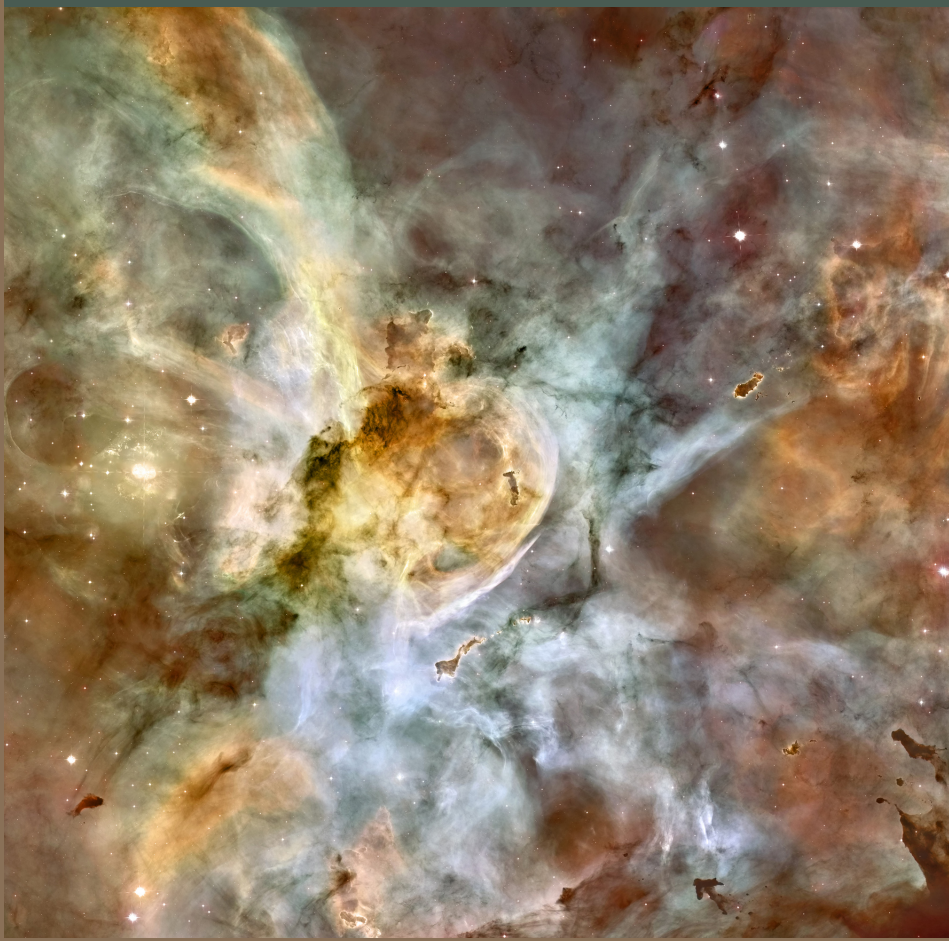
OCCASIONALISM REVISITED

New Essays from the Islamic and Western Traditions

Second Edition



ASIPT Series in Islamic Philosophy and Theology - 2

Edited by
Nazif Muhtaroğlu

OCCASIONALISM REVISITED

New Essays from the Islamic and Western Traditions

Islamic Philosophy and Theology Series

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New Essays from the Islamic and Western Traditions

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Nazif Muhtaroğlu

Second Edition

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There are two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle.

Albert Einstein

Preface

This book represents an expanded and updated edition of *Occasionalism Revisited*, originally published by Kalam Research and Media in 2017. This new edition is structured into three distinct sections: "Occasionalism in Islamic Intellectual History," "Occasionalism in Modern European Philosophy," and, notably, a new section on "Occasionalism in Contemporary Philosophy."

This addition addresses a gap in the first edition, which included only a single paper on current philosophical discourse—specifically, "Divine Compositionalism as Occasionalism." In this revised edition, the aforementioned paper has been thoughtfully relocated to the third section and retitled "Physical Occasionalism is Divine Compositionalism," reflecting its enhanced analytical depth.

Additionally, we have included two significant new chapters: Alvin Plantinga's "Law, Cause, and Occasionalism," previously published but reprinted here within this new context, and "Occasionalism in a Contemporary Context" by Douglas Kutach and Özgür Koca.

All chapters in this book except the one authored by Plantinga are original contributions, many of which were initially presented at the conference "Occasionalism East and West," which I had the pleasure of organizing at Harvard University in May 2013. This edition aims to further illuminate the vibrant and evolving discourse on occasionalism, bridging past insights with contemporary philosophical inquiry.

Finally, this book is also designed to guide scholars who may want to outline courses on occasionalism. For this reason, a list of selected readings on occasionalism in English is added as an appendix. Both considerable primary and secondary sources can be found within it. A timeline for occasionalism is included as well, which covers all significant dates relevant to occasionalism.

Acknowledgement

I am deeply grateful to Aaron Spevack and Michaela Spampinato for their invaluable assistance in preparing this new edition. I also extend my gratitude to the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations at Harvard University and the Philosophy Department at Yale University for supporting my research fellowship during this period.

I wish to reiterate my appreciation for the generous research funding provided by the John Templeton Foundation, Kalam Research and Media Foundation, and TUBITAK (Bidep 2232-Program) for the first edition.

Many of the chapters in this book were first presented at the conference "Occasionalism East and West," which I had the honor of organizing at Harvard University in May 2013, as well as the subsequent conference "Occasionalism and Theories of Causality" held at Boğaziçi University in June 2015. Special thanks go to Ahmad Ragab, Khaled El-Rouayheb, Jeffrey McDonough, Chryssi Sidiropoulou, and Himmet Taşkömür for their pivotal roles in organizing these conferences. Their collaboration and support were instrumental in bringing together the diverse perspectives and insightful discussions that have enriched this edition.

