same. I have said that each power matches the other in “measure or extent,” which may suggest that they are the same only in kind. But perhaps powers are, for Descartes, the kinds of things that are numerically the same whenever they coincide in measure.

The Third Meditation does not merely permit us to regard conservation as continuous creation. It seems to tell us that conservation or preservation really is continuous creation. The passage does imply, however, that this statement is reversible: that it is equally true that continuous creation really is conservation or preservation. But it is the unreversed version that strikes most of us as more illuminating or informative, I suppose because we have, pretheoretically, a healthier respect for the power required to initiate existence than we do for the power required to sustain it. The unreversed version seems to “inflate” conservation, whereas the reversal, were we to insist on it, would “deflate” or diminish creation. In my own experience as a teacher, at least, the doctrine seems to make students more wide-eyed about conservation rather than more ho-hum about creation.

The points I have just reviewed, which may just be matters of psychology, account, I think, for our tendency to think that the Third Meditation passage, if true, reveals an important fact about divine conservation: that it is “really” a creative act, exerted or enforced in every part of time. When understood in this way, the doctrine of continuous creation can nurture a powerful sense of our dependence on God, and thereby provide a discursive basis for a range of profound religious feelings. One is the feeling of “absolute dependence” that Schleiermacher took to be the core of all specifically religious sentiment. This feeling can be a source of comfort, as it was for example, for Wittgenstein, who reported, in his own attempt to clarify religious sentiment, that he sometimes felt “absolutely safe.” (What can better promote a feeling of safety that a vivid sense of one’s dependence on an omnipotent and thoroughly benevolent God?) But it can also be a source of anxiety, as it was presumably for Kierkegaard, who described himself as in perpetual danger, floating free above 20,000 fathoms. (What can better promote a feeling of insecurity than a vivid sense of one’s dependence on an omnipotent and absolutely unrestrained God?) The fact that the doctrine of continuous creation makes some sense of these opposed feelings is, I think, a central component of its hold over us—a hold that isn’t completely weakened, so far as I can tell, by religious disbelief. “Yes,” I can imagine atheists saying. “Continuous creation is what remaining in existence would require if there were a God.” An atheist might even take pride in enduring a
discursively based feeling of absolute contingency: a feeling that every subsequent moment of his or her life is no more securely grounded than the first. This feeling of absolute contingency or ungroundedness—of feeling of absolute independence—can, like its religious counterpart, be a source of joy and creative energy (as it was for Nietzsche and Sartre) or a source of anxiety, fear, and despair (as Nietzsche and Sartre thought it was, or should have been, for the victims of illusion and bad faith they criticized).

I will be coming back to Descartes’s thoughts on continuous creation later on. I will suggest that there is something very misleading in his presentation of the doctrine, insofar as he invites us to think of divine conservation as continuous recreation—an interpretation (or corruption) of the doctrine that makes the inference to occasionalism seem more powerful than it really is. For now, I will return to Berkeley, whose affirmation of continuous creation is, in my view, less complicated than Descartes’s and more faithful to the scholastic tradition.

3. BERKELEY’S AFFIRMATION OF CONTINUOUS CREATION AND HIS FIDELITY TO THE SCHOLASTIC TRADITION

Berkeley affirms continuous creation in a well-known letter to his American friend, Samuel Johnson. Berkeley writes that

those who have all along contended for a material world have yet acknowledged that *natura naturans* (to use the language of the Schoolmen) is God; and that the divine conservation is equipollent to, and in fact the same thing with, a continued repeated creation: in a word, that conservation and creation differ only in the *terminus a quo* [“point from which”: the circumstance in which the two acts take place]. These are the common opinions of the Schoolmen, and Durandus, who held the world to be a machine like a clock, put in motion by God, but afterwards continuing to go of itself, was therein particular, and had few followers . . . The Stoics and Platonists are everywhere full of the same notion. I am not therefore singular in this point itself, so much as in my way of proving it . . . For aught I can see, it is no disparagement to the perfection of God to say that all things necessarily depend on Him as their Conservator as well as Creator, and that all nature would shrink to nothing, if not upheld and preserved in being by the same force that first created it.7

To say that conservation is “equipollent” to creation is to say that it demands the same degree of power. Berkeley goes on to make what he evidently takes to be the stronger point that they are “in fact the same thing,” which can again mean the same in number, or exactly the same intrinsically. To say they differ only in their *termini a quo* is to say they differ only extrinsically. Berkeley assures Johnson that in affirming this doctrine, he is aligning himself with a long tradition. His only

7. This is from Berkeley’s letter to Johnson of November 25, 1729, in volume 2 of Luce and Jessop. See also *Principles* 46.
innovation lies, he claims, in his way of defending it. For Berkeley, as opposed to the tradition, bodies bottom out in ideas caused by God. Ideas are, on anyone’s view (at least as Berkeley sees things), “fleeting” and “dependent” beings (Principles 89), with no inherent tendency to persist. For Berkeley, these fugitive beings are all there is to body. For a Berkeleyan body to exist over time, then, is for ideas of sense to be created in one moment and other ideas to be created in the next.

Berkeley’s understanding of the continuous creation doctrine is faithful to the scholastic tradition as represented by Suarez, for whom the merely conceptual distinction between creation and conservation is a difference in what Berkeley, adhering to scholastic vocabulary, calls their *termini a quo*. According to Suarez, it is easy to understand the conceptual distinction between creation and conservation. For the very difference between the relevant ways of speaking indicates that there is at least a conceptual distinction here, given that an entity (i) is not said to be conserved at the first instant at which it is created and (ii) is not said to be created at the first instant during the rest of the time in which it is conserved. Therefore, there is at least some sort of conceptual distinction between the two.

This distinction is none other than the one mentioned above, namely that “creation” connotes a denial of previously possessed *esse*, whereas “conservation,” to the contrary, connotes the possession of the same *esse* that was previously had.

