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Creation and conservation once more

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Abstract. God is conceived in the Western theistic tradition to be both the Creator and Conservor of the universe. These two roles were typically classed as different aspects of creation, *originating creation* and *continuing creation*. On pain of incoherence, however, conservation needs to be distinguished from creation. Contrary to current analyses (such as Philip Quinn's), creation should be explicated in terms of God's bringing something into being, while conservation should be understood in terms of God's preservation of something over an interval of time. The crucial difference is that while conservation presupposes an object of the divine action, creation does not. Such a construal has significant implications for a tensed theory of time.

INTRODUCTION

'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth' (Gen. 1.1). With majestic simplicity the author of the opening chapter of Genesis thus differentiated his viewpoint, not only from that of the ancient creation myths of Israel's neighbours, but also effectively from pantheism, such as is found in Eastern religions like Vedanta Hinduism and Taoism, from panentheism, whether of classical Neo-platonist vintage or twentieth-century process theology, and from polytheism, from ancient paganism to contemporary Mormonism. He thereby gives us to understand that the universe had a temporal origin and thus implies *creatio ex nihilo* in the temporal sense that God brought the universe into being without a material cause at some point in the finite past.[1]

Later biblical authors so understood the Genesis account of creation.[2] The

[1] Many modern commentators have denied this *prima facie* reading. Usually their claim is that v. 1 should be read as a subordinate circumstantial clause modifying v. 2: 'In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was without form and void …'. In this way, it would appear that God's creation of the world consisted simply in fashioning a cosmos out of a pre-existent chaotic state. But on Gen. 1.1 as an independent clause which is not a mere chapter title, see Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, trans. John Scullion (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), p. 97; John Sailhammer, *Genesis*, Expositor's Bible Commentary 2, ed. Frank Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1990), p. 21.

[2] See, e.g. Is. 44.24. This prophecy, usually dated as exilic, asserts that God made *everything*. Isaiah could never have countenanced the idea that something existed which God did not create. (Cf. Is. 45.18; 24). In the various creation Psalms, the impression is never given that God's creation is not *ex nihilo* (Ps. 33.9). God's eternity is contrasted with the temporal finitude of creation (Ps. 90.2). It would be unthinkable that there should have also existed some co-eternal, uncreated stuff along with God. *Creatio ex nihilo* is the implicit assumption. Job is more explicit (Job 26.7; cf. Ps. 89.11, 12). Proverbs 8.22–31 seems to be an especially interesting reflection on Genesis 1. Particularly significant is the claim that God's

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doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* is also implied in various places in early extra-biblical Jewish literature.[3] And the Church Fathers, while heavily influenced by Greek thought, dug in their heels concerning the doctrine of creation, sturdily insisting, with few exceptions, on the temporal creation of the universe *ex nihilo* in opposition to the eternity of matter.[4] A tradition of robust argumentation against the past eternity of the world and in favour of *creatio ex nihilo*, issuing from the Alexandrian Christian theologian John Philoponus, continued for centuries in Islamic, Jewish and Christian thought.[5] In 1215 the Catholic church promulgated temporal *creatio ex nihilo* as official church doctrine at the Fourth Lateran Council, declaring God to be 'Creator of all things, visible and invisible, … who, by His almighty power, from the beginning of time has created both orders in the same way out of nothing'. This remarkable declaration not only affirms that God created everything *extra se* without any material cause, but even that time itself had a beginning. The doctrine of creation is thus inherently bound up with temporal considerations and entails that God brought the universe into being at some point in the past without any antecedent or contemporaneous material cause.

At the same time, the Christian Scriptures also suggest that God is engaged in a sort of on-going creation, sustaining the universe in being. Christ 'reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of His nature, upholding the universe by his word of power' (Heb. 1.3). Although relatively infrequently attested in Scripture in comparison with the abundant references to God's original act of creation, the idea of continuing creation came to constitute an important aspect of the doctrine of creation as well. For Thomas Aquinas,

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wisdom was with the LORD even when the depths were not yet in existence, for it is precisely the depths which Gen. 1.2 describes. It is God who created the depths and who then took their measure and prescribed their limits (Prov. 8.27–9; cf. Ps. 104.5–9). The New Testament also extols the God who is Maker of heaven and earth and understands the Old Testament doctrine as *creatio ex nihilo* (Rom. 4.17; 11.36; Heb. 11.3; Rev. 4.11). But the most notable contribution of the New Testament is its ascription of *creatio ex nihilo* to the pre-incarnate Christ, who is the Father's agent in creating the world (I Cor. 8.6; Col. 1.16, 17; Heb. 1.2, 3; cf. 2.10). Indeed, Christ is God, since he is the creator of all things (Jn. 1.1–3). The similarity of these passages suggests that the notion of the cosmic Christ was a common motif in the theology of the primitive church. The New Testament writers not only understood the Old Testament to be teaching *creatio ex nihilo*, but went further in identifying the pre-incarnate Christ as the principal agent of creation.