Notes on Contributors

Fred Ablondi is Professor of Philosophy at Hendrix College. He received his Ph.D. from Marquette University. In addition to numerous articles in modern philosophy, Professor Ablondi authored *Gerauld de Cordemoy: Atomist, Occasionalist, Cartesian* (2005).

Marc A. Hight is Elliott Professor of Philosophy at Hampden Sydney College. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Syracuse. Professor Hight is mainly interested in history of philosophy (especially early modern philosophy), philosophy of religion and philosophy of social sciences. Apart from many articles (mainly on Berkeley's ideas), he published the following monographs: *The Idea and Ontology: An Essay in Early Modern Metaphysics of Ideas* (2008) and *Correspondence of George Berkeley* (2013).

Özgür Koca is Associate Professor of Islamic Studies at Bayan Islamic Graduate School. He earned his Ph.D. from the Claremont Graduate School. Dr. Koca is mainly interested in the history of the Islamic intellectual tradition and the relationship between science and religion. He authored *Islam, Causality and Freedom: From Medieval to the Modern Era* (2020).

Douglas Kutach is an independent scholar. He received his Ph.D. from Rutgers University. He authored *Causation* (Key Concepts in Philosophy, 2014) and *Causation and Its Basis in Fundamental Physics* (Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Science, 2013).

Edward Omar Moad is Professor of Philosophy at Qatar University. He earned his Ph.D. in philosophy from the University of Missouri-Columbia. His research interests cover in Islamic philosophy, metaphysics, philosophy of religion, meta-ethics, and comparative philosophy. Moad published numerous articles concerning these areas and authored *Coherence of the Incoherence* (2023).

Nazif Muhtaroğlu is currently an associate research scholar in the philosophy department at Yale University. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Kentucky with a dissertation on the Islamic and Cartesian roots of occasionalism. He is primarily interested in historical and theoretical links between Islamic and Western philosophies, the metaphysical and

ethical issues surrounding causality. Muhtaroğlu is co-editor with Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka *Classic Issues in Islamic Philosophy and Theology Today* (2010), with Tymieneicka and Detlev Quintern *The Logos of Life and Cultural Interlacing* (2014).

Walter Ott is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Virginia. He also earned his Ph.D. from the University of Virginia. Ott's primary publications concern early modern philosophy. Some of them are *Locke's Philosophy of Language* (2004) and *Causation and the Laws of Nature in Early Modern Philosophy* (2009).

Andrew Platt is Visiting Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Villanova University. He earned his Ph.D. degree from the UMASS-Amherst with a dissertation on the rise of Cartesian occasionalism. Platt published several articles that concern early modern philosophy in journals such as the *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*. He authored *One True Cause: Causal Powers, Divine Concurrence, and the Seventeenth-Century Revival of Occasionalism* (2020).

Walter J. Schultz is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Northwestern. He earned his doctorate in philosophy at the University of Minnesota with specializations in mathematical logic and economic theory. He studied under Leonid Hurwicz who later won the Nobel Prize in Economics in 2007. For the past 15 years he has concentrated on theological metaphysics having been influenced by the ideas of the 18th century theologian/ philosopher, Jonathan Edwards, God and creation. Dr. Schultz has published extensively on philosophical theology in journals such as *Jonathan Edwards Studies* and *Philosophia Christi.*

J. Aaron Simmons is Professor of Philosophy at Furman University. He received his Ph.D. from Vanderbilt University. His publications mainly concern philosophy of religion in continental philosophy and some of them are as follows: *God and the Other: Ethics and Politics After the Theological Turn* (2011), *Reexamining Deconstruction and Determinate Religion: Toward a Religion with Religion* (co-edited with Stephen Minister, 2012).

Rev. Dr. Lisanne D'Andrea-Winslow is is an Affiliate Professor at the Evangelical Theological Faculty in Leuven, Belgium, and formerly served for over two decades as a full-professor at the University of Northwestern–St. Paul. She holds two doctoral degrees, a Ph.D. in Cell Biology and Biochemistry and a Ph.D. in Systematic Theology, and was a Visiting Fellow at Yale Divinity School. An ordained minister in the Congregational Church, she has served

in pastoral ministry alongside her academic career. As a marine biologist, theologian, poet, and pastor, her scholarship and creative work engage contemporary research in ecotheology and ecospirituality, divine action theory, and Jonathan Edwards studies.

Aladdin M. Yaqub is William Wilson Selfridge Professor of Philosophy at Lehigh University. He received his Ph.D. in philosophy from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Dr. Yaqub's primary areas of research are logic, truth theory, philosophy of mathematics, metaphysics, and Islamic Philosophy. He authored *The Liar Speaks the Truth* (1993) and *An Introduction to Logical Theory* (2013) and currently translated al-Ghazālī's *Moderation in Belief* (2013).

Introduction

Nazif Muhtaroğlu

Occasionalism is commonly understood as a theory that ascribes all causal power to God on the one hand and treats cause-effect relations in the universe as occasions indicating the manner of divine creation on the other. In other words, according to this theory, the only genuine causal agent is God and everything else is causally inert. The inspiration for such a doctrine can be found in the scriptures of the three monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam).[1] However, this book focuses on the philosophical articulation of this doctrine. This book aims to reveal the unexplored historical roots of occasionalism from the Islamic and Western traditions and contribute to the discussions centered on this theory that have received significant attention recently. Although we already have some works on occasionalism, their scope is limited to certain periods and figures.[2] This book aims to bridge the gaps

1. "He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power" (Hebrews 1:3), "For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created by Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together" (Colossians 1: 16–17), "in him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:18), and "I, the Lord, am the maker of all things, stretching out the heavens by Myself, and spreading out the earth all alone" (Isaiah 44) are the verses usually given from the Bible to support occasionalism. "God is the creator of everything", (39: 62), "All power belongs to God" (2: 165) are verses from the Qur'an.