The previous possession of *esse* or being is one *terminus a quo*; the absence of its previous possession is another. Whether or not *esse* is possessed at an earlier moment is extrinsic to the divine act responsible for *esse* at a later moment. Hence, Suarez urges, the difference between conservation and creation is not intrinsic or real but extrinsic or merely conceptual. Suarez’s reasoning was later endorsed by Leibniz, a far closer student of scholasticism than Berkeley, who admitted there is no reason why God’s conservation “should not be called production, or even creation, if one will: for the dependence being as great afterwards as at the beginning, the extrinsic designation [la denomination extrinseque] of being new or not does not change the nature”—that is, I assume, the intrinsic nature—“of that action.”

8. For a brief summary of the role played by the notions of *terminus a quo* (traditionally a privation) and *terminus ad quem* (traditionally a form) in scholastic natural philosophy, see Dennis Des Chene, *Physiologia: Natural Philosophy in Late Aristotelianism and Cartesian Thought* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), 63. Pierre Bayle gives a brisk characterization, less encrusted with specifically scholastic commitments, in his *Système Abrégé de Philosophie*: “The agent is the cause from which the action proceeds. The patient is the subject in which the action is received. The *terminus a quo* is what is lost by the action. The *terminus ad quem* is what is gained by the action” (p. 231 in *Oeuvres de Mr. P. Bayle*, volume 4 [The Hague: Compagnie des Libraires, 1737], my translation).


10. *Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man, and the Origin of Evil*, article 385, p. 356 in the translation by E. M. Huggard (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1985), which is
“differs not at all from the first creation, but only circumstantially: as in first creation there had been no such act and effect of God’s power before; whereas, his giving existence afterwards, follows preceding acts and effects of the same kind, in an established order.”

Suarez goes on to reinforce his point by what he calls “an analogy derived from the terminus,” but the terminus he has in mind is not the terminus a quo Berkeley mentions (since there is plainly a more than conceptual distinction between the presence of esse and its absence) but the effect or terminus ad quem: the “point to which” the causal process tends. “Creation,” Suarez explains,

connotes a denial of previously possessed esse, whereas “conservation,” to the contrary, connotes the possession of the same esse that was previously had. Now the claim that this is only a conceptual difference seems evident per se and is made readily obvious by an analogy derived from the terminus itself. For the created effect itself qua existing at the first moment can only be conceptually distinguished from itself qua existing in the whole of the subsequent time.

Despite his assurance that the merely conceptual distinction between conservation and creation is self-evident, Suarez seems to think that the merely conceptual distinction between the associated effects or termini is one his readers are likely to find more readily accessible or “obvious.”

4. MALEBRANCHE’S ARGUMENT FROM CONTINUOUS CREATION

As I have already suggested, Berkeley’s argument from continuous creation was probably taken from occasionalists such as Malebranche, whose Dialogues contains what is now the best-known example of such reasoning:

Creation does not pass, because the conservation of creatures is—on God’s part—simply a continuous creation, a single volition subsisting and operating continuously. Now, God can neither conceive nor consequently will that a body exist nowhere, nor that it does not stand in certain relations of distance to other bodies. Thus, God cannot will that this armchair exist, and by this volition create or conserve it, without situating it here, there, or elsewhere. It is a contradiction, therefore, for one body to be able to move another. Further, I claim, it is a contradiction for you to be able to move your armchair . . . The proof of this is clear. For no power, however great it be imagined, can surpass or even equal the power of God. Now, it is a contradiction that God wills this armchair to exist, unless He wills it to exist somewhere and unless, by the efficacy of His will, He puts it there, conserves

based on C. J. Gerhardt, ed., *Die Philosophischen Schriften von Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz*, vol. 6 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1885). “Extrinsic denomination” would be a more direct and familiar translation of the words Huggard renders as “extrinsic designation.”

it there, creates it there. Hence, no power can convey it to where God does not convey it, nor fix nor stop it where God does not stop it, unless God accommodates the efficacy of His action to the inefficacious action of His creatures. (*Dialogues VII*, 115–6)

There are, it seems to me, several gaps and even oddities in the argument as Malebranche presents it. But here is one attempt at a reconstruction. I provide, in parentheses, the words from which the elements in my reconstruction are derived:

1. The conservation of creatures is a continuous creation. (“[T]he conservation of creatures is . . . simply a continuous creation.”)
2. God creates by willing, and in order to will he must conceive what he wills. (“God can neither conceive nor consequently will . . . ”)
3. God cannot conceive a body’s existing unless he conceives it to exist in a particular place. (“God [cannot] conceive . . . that a body exist nowhere.”)
4. Hence, God cannot will a body to exist unless he wills it to exist in a particular place. (“God cannot conceive nor consequently will that a body exist nowhere.”)
5. No power can surpass the power of God. (“No power can surpass or even equal the power of God.”)
6. Hence, there is no body able to move another body. Nor is any mind able to move a body. (“It is a contradiction . . . for one body to be able to move another. Further, . . . it is a contradiction for you to be able to move your armchair.”)
7. Therefore, a body or mind can only *occasion* the motion of a body. (No body or mind can determine the motion of a body “unless God accommodates the efficacy of His action to the inefficacious action of His creatures.”
To say that God “accommodates his efficacy” to the inefficacious actions of creatures is to say that God allows those creatures [as Malebranche elsewhere puts it] to “determine” [that is, adapt or specify, in something like the way an input or argument determines, non-causally, the output or value of a function] his will. This is occasionalism.)

The argument explicitly addresses only the motion of bodies, but it can easily be extended to apply to any change in anything, as Bayle for example saw. In expounding the Malebranchean argument, Bayle explains, in a passage quoted by Leibniz, why it is “indefensible” to suggest that God might create me “in the first place,” and only afterwards produce my “determinations” (quoted by Leibniz at *Theodicy* 386, p. 356 in Huggard). God, Bayle says, “does not conserve me as a being without form, like a species, or another of the Universals of Logic.” Because I am an individual, “he creates me and conserves me as such,” in all of my determinacy: “as being all that I am in this instant, with all my attendant circumstances” (*Theodicy* 386). Every creature is subject to continuous creation; and every creature—or at least every creature that we can plausibly regard as a locus of causal power—is fully determinate. Hence, the Malebranchean strategy gives rise to an across-the-board occasionalism.
The puzzling part of the argument is the passage from (4) to (6). From (4), it does seem to follow that I cannot move my armchair from the dining table to the living room if God wills it to remain at the table. I could succeed in doing so only if my power surpassed the power of God, which it does not. But why can I not move the armchair to the living room if a cooperating god wills, or at least allows, that the armchair should be present at the new location (and, as I transfer it, that it should occupy all of the appropriate locations in between)? It is perhaps true that as we ordinarily understand “my ability to move a chair,” it is the ability to move it to any place I please: to the living room if I would like my guests to sit in it, and to the basement if I would prefer to hide it from their view. But in that case, Malebranche’s argument should not be about my ability as it is ordinarily understood; it should address the narrower question of whether I can move the chair at all, even in ways consistent with God’s volitions.