[3] E.g. II Maccabees 7.28; 1QS 3.15; Joseph and Aseneth 12.1–3; II Enoch 25.1ff; 26.1; Odes of Solomon 16.18–19; II Baruch 21.4. For discussion, see Paul Copan, 'Is *Creatio ex nihilo* a Post-biblical Invention?': an Examination of Gerhard May's Proposal,' *Trinity Journal* **17** (1996), pp. 77–93.

[4] *Creatio ex nihilo* is affirmed in the *Shepherd of Hermas* 1.6; 26.1 and the *Apostolic Constitutions* 8.12.6,8; and by Tatian *Oratio ad graecos* 5.3; cf.4.1ff; 12.1; Theophilus *Ad Autolycum* 1.4; 2.4, 10, 13; and Irenaeus *Adversus haeresis* 3.10.3. For discussion, see Gerhard May, *Creatio ex nihilo*: *The Doctrine of* '*Creation out of Nothing*' *in Early Christian Thought*, trans. A. S. Worrall (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994); cf. Copan's review article in note 3.

[5] See Richard Sorabji, *Time, Creation and the Continuum* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1983), pp. 193–252; H. A. Wolfson, 'Patristic Arguments against the Eternity of the World', *Harvard Theological Review* **59** (1966), pp. 354–67; *idem*, *The Philosophy of the Kalam* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976; H. A. Davidson, *Proofs for Eternity, Creation and the Existence of God in Medieval Islamic and Jewish Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Richard C. Dales, *Medieval Discussions of the Eternity of the World*, Studies in Intellectual History 18 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1990).

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for example, this aspect becomes the core doctrine of creation, the question of whether the world's reception of being from God had a temporal commencement or not having only secondary importance.[6] For Aquinas creation is the immediate bestowal of being and as such belongs only to God, the universal principle of being; therefore, creation is *ex nihilo* in that God's causing a creature to exist is immediate. Even if that creature has existed from eternity, it is still created *ex nihilo* in this metaphysical sense.

CREATIO ORIGINANS AND *CREATIO CONTINUANS*

Thus, God is conceived in Christian theology to be the cause of the world both in His initial act of bringing the universe into being and in His on-going conservation of the world in being. These two actions have been traditionally classed as species of *creatio ex nihilo*, namely, *creatio originans* and *creatio continuans*. While this is a handy rubric, it unfortunately quickly becomes problematic if pressed to technical precision, as Philip Quinn has pointed out. In line with the traditional understanding of creation as involving a temporal origination, Quinn initially broached the following definitions,[7] where x is any contingent individual and t any instant of time:

D_1. At t God conserves $x =_{\text{def.}}$ x exists at t iff God at t brings it about that x exists at t

D_2. At t God creates $x =_{\text{def.}}$ God at t brings it about that x exists at t and there is no t' such that t' is before t and x exists at t'

D_3. God continuously creates $x =_{\text{def.}}$ for all t, x exists at t iff at t God creates x

Quinn points out, however, that these definitions entail a bizarre form of occasionalism, according to which no persisting individuals exist. At each instant God creates a new individual, numerically distinct from its chronological predecessor, so that diachronic personal identity and agency are precluded.

One can respond to this difficulty in one of two ways: either by eliminating from the concept of creation any reference to a beginning of existence or by

[6] Thus, Aquinas argues in his second and third ways of proving God's existence for God as the first cause of all things, even while presupposing *ex concessionis* the past eternity of the world (Thomas Aquinas *Summa theologiae* 1a.2.3). Or again, he affirms that *creatio ex nihilo* can be demonstrated, while at the same time admitting that the past temporal finitude of the world cannot be demonstrated, a position which is tenable only because he has 'de-temporalized' the traditional doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* (Idem *Summa contra gentiles* 2.16; 32–8; cf. idem *Summa theologiae* 1a.45.1; 1a.4b.2). Though Aquinas discusses divine conservation, he does not differentiate it from creation (Idem *Summa contra gentiles* 3.65; *Summa theologiae* 1a.104.1).