2. Majid Fakhry, *Islamic Occasionalism and its Critique by Averroes and Aquinas* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1958). Fakhry's book covers only the Ashʿarite views of occasionalism before al-Ghazālī, and al-Ghazālī's views. Dominik Perler and Ulrich Rudolph, *Occasionalismus: Theorien der Kausalität im arabisch-islamischen und im europäischen Denken* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000). Perler and Rudolph examine only the Ashʿarites from the Islamic tradition and Malebranche from the Western. Steven Nadler, *Occasionalism: Causation Among the Cartesians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). Platt, Andrew R. *One True Cause: Causal Powers, Divine Concurrence, and the Seventeenth-Century Revival of Occasionalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020). Platt and Nadler focus on the Cartesian occasionalists from the Western tradition. Henkel, Christian. *Occasionalism and the Debate about Causation in Early Modern Germany* (New York, Routledge, 2024). Henkel explores the German critiques of occasionalist ideas developed

in the historical understanding of the theory and to engage occasionalism in dialogue with contemporary philosophical debates.

The philosophical statement of occasionalism can be traced back to St. Augustine (354–430). Arguably, Augustine presented some ideas that can be regarded as a limited form of occasionalism. He denies causal efficacy to bodies and affirms the causal agency of spirits while he insists on God's continuous sustenance of the world.[3] However, the first full-fledged and comprehensive formulation of occasionalism appeared among the Muslim scholars in the tenth century, that is, the Ashʿarites and Māturīdites. It was transmitted to Europe via the works of Averroes (1126–1198) and Maimonides (1135–1204) in the thirteenth century. In the seventeeth century it reappeared among the Cartesian philosophers, famously in the works of Nicolas Malebranche (1638–1715). Many philosophers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, including G. W. Leibniz (1638–1716) and D. Hume (1711–1776), took this theory into serious account, responded to it, and to a certain extent were influenced by it.

As an attempt to uncover the neglected historical roots and philosophical dimensions of occasionalism, this volume reveals how indispensable this theory is for those who want to understand central discussions and dynamics of Islamic and modern philosophy. Apart from showing the significance of occasionalism in both traditions, this book in general points out a convergence between them and prepares a common ground for a possible dialogue in future. I would like to indicate in more detail why this theory merits a serious reconsideration and philosophical evaluation. The chapters are arranged in chronological order and divided into three parts. The first part of the book covers the examination of occasionalism within the Islamic tradition, the second part within the modern European philosophy, and the third part within contemporary philosophy.

In the first part, each chapter examines significant aspects of the occasionalist views in the Islamic world from the tenth to the twentieth century. In order to facilitate the reading of these chapters, I would like to explain some of the technical terms that appear frequently throughout the text. The theory of occasionalism goes back to a specific Muslim tradition called *kalām*. *Kalām*

by Cordemoy and Sturm.

3. See for example, St. Augustine, *The City of God Against Pagans* [*De Civitate Dei*], trans. and ed. R. W. Dyson (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2006), Book V.9, 202–3. For an argument supporting this interpretation of Augustine, see also Nazif Muhtaroğlu, *Islamic and Cartesian Roots of Occasionalism*, PhD dissertation, University of Kentucky, 2012, 136–41.

basically means speech or conversation. In time, *kalām* became the name of the discipline that seeks to demonstrate the articles of the Islamic creed. Some scholars translate it as "Islamic theology" and others as "Arabic Scholasticism". Both translations are insufficient and, to a certain extent, misleading.

First, the Islamic creed concerns not only the nature of God but covers many other topics associated with an Islamic characterization of God (*Allāh*). Because of these associations, the scholars within the *kalām* tradition–the *mutakallimūn*–wrote extensively on epistemology, metaphysics, ethics, and political philosophy. Their treatment of issues in such areas is usually considered to be inferior to that of the philosophers, *falāsifa*, such as al-Fārābī (870–950) and Ibn Sīnā (980–1037) who philosophized within an Aristotelian-Neoplatonic framework. *Falāsifa* relied on demonstration (*burhān*) from generally acceptable self-evident propositions. On the other hand it is commonly believed that the *mutakallimūn* used a dialectical method (*jadal*) that defends a position in a conversational manner. It is true that some arguments of the *mutakallimūn* depend on questionable assumptions accepted by addressees, however this classical view on the difference between *kalām* and *falsafa* is no longer defensible. Many *mutakallimūn* produced general arguments based on propositions that were as self-evident as many of the propositions accepted by the *falāsifa*. The term "philosophy" as understood today covers both of these traditions.

It is very typical of the *mutakallimūn* that they did not take the truth of the Islamic creed for granted, without argumentation. They begin their search for truth with an examination of religion. After evaluation, they first approve of the strength of the claims of Islam, and then go on to examine other topics from the perspective of the Islamic creed. In brief, the method of the *mutakallimūn* cannot be understood as "faith seeking understanding". Rather, it is "search after truth under the guidance of revelation." Thus, the orientation of the *mutakallimūn* is different from that of the *falāsifa* who do not primarily focus on the examination of religious claims. To conclude, (1) *kalām* is a specific tradition different from *falsafa*, as explained above; (2) the *mutakallimūn* refer to the scholars of the former tradition, while the *falāsifa* stand for the scholars of the latter tradition. Following the established scholarly practice, these terms are left untranslated throughout the text.

The earliest *kalām* school is the Muʿtazila. With minor exceptions, the Muʿtazilite scholars proposed an atomist metaphysics and considered divine agency to be applicable to a large degree, save some domains such as human

acts. In time, they came to believe that human beings create their own acts. This limitation put on divine creation attracted some responses, most famously that of al-Ashʿarī (874–936). Having been formerly a Muʿtazilite, al-Ashʿarī abandoned this school and founded his own school known as the Ashʿariyya. In current scholarship, it is commonly accepted that al-Ashʿarī was the first scholar who presented a systematic and full-fledged occasionalism that is based on an atomistic metaphysics. In the tenth and eleventh centuries, all the *mutakallimūn* were divided into four main groups: the Basrian Muʿtazila, the Baghdadī Muʿtazila, the Ashʿarite school, and the Mātūridite school.[4] The first three groups were mainly located in Iraq and the last group was mostly confined to Transoxania in Central Asia.