My worry can be put in what may be a simpler and more pointed way: It seems that in moving, as he does from (4) to (6), Malebranche assumes that he need not come to terms with concurrentism. For on a concurrentist view, God and I collaborate in moving the armchair. Why does Malebranche assume that such collaboration is not possible: that in order for me to qualify as a productive (as opposed to occasional) cause of the armchair’s motion, my power needs to be, if not actually at odds with the power of God, at least potentially so? Occasionalists agree, let us suppose, that God is the cause (the only genuinely productive cause) of the existence (the being or esse) of the armchair. (The kind of concurrentist I am imagining will insist nonetheless that the craftsman is a genuinely productive cause of the armchair’s coming into existence.) They also agree that God creates by willing (certainly Malebranche believes this) and that God is no “blind agent”: that God, like any other willing agent, has to conceive whatever it is that he wills. Against this common background, Malebranche argues that when God conceives of the armchair, he must conceive of it in all of its determinacy. From this, he infers that God must create the chair in all of its determinacy, which is just to say that God must be the cause not only of its existence, but of each and every one of its determinations.12

If, however, God is the cause of a given determination, then according to Malebranche, nothing else can causally contribute to it. (I will call this the exclusion principle: If God is the cause of something, nothing else can be even a partial cause of it.13) In the argument as Malebranche presents it in the Dialogues, the exclusion principle is made to rest on the claim that another being can be the cause of some determination only if its power surpasses that of God.14

12. I do not mean to be implying that extension might, in Malebranche’s view, exist without determinations. Such determinations are, for Malebranche, absolutely necessary and altogether inescapable. I am grateful to David Scott for correspondence on this point.

13. It will make a difference whether the exclusion principle says that other things cannot be the total causes of an effect brought about by God or whether, as I am inclined to believe, it tells us that they cannot even be the partial causes.

14. David Scott has objected, in correspondence, that he finds the principles I consider here both unconvincing and ad hoc and has suggested that Malebranche’s notion of intelligible extension (in particular, its essential dependence on its creator) might better explain why he embraces (7). My own feeling is that the essential dependence of creatures—the essential dependence of their very existence—is a potential motive for accepting (1) rather than a principle meant to carry
There are at least two points in this line of reasoning to which the concurrentist might take exception. The first is the apparent assumption that if God must conceive of the chair in all of its determinacy, then he must be the cause of the chair in all of its determinacy. The concurrentist may object that God need not be the cause of all that he conceives. He may conceive of the existence of the chair and conceive at the same time of all of its particular affections, but he may be able to will (and thereby cause) the former without also willing (and thereby causing) the latter. He may leave the determinations to secondary causes though remaining perfectly cognizant of what those determinations will be.¹⁵

The second potential breaking point is the exclusion principle: Why does it follow, if God is the cause of a determination, that something else cannot also be? The principle is not obviously correct, and there are a number of possible foundations for it, each of which (in my view) creates an opening for stubborn concurrentists. One possible foundational principle is a ban on overdetermination: If God is the cause, he is presumably a sufficient cause, and he would not, in his wisdom, go to the trouble of arranging for any further cause, sufficient or insufficient.¹⁶ Sukjae Lee puts the point as follows:

Just as God alone fully caused and determined the entire state of affairs in the initial act of creation *ex nihilo*, it is God who does everything in every subsequent “conserving” act of the world. This being the case, there is nothing left for creatures to do, hence Malebranche’s denial of genuine causal powers in creatures.¹⁷

us from (1) to (7). Essential dependence could, I suppose, be interpreted more broadly as the essential dependence not only of creaturely existence but of all creaturely determinations. In that case, though, (7) could be defended without making any use of (1), and I suspect that the argument will still require the exclusion principle or something close to it.

¹⁵. In “How God Causes Motion” and “Descartes and Occasionalism,” two essays reprinted in his *Descartes Embodied* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), Daniel Garber makes a related suggestion: that in the occasionalist argument from the continuous creation of motion, it is too quickly assumed that the act by which God sustains motion is the same as the act by which he sustains existence. Garber believes, though, that the argument is “persuasive” given what he calls “the cinematic view of God as the cause of motion,” according to which “God causes motion by re-creating a body in different places and different instances of time” (“Descartes and Occasionalism,” 210). I am suggesting that in view of a concurrentist option that the argument itself does not close off, the assumption is not persuasive even on the view Garber identifies. In a more recent essay (“Does Continuous Creation Entail Occasionalism? Malebranche (and Descartes),” **Canadian Journal of Philosophy** 30 [2000]: 413–40), Andrew Pessin generalizes Garber’s suggestion so that it applies to arguments from the continuous creation of any determination whatsoever. Walter Ott finds a suggestion not unlike Garber’s in the anti-occasionalism of Pierre-Sylvain Régis. Ott writes that in the view of Régis, God does not “immediately will the substance’s modes” or determinations. “What he immediately creates,” Ott explains, “is the substance itself, and its modes will be determined by the ways in which the second causes modify the motion that God produces.” See Ott’s “Régis’s Scholastic Mechanism,” **Studies in History and Philosophy of Science** 39 (2008): 2–14, p. 13.

¹⁶. Michael Della Rocca made this suggestion in our 2006 seminar.

The problem with this, I think, is that as Descartes points out at the beginning of the Fourth Meditation (and conveniently forgets as he proceeds), it is rash to pronounce on God’s ends. Malebranche has taken on the burden of ruling out concurrentism; it does not seem fair of him to assume that causal redundancy is not a price that a wise god would be willing to pay for the sake of achieving an end that we, due to our finitude, might be unable to appreciate.