[7] Philip L. Quinn, 'Divine Conservation, Continuous Creation, and Human Action', in *The Existence and Nature of God*, ed. Alfred J. Freddoso (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), pp. 55–79.

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denying that conservation is properly a species of creation. Quinn initially chose the first route, 'de-temporalizing' creation so that it implies no beginning of existence:

D_4. At t God creates $x =_{\text{def.}}$ God at t brings it about that x exists at t

On (D_4) creation becomes indistinguishable from conservation: 'At t God conserves x' means the same as 'At t God creates x'. We can now speak coherently of *creatio continuans*:

D_5. God continuously creates $x =_{\text{def.}}$ x is a persistent thing, and, for all t, if x exists at t, then at t God creates x

The definition of continuous creation becomes indistinguishable from the definition of continuous conservation.

This first route accords with the Thomistic analysis and also accommodates modern sensibilities, which eschew empirical predictions based on theology. Undoubtedly the popularity of this route has been largely due to theologians' fear of a conflict with science, which *creatio continuans* permits them to avoid by operating only within the safe harbour of metaphysics, removed from the realities of the physical, space-time world.[8] Since the rise of modern theology with Schleiermacher, the doctrine of *creatio originans* has thus been allowed to atrophy, while the doctrine of *creatio continuans* has assumed supremacy.[9] According to Schleiermacher, the Church divided the original expression of the relation of the world to God, that of absolute dependence, into two propositions: that the world was created and that the world is sustained. But there is no reason, he asserts, to retain this distinction, since it is linked to the Mosaic account of creation, which is the product of a mythological age. The question of whether it is possible or necessary to conceive of God as existing apart from created things is a matter of indifference, since it has no bearing on the feeling of absolute dependence on God. Hence, the doctrine of *creatio originans* becomes an irrelevance.

On the other hand, this first route tends to compromise the teaching of Scripture and the Church that a temporal beginning is a vital element of the

[8] Good examples of such timorousness include Langdon Gilkey, *Maker of Heaven and Earth* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1959), pp. 310–315; Ian Barbour, *Issues in Science and Religion* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 383–385; Arthur Peacocke, *Creation and the World of Science* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), pp. 78–79. By way of contrast see Wolfhart Pannenberg, 'Theological Questions to Scientists', in *The Sciences and Theology in the Twentieth Century*, ed. A. R. Peacocke, Oxford International Symposia (Stocksfield, England: Oriel Press, 1981), p. 12; Ted Peters, 'On Creating the Cosmos', in *Physics, Philosophy, and Theology: a Common Quest for Understanding*, ed. R. Russell, W. Stoeger, and G. Coyne (Vatican City: Vatican Observatory, 1988), p. 291; Robert J. Russell, 'Finite Creation without a Beginning: the Doctrine of Creation in Relation to Big Bang and Quantum Cosmologies', in *Quantum Cosmology and the Laws of Nature*, ed. R. J. Russell, N. Murphy, and C. J. Isham (Vatican City: Vatican Observatory, 1993), pp. 303–10.

[9] F. D. E. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, 2d ed., ed. H. R. MacIntosh and J. S. Stewart (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1928), 36.1, 2; 41; pp. 142–3, 155.

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doctrine of creation. It is clear that the biblical authors' notion of creation is not some metaphysical doctrine of ontological dependence, but involves the idea of a temporal origin of that which is created. The nearly ubiquitous use of the past-tense with verbs of creation in the Scriptures is alone sufficient to establish the point. Moreover, the Church has so understood creation. By contrast Quinn's re-definitions ignore the temporal aspect of creation, thus leading to a depreciation of temporal *creatio ex nihilo*:

> For God to create or conserve an individual at an instant is merely for him at that instant to bring about the existence of the individual at the instant … Seen in this light, the question of whether the cosmos of contingent things was introduced into existence *ex nihilo* after a period of time when nothing contingent existed becomes relatively unimportant for theistic orthodoxy.[10]

While this conclusion may be congenial to modern theologians, it must be said that the modern *modus operandi* of hermetically sealing off theology from science has tended to make theology itself something of an irrelevance. This is all the more tragic because modern cosmology, which studies the large-scale structure and origin of the universe, has been strongly confirmatory of a doctrine of *creatio originans*. Moreover, since Quinn is offering us *definitions*, not mere explications, of divine creation, they must accord with our pre-philosophical intuitions and language.[11] But there does seem to be an intuitive, conceptual distinction between creation and conservation which is obscured by treating the latter as a species of creation. As John Duns Scotus observed,

> Properly speaking … it is only true to say that a creature is created at the first moment (of its existence) and only after that moment is it conserved, for only then does its being have this order to itself as something that was, as it were, there before. Because of these different conceptual relationships implied by the words 'create' and 'conserve' it follows that one does not apply to a thing when the other does.[12]

Rather than re-interpret creation in such a way as to not involve a time at which a thing first begins to exist, we ought perhaps to treat *creatio continuans* as a *façon de parler* and to try to distinguish creation from conservation.