Islamic occasionalism has been typically represented by the Ashʿarite School, and the Māturīdites have, so far, been regarded as non-occasionalists. In Chapter 1, on the basis of my study of the *Book of Monotheism* (*Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*), I challenge this mainstream assumption and argue that al-Mātūridī indeed held an occasionalist position. In interpreting al-Mātūridī's view of causality as occasionalism on the basis of his non-atomist metaphysics, I show that Islamic occasionalism is not restricted to the Ashʿarite School on the one hand and does not necessarily depend upon atomism on the other.

One of the most famous scholars (perhaps the most famous one) associated with Islamic occasionalism is al-Ghazālī (1058–1111). Within the last several decades, the conventional perception of al-Ghazālī has been challenged, especially via the works that exposed the link between Ibn Sīnā and al-Ghazālī. As the argument goes, al-Ghazālī's familiarity with disciplines other than *kalām* (especially *falsafa* and Sufism) was not neutral and influenced his thinking to a certain extent. Thus, in the second period of his intellectual and spiritual life, al-Ghazālī abandoned a strict occasionalism after his spiritual crisis. In Chapter 2, Aladdin Yaqub reexamines the link between Ibn Sīnā and al-Ghazālī concerning the issue of causality and responds to these new challenges on behalf of the classical interpretation of al-Ghazālī as an occasionalist.

Indeed, al-Ghazālī is a central figure to the understanding of the interrelation among *kalām*, *falsafa*, and Sufism in Islamic intellectual history. In the *Incoherence of the Philosophers* (*Tahāfut al-Falāsifa*), al-Ghazālī criticizes the twenty theses defended by the *falāsifa*, which can be regarded as

4. Alnoor Dhanani, *The Physical Theory of Kalām: Atoms, Space, and Void in Basrian Muʿtazilī Cosmology* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994), 6.

implications of their conception of God and cosmology. Al-Ghazālī does not commit himself to any specific point of view when offering his criticisms, but the Ashʿarite *kalām* plays a significant background role. In his *Moderation in Belief* (*al-Iqtiṣād fī aI-Iʿtiqād*), a later work, he explicitly proposes to defend a cosmological and theological model that is based on the Ashʿarite *kalām*. Although in his later works he offers some critical assessments of the discipline of *kalām*, he does not stop referring to the *Moderation in Belief* as a detailed study of issues concerning faith in God.[5] Chapter 2 gives a picture of al-Ghazālī, the various periods of whose intellectual life are unified under occasionalism. His early rational defense of occasionalism and critical engagement with other theoretical systems can be regarded as continuous with a more spiritual adaptation of occasionalism.

The Sufi context provides a significant development of occasionalism among the Muslims. Famously, Ibn ʿArabī (1165–1240) situates Sufism into a theoretical framework. Thus, he relates the inner spiritual development of human beings to a metaphysics that is based on a multiplicity of Divine Names. This approach improves the Ashʿarite endeavor to support occasionalism that is based on a few names of God. In addition, it draws attention to the ethical dimension of occasionalism. In Chapter 3, Özgür Koca compares and contrasts Ibn ʿArabī and the Ashʿarites in relation to causality. Koca argues that they agree on considering phenomena to be devoid of causal efficacy and upholding the constant creative activity of God. Yet, according to Koca, Ibn ʿArabī *criticizes* the Ashʿarites as being inconsistent because of their assumption that accidents depend upon substrate atoms in order to come into existence. This assumption, as Koca interprets it, damages the thesis that everything depends upon God alone. Koca's interpretation of Ibn ʿArabī invites us to rethink the distinctions between causal and ontological dependency and ponder upon whether they are genuine distinctions or reducible to each another. Conflating these two types of dependencies results in monism. Ibn ʿArabī seems to conflate them and face the challenge of monism. Whether occasionalism is compatible with monism is a significant philosophical issue that arises especially in the context of Sufism in Islamic intellectual history.

In Chapter 4, Edward Moad examines the link between occasionalism and Ibn Khaldūn's (1332–1406) methodological approach to science. Ibn Khaldūn is generally considered to be the first scholar who thought that social and

5. See Al-Ghazālī, *Kitāb al-Arbaʿīn fī Uṣūl al-Dīn* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Jundi, 1964), 2, and *Iḥyā' ʿUlūm al-Dīn*, 4 vols. (Cairo, 1957), 1: 98.

historical conditions are subject to scientific evaluation. Moad argues that Ibn Khaldūn adapted a methodological occasionalism in the scientific study of the world (including its social and historical dimensions). The earlier occasionalists within the *kalām* tradition understood the sustenance of the world order as a result of continuous divine activity. What we see as regularities in the world are certain ways that God follows in creating the world. In the language of the *mutakallimūn*, they are habits of God (*Sunnat Allāh*). This concept already presents the possibility of practicing science on the basis of occasionalist metaphysics. A scientist can study the world and attempt to understand the mechanism behind it in terms of certain laws and may consider them to be ways of describing God's ordered way of creation. Given this background, Ibn Khaldūn's ideas contribute much to understanding how scientific activity (that also takes human condition into consideration) can be accomplished in an occasionalist framework.

In Chapter 5, Koca and I explore three Ottoman occasionalists' response to the materialist interpretation of modern science in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Contrary to a prevalent opinion that Muslim scholars did not sufficiently assess the philosophical dimensions of modern science during that time, these Ottoman scholars, namely Ali Sedad (1853–1900), Hamdi Yazır (1878–1942), and Said Nursi (1877–1960), clearly distinguish the philosophical interpretation of science from scientific activity itself. Rejecting its materialist and naturalist interpretations, they reinterpret the concepts of energy, force, and laws of nature from an occasionalist point of view. In addition, Nursi presents a comprehensive metaphysical framework in which every science and discipline could be connected to various Divine Names. The ideas of these late Ottoman scholars present a fresh approach to the discussions centered on the dialogue between science and religion.