A second foundational candidate, not unrelated to the first, is that there must, according to Malebranche, be a necessary connection between a cause and its effect, but a necessary connection between an effect and a finite cause (at least any total finite cause) is preempted by the necessary connection that already obtains on God’s part, assuming the necessary connection would hold between God and whatever he happens to will.18 This seems to me to raise a number of difficulties, one of them being that the argument from continuous creation, at least as usually interpreted, is meant to be self-sufficient.19 If it depends on the conception of causation as necessary connection that is deployed on behalf of occasionalism in The Search after Truth (where the argument from continuous creation does not appear, though it is referred to in the Elucidations), it does not have the independent force that Malebranche (in Dialogues) seems to claim for it.

Yet another foundational principle exploits the merely conceptual difference between creation and conservation. If the two acts are one and the same (“metaphysically identical,” as Lee puts in the paper from which I quoted a moment ago, also on p. 555), then anything true of one must be true of the other. Thus, if the act of creation was unaccompanied and at the same time responsible for every determination, the act of conservation must also be unaccompanied, even though equally responsible. But I do not see why one and the same act could not vary, over time, both in its isolation from other causes and in its degree of responsibility for determinacy. Perhaps I am being too loose about what counts as one act, but I do not see why an enormously complex volition, with temporally indexed component volitions, could not qualify as one and the same throughout, especially if all the components subserve (as for Malebranche, they do) a single aim, the manifestation and glorification of God. Insisting that the act be uniform or homogeneous may actually raise difficulties for those arguing from continuous creation, as in a curious anti-occasionalist argument Descartes’s Le Monde perhaps suggests.20 By “nature,” Descartes explains there, he means “matter itself,” characterized only by motion, size, shape, and texture of parts (AT XI, 26; CSM, 89), “under the condition that God continues to preserve it in the same way.

18. This candidate was also entertained by Michael Della Rocca in our seminar.
that he created it” (AT XI, 37; CSM, 92). “For it follows of necessity,” he then maintains,

from the mere fact that he continues thus to preserve it, that there must be many changes in its parts which cannot, it seems to me, properly be attributed to the action of God (because that action never changes), and which therefore I attribute to nature. The rules by which these changes take place I call the “laws of nature.” (AT XI, 37; CSM, 92–3)

I said as I began that the argument from continuous creation has some hold over me, which means I feel some pressure to move from (1) to (6). We have, in effect, been examining some ways of explaining why I feel that pressure. According to our analysis of my first criticism of the argument, the move is assisted by the assumption that God must will (and therefore, cause) whatever it is that he conceives. According to the responses we have considered to my second criticism, the move from (1) to (6) is assisted by one or another way of grounding the exclusion principle. I am not entirely happy with any of these imputed assumptions as an explanation of why I feel the pressure I do, which is not to say that they do not explain why the argument persuaded Malebranche himself. In the hope that at least some readers feel as I do, I would like to explore a different way of explaining the power of the argument.

5. THE ARGUMENT’S MYSTIQUE, EXPLAINED AND DISSIPATED

I will begin by distinguishing three ways of arguing from continuous creation, of which we have already seen two. Berkeley’s argument is what I will call the immanent variant because it turns on an alleged case of immanent causation: a body’s alleged effect on its own later state. Malebranche’s argument exemplifies one of two transeunt variants. Concentrating on the alleged effect of a transeunt cause—a cause that operates “transiently” or beyond itself—Malebranche argues that God’s role in causing the effect blocks any other cause from participating. A second transeunt variant, concentrating on the alleged cause of a transeunt effect, argues that God’s responsibility for the so-called cause blocks it from participating in bringing the effect about. An argument of this sort, the third way of arguing overall, is discussed by Bayle (who, in fact, discusses all three versions) in another passage reproduced by Leibniz:

It is . . . impossible for [creatures] to co-operate with God for the production of any other thing . . . Since their conservation is a continued creation, and since all human creatures in the world must confess that they cannot co-operate with God at the first moment of their existence, either to produce themselves or to give themselves any modality, since that would be to act before being (observe that Thomas Aquinas and sundry other Schoolmen teach that if the angels had sinned at the first moment of their creation God

21. For this use of “transient,” see the Oxford English Dictionary, Transient 2.
would be the author of sin...; it is a sign that they acknowledge that at the
first instant the creature cannot act in anything whatsoever), it follows mani-
festly that they cannot co-operate with God in any one of the subsequent
moments, either to produce themselves or to produce any other thing. If they
could co-operate therein at the second moment of their existence, nothing
would prevent their being able to co-operate at the first moment. (Quoted at
*Theodicy* 387, p. 357 in the Huggard translation)

The worry here is not that God’s responsibility for the effect preempts the alleged
cause from participating in the effect, but that the alleged cause, because it is
produced at the same time as the effect, is not eligible to participate in the first
place, because it is not on hand when it needs to be.

But does a cause really have to precede its effect in time and last until its
effect is in full flower? This is a question I cannot attempt to answer here, but
Bayle’s argument does reveal how far we are from what might be called the
*standard case* of transeunt causation, as that phenomenon was understood by
both Suarez and Descartes. On the analysis they seem to share, the standard case
calls for two substances, one an agent (or cause) and one a patient, each of which
exists before the effect, and for so long as it takes for the effect to be fully
realized. The standard case also includes an action on the part of the cause or
agent (e.g., its moving a second body) and a corresponding passion on the part of
the patient (its being moved by the first). The action and the passion may be
identical (as Descartes seems to have held), and it is certainly not unreasonable
to view them as simultaneous, but the *cause*, strictly so called, is, as a preexisting
substance, unquestionably prior in time to (yet coexistent with) both its action
and its effect. Hence, if Bayle’s analysis is accepted, every case of transeunt cau-
sation becomes nonstandard.