CREATION AND CONSERVATION

In his most recent work Quinn does differentiate between creation and conservation.[13] He offers the following postulate and definitions:

[10] Quinn, 'Continuous Creation', pp. 70, 74. Of course, it is no part of the doctrine of creation that the cosmos was created *in* time rather than *with* time. But Quinn means to downplay the importance of any introduction into existence *ex nihilo* of the cosmos.

[11] On definitions and explications, see Samuel Gorowitz *et al.*, *Philosophical Analysis*, 3rd ed. (New York: Random House, 1979), pp. 135–40.

[12] John Duns Scotus, *God and Creatures*, trans. E. Alluntis and A. Wolter (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), p. 276.

[13] See Philip Quinn, 'Creation, Conservation, and the Big Bang', in *Philosophical Problems of the Internal and External Worlds*, ed. John Earman, Allen I. Janis, Gerald J. Massey, and Nicholas Rescher (Pittsburgh:

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A. Necessarily, for all x and t, if x exists at t, God willing that x exists at t brings about x existing at t.

D_6. God creates x at $t =_{\text{def.}}$ God willing that x exists at t brings about x existing at t, and there is no t' prior to t such that x exists at t'

D_7. God conserves x at $t =_{\text{def.}}$ God willing that x exists at t brings about x existing at t, and there is some t' prior to t such that x exists at t'

Unfortunately, these definitions remain problematic. First, in contrast to Quinn's initial definitions, they construe divine causation as a sort of state-state causation rather than as agent causation. The *bringing about* relation is said to be a special relation of metaphysical causation which holds between the state of affairs *God willing that x exists at t* and *x existing at t*.[14] Thus, Quinn says, 'My account of creation and conservation rests on the … assumption that there is a special two place relation of divine bringing about defined on ordered pairs of states of affairs'.[15] On Quinn's account there are thus contingent states of affairs like *x existing at t* which are not brought about or metaphysically caused by God, which is incompatible with an adequate doctrine of creation.[16]

Secondly, even if we revert to D_2, Quinn's definitions still fail to capture the essence of creation. Creation and conservation are distinguished in his account only in virtue of the accidental feature of something's existing or not at a time prior to the time at which God brings it about that x exists. Indeed, Quinn takes it as a virtue of his account that creation and conservation are intrinsically the same: those who differentiate creation and conservation 'seem to suppose that the kind of power required to create something *ex nihilo* is different from the sort of power needed merely to keep it from lapsing back into nonbeing once it has been created'.[17] 'But', according to Quinn, 'the power and action involved in the bringing about are the same in both cases'.[18] Accordingly, all that differentiates creation from conservation of x is the adventitious fact of x's prior existence.[19]

University of Pittsburgh Press, 1993), pp. 589–612; cf. *idem*, 'Divine Conservation, Secondary Causes, and Occasionalism', in *Divine and Human Action*, ed. Thomas V. Morris (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1988), pp. 50–73.

[14] Quinn, 'Secondary Causes', p. 52.

[15] Quinn, 'Big Bang', pp. 596–7.

[16] Hence, it is difficult to understand what Quinn means when he asserts, 'According to this account, then, divine volition brings about the existence of every contingent individual at every instant at which it exists …' (*Ibid.* p. 597), for this is precisely what his account does *not* state. If he allows that God's volition brings about the existence of individuals, then why define creation and conservation in terms of the superfluous state-state causation envisioned by Quinn?

[17] Quinn, 'Secondary Causes', p. 54.

[18] *Ibid.* p. 55.