The second part of the book examines occasionalism in modern European philosophy. Occasionalism appeared among the Cartesian philosophers in Europe in the early modern times. Even Descartes's (1596–1650) metaphysics displays some affinities with occasionalism. Yet the denial of secondary causality became much apparent in the works of Louis de la Forge (1632–1666), Arnold Geulincx (1624–1669), Gerauld Cordemoy (1626–1684), and, famously, Nicolas Malebranche (1638–1715). La Forge is considered to be a limited occasionalist because he denies the causal efficacy of bodies and affirms the causality of minds. Others deny the causal efficacy of bodies, as well as minds. In Chapter 6, I compare the Ash'arite occasionalism with Cartesian

metaphysics and explore the possible historical links between them. I identify four main channels through which Islamic occasionalism could be transmitted to Cartesians: Averroes, Maimonides, the Latin scholastics, and orientalists. I display the Muslim contribution to the conceptual tools, arguments, and approaches that were used to build Descartes's metaphysics and guided its development toward a full-scale occasionalism. I argue that through indirect ways Descartes and Cartesians benefited from the ideas of the Ashʿarites in constructing and developing their metaphysics and natural philosophy, especially concerning the topics of causality, modality, laws of nature, and atomism. In addition, we should consider the Ashʿarites to be as modern as the Cartesians.

Among the Cartesians, Cordemoy is the only known atomist. He does not find Descartes's notion of material substance satisfactory. Descartes affirms the infinite divisibility of matter (since its essence is extension) and rejects the existence of indivisible particles (atoms). However, Cordemoy thinks that the terms "matter" and "body" that are used interchangeably by Descartes refer to different things. According to Cordemoy, what we see is matter, which is composed of bodies. Bodies are extended substances; however, their assemblages (i.e. matter) are not extended. Otherwise, the whole world would be a single extended substance, which is not acceptable to Cordemoy. Thus, there must be extended indivisible substances as the basis of material reality. Their aggregations give rise to matter, which is, strictly speaking, not extended but quantified. Matter has quantity rather than extension.[6] Cordemoy's occasionalism is worth examining against this background.

In Chapter 7, Andrew Platt explores the link between Descartes's metaphysics and the motivations of Cordemoy's occasionalism. Platt argues that Cordemoy's occasionalism cannot be considered to be an inevitable consequence of Descartes's metaphysics, especially given Descartes's view on the nature of motion and divine conservation. Instead, Cordemoy embraced occasionalism to situate Cartesian metaphysics into a more consistent and developed theoretical framework. Cordemoy's case is especially salient among the Cartesian occasionalists because he also defended atomism in opposition to others. In Chapter 6, I draw attention to the similarity between Cordemoy and the early Ashʿarites but argue that this similarity is nothing more than superficial. Cordemoy accepts atomism only in the material realm and formulates

6. Gerauld de Cordemoy, *Six Discours* in *Oeuvres Philosophiques*, ed. Pierre Clair and Francois Girbal (Paris: Presses Universitaries de France, 1968), 95–7.

spiritual substances as distinct from bodies. However, the early Ash'arites think that both material and mental phenomena inhere in indivisible homogenous substances. Thus, they reject a substantial dualism, as most Cartesians would affirm. However, some later Ash'arites presented metaphysical systems that are very similar to that of Cordemoy: they affirmed atomism, occasionalism and substantial dualism together.

The most knowledgeable philosopher about medieval philosophy among the Cartesians seems to be Malebranche. He takes into account the scholastic critiques of occasionalism and responds to them in detail. In Chapter 8, Fred Ablondi and Aaron Simmons analyze Malebranche's method of dealing with those scholastic critiques and argue that Malebranche uses a method very similar to that defended by Robert Audi in relation to his discussion on secular reason.

In Chapter 9, Walter Ott focuses on the link between Malebranche's occasionalism and his doctrine of vision in God. Malebranche is exceptional among the Cartesians in proposing that ideas do not reside in our minds. Rather, ideas are eternal and exist in God. We can attain knowledge only by apprehending ideas in God. Thus, the doctrine of vision in God renders our knowledge also dependent upon God. Ott argues that this doctrine is an "intelligible development of occasionalism". In this chapter, Ott invites us to think about the epistemological dimensions of occasionalism.

During his life Malebranche's philosophy gained great popularity in Continental Europe. In Germany, Holland, and Italy, Malebranche's ideas were discussed in reading groups. His reception in Ireland and England was also considerable. Similar reading groups were formed in Ireland. Most importantly, there is a group that deserves to be called "English Malebranchians," which includes John Norris (1657–1711), Thomas Taylor (1669–1735?), and Arthur Collier (1680–1732).[7]

Malebranche's influence on George Berkeley (1685–1753) is also apparent, despite Berkeley's remarks distancing himself from Malebranche. In Chapter 10, Marc A. Hight displays how Malebranche shaped Berkeley's view of causality. Hight argues that Berkeley adapts Malebranche's assumption that causality is considered to be a necessary relation and derives from it not a full-fledged occasionalism as Malebranche proposed, but a semi-occasionalism. According to Hight's interpretation, Berkeley affirms occasionalism with respect to ideas about the physical world but rejects it with respect to

7. Andrew Pyle, *Malebranche* (London: Routledge, 2003), 257.

the imaginative volitions of finite minds. Hight's point is that Berkeley never departs from Malebranche's assumption about the necessary character of causality and assumes it even in ascribing causality to finite minds.