In his response to Bayle, Leibniz professed not to be bothered by the disap-
ppearance of the standard case. He contended that even if the cause and its effect
come into being at the same moment, the cause is “anterior” in its nature to its
accidents and actions (*Theodicy* 388, pp. 357–8 in Huggard). “When God produces
the thing he produces it as an individual and not as a universal of logic (I admit);
but he produces its essence before its accidents, its nature before its operations,
following the priority of their nature” (*Theodicy* 390). The anteriority of the crea-
ture’s nature—its priority in the order of explanation—is, he says, “a commonplace
in philosophy” (*Theodicy* 389), and it does not depend on priority in the order of
time.

22. In one passage affirming this identity, Descartes makes use of the same scholastic vocabu-
larv we encountered in connection with the identity of creation and conservation. In August 1641,
held “Hyperasperistes” that “I have always thought it is one and the same thing which is called an
activity in relation to a *terminus a quo* and a passivity in relation to a *terminus ad quem*” (AT III,
428; CSM 3, 193). The identity of passion and action is a recurring theme in Paul Hoffman’s work.
See “The Union and Interaction of Mind and Body (Part 2),” pp. 101–04, and “Cartesian Passions
and Cartesian Dualism,” pp. 105–24, in his *Essays on Descartes* (New York: Oxford University
Leibniz, of course, had reasons of his own for nonchalance about the disappearance of the standard case, because what was standard for Descartes and Suarez was not standard for him: In his system, as he emphasizes later in the *Theodicy*, all genuine creaturely causation is immanent (*Theodicy* 400). And because time for Leibniz is phenomenal, all he asks of a cause is that it be prior to its actions and effects in the underlying order of which time is a reflection. We ourselves are, like Leibniz, willing to distinguish between priority in time and priority in the order of explanation. We agree that one thing does not achieve priority over another in the order of explanation simply because it is prior to it in the temporal order. But could Suarez and Descartes not be correct in thinking that causation requires the prior and continuing existence of a substance? At the very least, the priority of one substance to another in the order of time gives us confidence that it can also be prior to the other in the order of causation or explanation. I am in no position to argue that if the standard case vanishes from the created world, there can be no creaturely causes; to the extent Bayle thinks he can, he has, perhaps, overreached. But the disappearance of the standard case may leave us wondering whether, in the created world, the right kind of explanatory priority can be achieved.

To make my worry more precise, consider Leibniz’s more concrete understanding of my nature’s anteriority to its effects: The patient, he says, is accommodated to my nature. But if this means that God creates the patient (and with it the effect) because he has decided to create me, it looks very much as if I am prior to the effect in the order of explanation without being prior to it in the causal order. I may provide God with a reason for creating the patient, but if God carries out the mandated act of creation, and does so in the very act of creating me as well, it does not seem that I am the productive cause of the effect, no matter how brightly my nature may illuminate it.

I am therefore left thinking that what gives continuous creation its hold over me is the threat it presents to the preexistence of substantial causes. Even if God’s causal role (contrary to both the immanent variant and the first transeunt variant) leaves a place for a collaborating finite being, I have trouble seeing how a finite substance that comes into being at the same very moment as the effect can be a productive cause of it. The substance may help to render the effect intelligible, but if it does so only because God adjusts the world to accommodate it, the real productive work seems to be the privilege of God alone.

In spite of what he says in the passages from the *Theodicy* I have so far quoted, elsewhere Leibniz seems to share my concerns. In “On Nature Itself,” for example, criticizing an occasionalist argument from the continuous creation of motion made by Johann Christopher Sturm, Leibniz insists on preexistence:

He says that *motion* is only the successive existence of the moving thing in different places. Let us grant this [though it is not satisfactory] . . . [Now, if motive force is excluded from body] then at the present moment (and furthermore, at any moment whatsoever) a body A in motion would not differ at all from a resulting body B, and the view of that distinguished gentleman . . . would entail that there is no clear criterion in bodies for distinguishing them . . . But just as that first and universal cause conserving everything
does not destroy, but rather causes the natural subsistence of a thing begin-
ning to exist, or its perseverance in existence, once existence is granted, so in
the same way he will not destroy, but rather support the natural efficacy of a
thing incited to motion or its perseverance in acting, once it is impressed.23

In the Theodicy itself, he complains about the Heracliteanism entailed by
Bayle’s argument:

The conclusion to be drawn from this doctrine would seem to be that the
creature never exists, that it is ever new-born and ever dying, like time,
movement, and other transient beings. Plato believed this of material and
tangible things, saying that they are in a perpetual flux, semper fluunt,
nunquam sunt [always in becoming, never in being]. (Theodicy 382, p. 354 in
the Huggard translation)

Two articles later, he attacks continued creation that he attributes to Erhard
Weigel, whose God, according to Leibniz,

resuscitates, as it were [pour ainsi dire], all things outside himself at each
moment: falling away as they do at each moment, they must ever have one
who shall resuscitate them, and that cannot be any other than God. But there
would be need of a more exact proof if [this] is to be called a demonstration.
It would be necessary to prove that the creature always emerges from noth-
ingness and relapses thither forthwith. In particular it must be shown that
the privilege of enduring more than a moment by its nature belongs to the
necessary being alone. The difficulties on the composition of the continuum
enter also into this matter. This dogma appears to resolve time into moments,
whereas others regard moments and points as mere modalities of the con-
tinuum, that is, as extremities of the parts that can be assigned to it, and not
as constituent parts. But this is not the place for entering into that labyrinth.
(Theodicy 384, p. 355 in the Huggard translation)

As Leibniz suggests in all these passages, continuous creation threatens
the causal power of finite substances only if it is construed as continuous
recreation—as the rescue or rehabilitation of substances that have descended into
nothingness. If it is construed instead as continuous maintenance, the threat seems
to vanish. I am therefore inclined to think that Leibniz was less deeply troubled by
arguments from continuous creation than some of his commentators have sup-
pposed. Sukjae Lee, for example, argues that Leibniz was driven to regard finite
substances as providers of final causes rather than as genuinely productive causes
precisely because he thought arguments from continuous creation undercut the
latter possibility. Lee writes that

the difficulty for Leibniz arises from his agreement with Malebranche on the
truth of the “conservation is but continuous creation” principle. For he must

reconcile “conservation is but continuous creation,” whose acceptance looks like a key step on the road toward occasionalism, with his own view that creatures are indeed possessed of real causal powers.24

It seems to me, on the contrary, that Leibniz found it relatively easy to avoid occasionalism because he did not take continuous creation to imply constant resuscitation or reentry into being. The doctrine was, for him (putting aside his belief in the phenomenality of time), an affirmation not of perpetual coming into being, but of being itself. As he explains in “On Nature Itself,” because “the very substance of things consists in a force for acting and being acted upon, . . . it follows that persisting things cannot be produced if no force lasting through time can be imprinted on them by the divine power” (Ariew and Garber, 159–60). If God wills that a force is to last through time, then it will last through time, even though God is creating the force continuously. And if the force lasts through time, so will the substance that incorporates it, even though the substance, too, is continuously created.

6. DESCARTES RECONSIDERED

The lesson I want to draw from the previous section is that we should not think of continuous creation as continuous recreation. The difference between creation and conservation is merely conceptual (Suarez), extrinsic (Leibniz), or circumstantial (Edwards). Considered in itself, and at any particular moment, continuous creation is as much conservation as it is creation. To call it recreation is again to describe it extrinsically or circumstantially and to do so misleadingly because the objects in question very often exist before the moment seized upon. The distinction between recreation and conservation gives us at least the outline of a solution to the general form of our puzzle. Philosophers who affirmed continuous creation did not stam-pede toward occasionalism because they regarded continuous creation as maintenance: as the steadfast preservation of the old rather than as the unceasing introduction of the new.

I think Descartes is partly to blame for this misunderstanding of continuous creation as recreation. In the passage I have already quoted from the Third Meditation, he speaks of God as creating me “afresh” at every moment. He does add the cautionary quasi, “as it were,” but since it is not at all clear what the word is meant to qualify, it does not really soften the impression made by “afresh.” In a corresponding passage in Principles, Descartes again creates the wrong impression and makes another feeble attempt to correct it:

For the nature of time is such that its parts are not mutually dependent, and never coexist. Thus, from the fact that we now exist, it does not follow that we shall exist a moment from now, unless there is some cause—the same cause

which originally produced us—which continually reproduces us, as it were [veluti], that is to say, which keeps us in existence. (AT VIIIA, 13; CSM, 200; Principles I, 21)\textsuperscript{25}

When continuous creation is construed as recreation, it may intensify the difficulty of explaining how finite things can remain the same over time. It will certainly do so for any philosopher who shares either Locke’s view that “one thing cannot have two beginnings of existence,” or Hume’s view that identity, strictly understood, calls for “invariable and uninterrupted existence.”\textsuperscript{26} At one time, I was persuaded that Descartes himself is committed to acknowledging a real distinction between a myself-at-one-time and myself-at-another. My reasoning was this: If I can exist at an earlier time whether or not I exist at a later one, and if I can exist at the later one whether or not I exist at the earlier, then Winkler-at-one-time and Winkler-at-another-time must be really distinct. So it seemed that continuous creation, as Descartes understands it, might disrupt strict personal identity. Elliot Paul persuaded me that I was wrong. A real distinction, he pointed out, holds only between two or more substances, as Descartes stipulates when he introduces the notion in Principles:

A real distinction exists only between two or more substances; and we can perceive that two substances are really distinct simply from the fact that we can clearly and distinctly understand one apart from the other. For when we come to know God, we are certain that he can bring about anything of which we have a distinct understanding. . . . We can also be certain that, if [a corporeal substance] exists, each and every part of it, as delimited by us in our thought, is really distinct from the other parts of the same substance. (Principles I, 60, p. 213 in CSM 1)

My mistake, I think, was that I had the main proof of dualism in the Sixth Meditation too much at the forefront of my mind. Descartes begins that proof with the announcement that “the fact that I can clearly and distinctly understand one thing apart from another is enough to make me certain that the two things are distinct, since they are capable of being separated, at least by God” (AT VII, 78; CSM, 54). This certainly suggests that understanding Winkler-at-one-time apart from Winkler-at-another is all it takes to convince us that they are distinct. But in the Fourth Replies, Descartes crafts the argument with more care. Winkler-at-one-time and Winkler-at-another are, he suggests there, perhaps not “things” in the relevant sense. Because we do not conceive of them as what the Fourth Replies calls “complete beings” (AT VII, 222; CSM, 156–7). Although Descartes never

\textsuperscript{25} Garber’s exposition in “Descartes and Occasionalism” faithfully reproduces Descartes’s emphasis on recreation. Indeed, Garber usually speaks of the doctrine as one of “re-creation” and of God’s role according to the doctrine as that of “re-creator.” See, for example, Descartes Embodied, pp. 206 and 209.

\textsuperscript{26} For Locke, see An Essay concerning Human Understanding, ed. P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), Book I, chapter xxvii, section 1; for Hume, see Treatise 1.4.6.5–6.
officially classifies such things as selves-at-a-time, they should perhaps be understood as parts of my duration, which is an attribute only conceptually distinct from me (ATM VIIIA, 30; CSM, 214; Principles I, 62).

Descartes believes that the parts of a substance are themselves substances. In order to escape the conclusion that myself-at-one-time is really distinct from myself-at-another, Descartes has to say that what we now call temporal parts are, unlike spatial parts, not really parts at all. Now it would be unfair to chastise Descartes for failing to refute a belief in temporal parts; the doctrine of temporal parts is something he never considers, and he cannot be faulted for failing to anticipate even the intuitive case made on its behalf by recent writers. But Descartes does deny, at least implicitly, that Winkler-at-a-time is a substance, and it is not unfair to ask whether he has any way of securing his right to do so. Is “Winkler-at-a-time” any less of a “complete being” than a particular region of Winkler’s body? I cannot examine Descartes’s account of completeness in being here, but for a simpler response to my question, we might allow Descartes to borrow a point made by Suarez, in a passage quoted earlier: “the created effect qua existing at the first moment can only be conceptually distinguished from itself qua existing in the whole of the subsequent time.” This suggests that Winkler-at-one-time is only conceptually distinct from Winkler-at-another-time, and a natural conclusion to draw from this is that each of these temporal slices or stages is only conceptually distinct from the substance Winkler. Perhaps the problem with arguing from the mutual independence of Winkler-at-one-time and Winkler-at-another to the conclusion that they are really distinct is that they are not complete beings, but that they are the same complete being: me! When I conceive of Winkler-at-a-time—of Winkler qua existing at a time—I conceive of a substance, but not by means of what David Wiggins calls a “substance-concept.” I conceive of it by means of a substance concept modified by time or duration. Now it is not altogether clear to me exactly how, on Descartes’s view, we are meant to discriminate substance concepts from others. But I no longer see, in Descartes’s conception of continuous recreation and surrounding doctrines, any reason to think he confronts a special difficulty in accounting for identity over time.