Another great figure who seriously studied Malebranche's philosophy is David Hume (1711–1776). Hume was a close reader of Malebranche and even advised reading Malebranche's *Search After Truth* if one wished to understand the metaphysical part of the *Treatise of Human Nature*.[8] Malebranche's understanding of causality as a necessary relation and as identifying God as the only causal agent on this basis gave Hume sufficient background to produce his skeptical arguments against causality. Hume argues that we cannot justify the causality between finite phenomena either via empirical means or rationally. In this regard, he is in line with Malebranche. However, unlike Malebranche, Hume also argues against considering God to be the only causal agent. For Hume, if we cannot justify causal power of finite beings, we cannot justify divine power either.[9] With the rise of skepticism in Europe during the eighteenth century, Malebranche's occasionalism began to fall out of favor. Hume's (even Locke's) criticisms particularly accelerated this fall. After the rise of the secular vision (as propounded by the French encyclopedists for example) and Kant's critique of *a priori* metaphysics as well as rational theology, occasionalism came to disappear from the intellectual scene of Europe.[10]

Although occasionalism fell out of favor in Europe after the eighteenth century, it remained vibrant in the Islamic world into the twentieth century. The late Ottomans extensively utilized the occasionalist paradigm, applying it to various philosophical and social issues. As previously noted, they provided occasionalist interpretations of modern science, demonstrating its ongoing relevance. Occasionalism continues to offer insights to the contemporary world. The third part of the book is dedicated to exploring the potential role of occasionalism within the context of current philosophical discussions.

Chapter 11, Alvin Plantinga advocates for a limited version of occasionalism as a coherent metaphysical basis for understanding laws of nature, presenting it as superior to other models of divine action. He explores three frameworks: secondary causalism, which views laws as reflections of God-given causal powers; decretalism, where laws are divine decrees dictating

8. Thomas M. Lennon, "Introduction", in *Malebranche, The Search After Truth*, ed. T. Lennon and P. J. Olscamp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), xxii.

9. David Hume, *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merril, 1955), Section 7: The Idea of Necessary Connection.

10. Pyle, Malebranche, 257.

natural occurrences; and the view of laws as counterfactuals of divine freedom, showing possible divine actions. Plantinga critiques secondary causalism for its lack of empirical clarity and favors decretalism and counterfactual approaches, which align with occasionalism. He argues these models recognize all causality as stemming from divine action, maintaining occasionalism's clear link between divine will and world events. However, driven by a desire to preserve accountability for actions, he attributes causality to human will.

In Chapter 12, Walter J. Schultz and Lisanne D'Andrea-Winslow present an updated occasionalist model of scientific explanation that aligns with contemporary scientific insights into the universe. Drawing inspiration from Jonathan Edwards, whose occasionalist philosophy was influential in Colonial America[11], they introduce the concept of Divine Compositionalism. This model posits divine action as God's compositional, existence-conferring, efficient causation, executed according to His will or plan. They then explore how Divine Compositionalism provides a framework for understanding fundamental scientific concepts such as dispositions, causation, events, laws of nature, and mechanisms.

In Chapter 13, Douglas Kutach and Özgür Koca seek to enrich occasionalism by drawing on contemporary theories of causation, aiming to update it while avoiding its theistic connotations. They address two primary questions: the criteria for identifying an "occasional cause" in modern terms, and whether current distinctions in causation can clarify and strengthen occasionalism. Given its theistic roots, reformulating occasionalism in a secular context could show its relevance in contemporary metaphysical discussions, ensuring it is viewed as a viable doctrine worth further exploration even for secular purposes.

These chapters could be regarded as small steps toward understanding occasionalism afresh today and see that it is still relevant to contemporary intellectual concerns. A solid understanding of occasionalism through the milestones in history will enable us to see its deeper and more philosophical dimensions. In this book we aim to show this.

11. Charles James McCracken, *Malebranche and British Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983).

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Timeline for Occasionalism

Significant Persona

St. Augustine: 354–430, Hippo Regius (Algeria)

Abū Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī (the founder of the Ashʿarite School in the Islamic *kalām*): 874–936, Baghdad (Iraq)

Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī (the founder of the Māturīdīte School in the Islamic *kalām*): 853–944, Samarkand (Uzbekistan)

Al-Bāqillānī (Ashʿarite): 950–1013, Baghdad (?), (Iraq)

Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna): 980–1037, Hamedan (Iran)

Al-Juwaynī (an Ashʿarite scholar): 1028–1085, Nishapur (Iran)

Abū al-Muʿīn al-Nasafī (Māturīdīte): 1047–1115, Buhara (Uzbekistan)

Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (Alghazel): 1058–1111

Najmaddīn al-Nasafī (Māturīdīte): 1068/9–1142, Samarkand (Uzbekistan)

Al-Shahrastānī (Ashʿarite): 1086–1153, Khorasan (Iran)

Ibn Rushd (Averroes): 1126–1198, Marakkesh (Morocco)

Moses Maimonides (Mosheh ben Maimon, Mūsa Ibn Maymūn): 1135–1204, Fostat-Cairo (Egypt)

Fakhraddīn Rāzī (Ashʿarite): 1149–1209, Herat (Afghanistan)

Albert the Great: 1206–1280, Cologne (Germany)

Thomas Aquinas (Dominican): 1225–1274, Fossanova (Italy)

Muhyiddīn Ibn ʿArabī: 1165–1240, Damascus (Syria)

Michael Scot: 1175–1232

Duns Scotus (Franciscan): 1266–1308, Cologne (Germany)

SadaddīnTaftazānī (Ashʿarite): 1322–1390, Samarkand (Uzbekistan)

Sayyid Sharif Jurjānī (Ashʿarite): 1339–1413, Shiraz (Iran)

William of Ockham (English Franciscan): 1287–1347, Munich (Germany)

Nicholas of Autrecourt: 1299–1369, Metz (France)

Ṣadr al-Sharīʿa (Māturīdīte): d. 1346, Bukhara (Uzbekistan)

Ibn Khaldūn: 1332–1406, Cairo (Egypt)

Cardinal Pierre d'Ailly (Dominican): 1351–1420, Avignon (France)