Other philosophers, however, did face such a difficulty, most notably Jonathan Edwards—though he believed, as we will now see, that it was one that he could turn to theological advantage.

7. JONATHAN EDWARDS

The theological project of Jonathan Edwards’s Original Sin is to defend its title doctrine against the charge that it is unjust. The taint of Adam’s sin cannot, it is charged, be transmitted to his descendants because they are distinct from him. Edwards replies that it is within God’s power to constitute Adam and his descen-

dants as one: that there is no distinctness, antecedent to God’s will, against which his justice can be estimated and condemned.

It is not always clear just what Edwards has in mind when he speaks of God’s making things one. In the first of the following passages, he, for the most part, suggests that God merely treats things as one. Note too that as the passage closes, he seems to make an exception for the human soul.

Some things, being most simply considered, are entirely distinct, and very diverse, which yet are so united by the established law of the Creator, in some respects and with regard to some purposes and effects, that by virtue of that establishment it is with them as if they were one. Thus a tree, grown great, and an hundred years old, is one plant with the little sprout, that first came out of the ground, from whence it grew, and has been continued in constant succession; though it’s now exceeding diverse, many thousand times bigger, and of a very different form, and perhaps not yet one atom the very same: yet God, according to an established law of nature, has in a constant succession communicated to it many of the same qualities, and most important properties, as if it were one. It has been his pleasure, to constitute an union in these respects, and for these purposes, naturally leading us to look upon all as one. So the body of man at forty years of age, is one with the infant body which first came into the world, from whence it grew; though now constituted of a different substance, and the greater part of the substance probably changed scores (if not hundreds) of times; and though it be now in many respects exceeding diverse, yet God, according to the course of nature, which he has been pleased to establish, has caused, that in a certain method it should communicate with that infantile body, in the same life, the same senses, the same features, and many the same qualities, and in union with the same soul; and so, with regard to these purposes, ‘tis dealt with him as one body.29

So must the existence of each created person and thing, at each moment of it, be from the immediate continued creation of God. It will certainly follow from these things, that God’s preserving created things in being is perfectly equivalent to a continued creation, or to his creating those things out of nothing at each moment of their existence. (Original Sin, 401)

Later, though, Edwards seems to embrace a more radical view. Unlike most of the figures I have discussed so far, Edwards does not take continuous creation for granted. He argues for it from the dependence of the present state of a creature: earlier states of the same creature are not present to provide the required support (and, being passive, could not really provide it if they were present) so it must be provided by a continuously active god. Note that here, although the example is material, no exception is made for the soul:

That God does, by his immediate power, uphold every created substance in being, will be manifest, if we consider, that their present existence is a dependent existence, and therefore is an effect, and must have some cause: and the cause must be one of these two: either the antecedent existence of the same substance, or else the power of the Creator. But it can’t be the antecedent existence of the same substance. For instance, the existence of the body of the moon at this present moment, can’t be the effect of its existence at the last foregoing moment. For not only was what existed the last moment, no active cause, but a wholly passive thing; this also is to be considered, that no cause can produce effects in a time and place on which itself is not. ’Tis plain, nothing can exert itself, or operate, when and where it is not existing. But the moon’s past existence was neither where nor when its present existence is. In point of time, what is past entirely ceases, when present existence begins; otherwise it would not be past. (p. 400)

“The prior existence,” he says again, “can no more be the proper cause of the new existence, in the next moment, or next part of space, than if it had been in an age before, or at a thousand miles distance, without any existence to fill up the intermediate time or space. Therefore the existence of created substances, in each successive moment, must be the effect of the immediate agency, will, and power of God” (p. 401). Here, at least, Edwards seems to view the various parts of time as discontinuous, spaced by thin slices of “intermediate time.” Conservation is therefore recreation, and each thing God brings into being out of nothing is a new creation:

If the existence of created substance, in each successive moment, be wholly the effect of God’s immediate power, in that moment, without any dependence on prior existence, as much as the first creation out of nothing, then what exists at this moment, by this power, is a new effect; and simply and absolutely considered, not the same with any past existence, though it be like it, and follows it according to a certain established method. And there is no identity or oneness in the case, but what depends on the arbitrary constitution of the Creator; who by his wise sovereign establishment so unites these successive new effects, that he treats them as one, by communicating to them like properties, relations, and circumstances; and so, leads us to regard and treat them as one. When I call this an arbitrary constitution, I mean, that it is a constitution which depends on nothing but the divine will; which divine will depends on nothing but the divine wisdom. (pp. 402–3)

30. Another passage suggests a somewhat different view: “All dependent existence whatsoever is in a constant flux, ever passing and returning; renewed every moment, as the colors of bodies are every moment renewed by the light that shines upon them; and all is constantly proceeding from God, as light from the sun. ‘In him we live, and move, and have our being’” (p. 404). But if Edwards holds an atomic view of time, this passage would be consistent with the other.
Here, again, God is *treating* distinct things as one, and causing us to fall in line. Elsewhere, though, Edwards’s God seems to *make* things one in spite of their inherent distinctness:

Thus it appears, if we consider matters strictly, there is no such thing as any identity or sameness in created objects, existing at different times, but what depends on *God’s sovereign constitution*. (p. 404)

A *divine constitution* is a thing which *makes truth*, in affairs of this nature. (p. 404)

In the absence of further analysis, this seems unacceptable. There is something superficially like it in Berkeley, but because Berkeley carefully distinguishes between two levels of metaphysical analysis—the level of ideas, which are in constant flux, and the level of things, which are stable constructions out of ideas—he avoids suggesting that God’s sheer power is sufficient to override the inherent distinctness among things.

8. BERKELEY

I return at last to Berkeley. The puzzle with which I began was this: How does he resist an across-the-board occasionalism, given his across-the-board endorsement of continuous creation? It is not enough to repeat my solution to the general puzzle because Berkeley is a special case. He accepts occasionalism in one domain and rejects it in another. But continuous creation, in his view, is the rule in both. If it leads him to occasionalism with respect to bodies, why does it not lead him to occasionalism with respect to finite minds?

My reply, of which I can now offer only a sketch, is that continuous creation takes different forms in the two cases. In the case of body, continuous creation is actually discontinuous recreation. Because present sensations are caused by God and earlier sensations are not on hand to contribute to his efforts, Berkeley concludes (as Bayle would have urged) that earlier sensations (and therefore earlier bodies, which are *congeries* of sensations) play no causal role. Ideas or sensations, and therefore bodies, are too far from what I earlier called the standard case. Minds, by contrast, are continuously created—that is, continuously *maintained* in existence—which leaves them eligible to play a productive causal role.

Berkeley avoids denying the identity of ordinary objects over time by treating them as human constructions out of ideas. Even if their constituent ideas are in constant succession, ordinary objects can remain the same. As Philonous explains to Hylas, “men combine together several ideas, apprehended by divers senses, or by the same sense at different times, or in different circumstances, but observed however to have some connexion in Nature either with respect to co-existence or succession; all which they refer to one name, and consider as one thing” (Third Dialogue, *Works* 2, 245). “Words,” as Philonous later says, “are of arbitrary

imposition,” and if “the term same be taken in the vulgar acceptation,” not only can different persons perceive the same thing (as Philonous himself emphasizes, Works 2, 247), but the same person can perceive the same thing at different times. It may seem that human beings are managing something that I earlier claimed not even God could manage, but what they are doing in Berkeley’s scheme is importantly different from what God is thought to do in Edwards’s scheme. Berkeley’s human beings do not make distinct ideas into one idea but make them into one thing, and they do so by convention or logical construction. Berkeleyan spirits, on the other hand, have an unconstructed identity (implicit at Principles 139, among many other passages); hence, the argument from continuous creation can gain a foothold in one domain but not in the other.

It might be objected that if Berkeleyan bodies can be the same over time, they should also be able to serve as causes. Yet this is something that Berkeley emphatically denies. My reply is that although Berkeley is willing to find identity at the level of ordinary things, he is not willing to find causation there. Like the ideas that constitute them, ordinary things (as Berkeley understands them) can do no more than signify. It is possible, of course, to craft a new notion of causation—one that ideas or things constructed out of them might satisfy. Hume does this in the Treatise. If Hume has a metaphysics (and he may not), it is one of ideas or perceptions. The world system of Hume’s Treatise, if it contains such a system, is one of discontinuous perceptions, with neither a god to support them nor a substantial finite mind to perceive them. It would therefore be natural for Hume, supposing for now that he is a willing or unreluctant metaphysician, to seek a way of deriving enduring things—or, at any rate, the belief in enduring things—from discontinuous perceptions, as he does in part IV of Book I of the Treatise, and to offer an account of causation able to survive the complete disappearance of the standard case, as he does in part III. Because the standard case has no hold on Hume at all—because a preexisting substance is not, in his view, the only acceptable locus of causal power—the argument from continuous “creation” (or, rather, from constant revolution or perpetual fulguration) cannot move him. If we are still moved by the argument, it is perhaps because the standard case has not lost its sway. In Four-Dimensionalism, Theodore Sider considers Judith Jarvis Thomson’s objection that a metaphysics of temporal parts is, as Sider says, “crazy” (p. 216). Thomson, as quoted by Sider on p. 217, writes that

32. I do not mean to imply that Edwards could not make use of Berkeley’s strategy or of some other way of constructing lasting things out of momentary objects. But he makes no such attempt, and I suspect that any appeal to human convention or constructive activity would, in these eyes, intrude upon God’s sovereignty.


34. Paul Hoffman comments insightfuly on the way in which “our post-Humean model of causation” diverges from what I have called the standard case—which was no less standard for Descartes, in his view, than it was for Aristotle—in “The Union and Interaction of Mind and Body (Part 2),” pp. 101–04 in Essays on Descartes.
the metaphysic yields that if I have had exactly one bit of chalk in my hand for the last hour, then there is something in my hand which is white, roughly cylindrical in shape, and dusty, something which also has a weight, something which is chalk, which was not in my hand three minutes ago, and indeed, such that no part of it was in my hand three minutes ago. As I hold the bit of chalk in my hand, new stuff, new chalk, keeps constantly coming into existence *ex nihilo*. That strikes me as obviously false.

Sider replies as follows:

The four-dimensionalist does indeed claim that the piece of chalk has a temporal part at every moment at which it exists, and that those temporal parts are white, cylindrical, and dusty. But in saying that temporal parts come into existence *ex nihilo*, Thomson makes it sound as if a miracle is constantly occurring. That isn’t right. The sensible four-dimensionalist will claim that current temporal parts are caused to exist by previous temporal parts. The laws that govern this process are none other than the familiar laws of motion. A law of motion *just is* a law that guarantees the future existence of temporal parts given previous temporal parts. (p. 217)

Thomson, in worrying about the continuous appearance of temporal parts *ex nihilo*, may be expressing allegiance to the standard case. Sider, like Hume, seems comfortable with its disappearance.  

35. In “Persistence, Change, and Explanation,” first published in 1989, Sally Haslanger seems to side with Thomson. “Without persistence,” she writes, “the causal story becomes unconnected: neither the past nor the future can get a hold on the present in a way that is causally efficacious” (p. 177 in *Persistence: Contemporary Readings*, ed. Haslanger and Roxanne Marie Kurtz [Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006]). Later, she suggests that a full account of persisting things and their explanatory role will draw on “the traditional notion of substance” (p. 178). She recognizes, though, that on a Humean view of causation, no substance is needed to bridge the gap between a present effect and a cause no longer present.