Gabriel Biel: 1420/5–1495, Einsiedeln (Switzerland)
Ibn Humām (Māturīdīte): 1388–1456, Cairo (Egypt)
Jalaladdīn Dawwānī (Ashʿarite): d. 1502, Kazerun (Iran)
Francisco Suárez (Spanish Jesuit): 1548–1617, Lisbon (Portugal)
René Descartes: 1596–1650, Stockholm (Sweden)
Johannes Clauberg (Scholastic Cartesian): 1622 –1665, (Germany)
Jacob Golius (Orientalist): 1596–1667, Leiden (Netherlands)
Claude Clerselier (Cartesian): 1614–1684, Paris (France)
Louis de La Forge (Cartesian): 1632–1666, Saumur (France)
Arnold Geulincx (Cartesian): 1624–1669, Leiden (Netherlands)
Margaret Cavendish: 1623?–1673, New Castle (United Kingdom)
Baruch Spinoza: 1632–1677, The Hague (Netherlands)
Géraud Cordemoy (Cartesian): 1626–1684, Paris (France)
Antoine Arnauld (Jansenist, Cartesian): 1616–1698, Brussels (Belgium)
François Lamy (Benedictine, Cartesian): 1636-1711, Paris (France)
Johann Christoph Sturm: 1635 –1703, Nürnberg, (Germany)
Richard Simon (Oratorian, Biblical Scholar, Orientalist):1638–1712 Paris (France)
Nicolas Malebranche (Oratorian, Cartesian): 1638–1715, Paris (France)
Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz: 1646–1716, Hanover (Germany)
John Norris: 1657–1711, Wiltshire (United Kingdom)
Thomas Taylor: 1669–1735?, (United Kingdom)
Arthur Collier: 1680–1732, Steeple-Langford (United Kingdom)
Isaac Newton: 1642–1727, London (United Kingdom)
Samuel Clarke (Anglican): 1675-1729,
George Berkeley: 1685–1753, Oxford (United Kingdom)
Bernard Le Bovier de Fontenelle (Cartesian): 1657–1757, Paris
Jonathan Edwards (Puritan): 1703–1758, Princeton (USA)
David Hume: 1711–1776, Edinburgh (United Kingdom)
İsmail Gelenbevi (Ottoman): 1730–1790
Ali Sedad (Late Ottoman): 1853–1900, Istanbul (Turkey)
Mehmet Seyyid (Late Ottoman): 1873–1925, Istanbul (Turkey)
Hamdi Yazır (Late Ottoman): 1878–1942, Istanbul (Turkey)
Said Nursi (Late Ottoman): 1877–1960, Urfa (Turkey)
Mustafa Sabri (Late Ottoman): 1869–1954, Cairo (Egypt)

Significant Works

Al-Ghazālī's *Incoherence of the Philosophers* (*Tahāfut al-Falāsifa*): 1095

Al-Ghazālī's *Moderation in Belief* (*al-Iqtiṣād fi' aI-I'tiqād*): 1095

Al-Ghazālī's *Revival of Religious Sciences* (*Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*): 1098

Averroes's *Incoherence of the Incoherence* (*Destructio Destructionum*): written probably between 1180 and 1200; partially translated into Latin in 1328 (the last four discussions were missing). The first complete Latin translation was printed in Venice in 1527, and reprinted in 1550–1552,1560, and 1573–1574.

Maimonides's *Guide for the Perplexed* (*Dalalāt al-Ḥa'irīn, Dux Neutrorum*): Originally written in Arabic and completed in 1190, this book was translated into Hebrew and Latin. The first Hebrew translation was prepared by Samuel ben Judah ibn Tibbon in 1204. The Latin translation was made from al-Ḥarizi's Hebrew translation, which was available in the thirteenth century and is entitled *Dux Neutrorum*. This book was published in Latin in 1520, 1629, 1641, and 1642.

Descartes's *Meditations*, 1st ed.: 1641

Descartes's *Principles of Philosophy*: 1644

La Forge's *Treatise on the Human Mind* (*Traité de l'Esprit de l'Homme, de ses facultez et functiones, et de son union avec le corps. Suivant les principes de René Descartes*): 1666

Cordemoy's *Six Discourses on the Union and the Distinction between the Mind and the Body* (*Six Discours sur la Distinction et l'Union du Corps d'Lame*): 1666

Malebranche's *Search After Truth* (*De la Recherché de la Vérité*): 1674/5

Malebranche's *Elucidations of the Search* (*Eclaircissements*): 1678

Newton's *Principia Mathematica*, 1st ed.: 1687

Leibniz's *New System*: 1695

Berkeley's *Principles of Human Knowledge*: 1710

Berkeley's *On Motion*: 1721

Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature*: 1739/40

Hume's *Enquiry Concerning Understanding*: 1748

Ali Sedad's *Principles of Transformation in the Motion of Particles* (*Kavaidü't-Tahavvülat fi Harekati'z-Zerrat*): 1883

Section I

Occasionalism in the Islamic Intellectual History

1

Al-Māturīdī's View of Causality

Nazif Muhtaroğlu

1.1 Introduction

Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī (853-944), the founder of the Māturīdī School, was the originator of an independent strand in the Islamic *kalām* and influenced many people in Central Asia and the old Ottoman world. Nonetheless, western scholarship directed its attention to al-Māturīdī's ideas only after the first half of the 20th century. His main *kalām* work, the *Book of Monotheism* (*Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*), was discovered in 1950.[1] Fathalla Kholeif edited the manuscript first in 1970, albeit with some mistakes.[2] Bekir Topaloğlu and Muhammed Aruçi introduced a much more reliable edition in 2002.[3]

In comparison to the other prominent schools of the *kalām,* such as the Muʿtazila and the Ashʿariyya, scholarly works have shown that al-Māturīdī's ideas cannot be easily classified under either school. In this paper, I explore al-Māturīdī's metaphysics in his *Book of Monotheism* (*Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*), focusing on his view of the causal relationship between God and the universe, and comparing it to the views of the above-mentioned schools.

1. For the original copy in Cambridge Library, ms. Add. No. 3651. See also Joseph Schacht, "New sources for the history of Muhammadan theology," *Studia Islamica* 1 (1953): 23-42.
2. Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd,* ed. Fathalla Kholeif (Beirut: Dar al-Machreq, 1970). For the authenticity of the manuscript, see also Sait Özervarlı, "The Authenticity of the Manuscript of al-Māturīdī's Kit*ā*b al-Tawḥīd: A Reexamination," İslam Araştırmaları Dergisi 1 (1997): 19-29.
3. Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* (*Book of Monotheism*), ed. Bekir Topaloğlu and Muhammed Aruçi (Ankara: İsam Yayınları, 2002).

Al-Māturīdī's view of causality has been subject to diverse interpretations. Mustafa Ceric considers him an atomist and a believer in continuous creation. Thus, for Ceric, al-Māturīdī was among the majority of the Muslim *mutakallimūn*.[4] Yet it is not clear whether by the phrase "the majority of the Muslim *mutakallimūn*" Ceric refers only to the Ashʿarites or to both the Ashʿarites and Muʿtazilites, since both groups were atomists and held that God continues to create the world, though they disagreed on the details of continuous creation. The term "continuous creation" is ambiguous, falling somewhere between occasionalism and constant creation with secondary causality. While occasionalists deny any kind of secondary causality and affirm only divine agency, some believers in constant creation ascribe causal powers to finite beings. Philip Dorroll characterizes al-Māturīdī's perspective as "the metaphysics of flux," wherein the universe is regarded as undergoing continuous transitions between states, all under divine guidance. However, Dorroll neither categorizes this perspective as occasionalism nor explicitly addresses its compatibility with the concept of creaturely causation.[5] Richard Frank focuses on al-Māturīdī's idea of natures (*ṭabāʾiʿ*) and argues that al-Māturīdī ascribed causality to natures but did not treat them as the naturalists did.[6] Ulrich Rudolph neither accepts Frank's interpretation of natures nor affirms that al-Māturīdī totally rejected secondary causes in the universe. For Rudolph, occasionalism, the hallmark of the Ashʿarites, has no role in al-Māturīdī's thought.[7] J. Meric Pessagno examines al-Māturīdī's ideas on the human will and comes to the conclusion that al-Māturīdī affirmed the causal agency of human beings.[8] Ramon Harvey draws on Al-Māturīdī's emphasis on human will and the responsibility for voluntary actions to attribute to al-Māturīdī a view known as concurrentism. This theory posits that both creaturely and divine causality simultaneously contribute to producing an effect. However, Harvey does not provide a substantial argument to support this interpretation,

4. Mustafa Ceric, *Roots of Synthetic Theology in Islam: A Study of the Theology of Abu Mansur Al-Maturidi* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 1995), 109-110.

5. Philip Dorroll, "The Universe in Flux: Reconsidering Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī's Metaphysics and Epistemology," *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 27/2 (2016): 119–35.

6. Richard M Frank, "Notes and Remarks on the *ṭabāʾiʿ* in the teaching of al-Māturīdī," in *Melanges d'islamologie a la memoire d'Armand Abel*, ed. P. Salmon (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974).

7. Ulrich Rudolph, *Al-Maturidi and Sunnitische Theologie in Samarkand* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997), 283-289.

8. J. Meric Pessagno, "Irada, Ihktiyar, Kudra, Kasb, the View of Abu Mansur al-Maturidi," *Journal of American Oriential Society* 104, no. 1 (1984): 177 -191.

indicating that a more detailed examination is deferred to future studies.[9] Māturīdī's treatment of the human will is generally considered to be a reason for his being closer to the Muʿtazilites than to the Ashʿarites.

As we see from these interpretations so far, nobody has argued clearly that al-Māturīdī accepts occasionalism. In the discussion that follows, I argue that a careful study of the *Book of Monotheism* shows that al-Māturīdī holds an occasionalist position. Nonetheless, his occasionalism is not exactly the same as that of the Ashʿarites and carries some elements of Muʿtazilite ideas. In order to understand al-Māturīdī's view of causality properly, first, I briefly present the metaphysical systems of Abū al-Hudhayl al-ʿAllāf (752-841), a significant Muʿtazilite scholar, and al-Ashʿarī (874-936), the founder of the Ashʿarite School. Second, in comparison to these metaphysical systems, I examine al-Māturīdī's metaphysics in terms of its implications for causality.

1.2 Muʿtazilites and Ashʿarites

Although there are various strands of thought associated with the Muʿtazilites, their mainstream metaphysical view is atomism. Al-Ashʿarī was formerly a Muʿtazilite, but he rejected a significant portion of Muʿtazilite ideas later and established his own school, known as "the Ashʿarite School." Nonetheless, he continued to hold to a belief in atomism. One of the detailed accounts of Muʿtazilite atomism belongs to Abū al-Hudhayl al-ʿAllāf, who lived before al-Ashʿarī. I will present the atomistic systems of both scholars and compare them in terms of their causal conclusions.

Abū al-Hudhayl accepts that the universe is made up of indivisible particles (*al-juz' alladhī lā yatajazza'*). He analyzes these particles in terms of two ontological categories: substrate (*maḥall*) and accident (*ʿaraḍ*). An atom may be identified with the substrate, which is the fundamental entity in which attributes and properties (in other words, accidents) inhere. Yet an atom can never exist independently of accidents. According to Abū al-Hudhayl, not even God can strip atoms completely of accidents.[10] Richard M. Frank clarifies this point: "The atom has no actuality, in one sense, apart from accidents."[11]

9. Ramon Harvey, *The Qur'an and the Just Society* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 32-34. Ramon Harvey, *Transcendent God, Rational World: A Māturīdī Theology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 93.

10. Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī, *Maqālāt al-Islāmīn wa ikhtilāf al-Muṣallīn*, ed. H. Ritter (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1963), 311.

11. Richard M. Frank, *The Metaphysics of Created Being According to Abū l-Hudhayl Al-ʿAllāf*, (Istanbul: Netherlands Historische-Archeologisch Instituut, 1966), 43.