[19] This is a very common failing. Cf. similar assertions by Kvanvig and McCann: from the point of view of the creative act, 'it is not even possible to distinguish God's bringing things to be from His sustaining them in existence' (Jonathan L. Kvanvig and Hugh J. McCann, 'Divine Conservation and the Persistence of the World', in *Divine and Human Action*, p. 49); God's 'creating and conserving the world are, from the point of view of the act itself, indistinguishable, a seamless endeavor consistent with the

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But those who differentiate creation and conservation need not, *pace* Quinn, find the intrinsic difference between them in the divine power and action, but may see it rather in the terminus of that action. Intuitively, creation involves God's bringing something into being. Thus, if God creates some entity *e* (whether an individual or an event) at a time *t* (whether an instant or finite interval), then *e* comes into being at *t*. We can explicate this last notion as follows:

E_1. *e* comes into being at *t* iff (i) *e* exists at *t*, (ii) *t* is the first time at which *e* exists, and (iii) *e*'s existing at *t* is a tensed fact

Accordingly,

E_2. God creates *e* at *t* iff God brings it about that *e* comes into being at *t*

God's creating *e* involves *e*'s coming into being, which is an absolute beginning of existence, not a transition of *e* from non-being into being. In creation there is no patient entity on which the agent acts to bring about its effect.[20] It follows that creation is not a type of change, since there is no enduring subject which persists from one state to another.[21] It is precisely for this reason that conservation cannot be properly thought of as essentially the same as creation. For conservation does presuppose a subject which is made to continue from one state to another. In creation God does not act on a subject, but constitutes the subject by His action; in contrast, in conservation God acts on an existent subject to perpetuate its existence. This is the import of Scotus's remark that only in conservation does a creature 'have this order to itself as something that was, as it were, there before'. In conservation there is a patient entity on which the agent acts to produce its effect.

To analyze God's conservation of *e*, along Quinn's lines, as God's re-creation of *e* anew at each instant or moment of *e*'s existence is to run the risk of falling into the radical occasionalism of certain medieval Islamic theologians, who, out of their desire to make God not only the creator of the world, but also its ground of being, denied that the constituent atoms of things endure from one instant to another but are rather created in new states of being by God at every successive instant.[22] The Islamic *mutakallimun*

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divine simplicity … and responsible for every instant of the world's existence' (Hugh J. McCann, 'Creation and Conservation', in *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, Blackwell Companions to Philosophy 8, ed. Philip L. Quinn and Charles Taliaferro (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1997), p. 308). A similar tendency is evident in James F. Ross, 'Creation', *Journal of Philosophy* **77** (1980), 614–19; *idem*, 'Creation II', in *Existence and Nature of God*.

[20] As noted by Alfred J. Freddoso, 'Medieval Aristotelianism and the Case against Secondary Causation in Nature', in *Divine and Human Action*, p. 79. For the scholastics causation is a relation between substances (agents) who act upon other substances (patients) to bring about states of affairs (effects). *Creatio ex nihilo* is atypical because in that case no patient is acted upon.

[21] Rightly so Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles* 2.17.

[22] See Majid Fakhry, *Islamic Occasionalism and its Critique by Averroës and Aquinas* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1958), p. 30.

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therefore denied the reality of secondary causation, leaving God as the sole cause of change.[23]

There are actually two forms of occasionalism courted by Quinn: (1) the occasionalism implied by a literal *creatio continuans* according to which similar, but numerically distinct, individuals are created at each successive instant, and (2) the occasionalism which affirms diachronic individual identity, but denies the reality of *transeunt* secondary causation. Quinn insists that his account of *creatio continuans* avoids (1) because his definitions presuppose that *x* is a persistent thing. But is it even coherent to affirm that God creates a persistent entity anew at every instant? If at every *t* God creates *ex nihilo*, is it really *x* which exists at successive instants rather than a series of simulacra? Since there is no patient subject on which the agent acts in creation, how is it that it is the identical subject which is re-created each instant out of nothing rather than a numerically distinct, but similar, subject? This difficulty may be sharpened by noting that Quinn's (D_7) allows that there may be temporal intervals separating the instants at which *x* exists. Not only does this feature of (D_7) render it an inadequate definition of conservation (since intuitively each new beginning of *x*'s existence represents creation, not conservation), but it also exacerbates one's doubts about *x*'s diachronic identity on Quinn's account of conservation. Quinn dismisses the objection that God cannot create one and the same individual more than once and appeals to the

[23] It is very interesting to compare Kvanvig and McCann's development on this score with Quinn's. Whereas Quinn claims that 'because God can repeatedly create a single individual at every instant in a finite interval throughout which it persists, God can repeatedly create, or recreate, one and the same individual' (Quinn, 'Continuous Creation', p. 76), Kvanvig and McCann deny 'that each of the things God creates somehow begins to exist *anew* at each moment of its duration … Rather what is intended is a view according to which each instant of the existence of any of God's creatures is as radically contingent as any other …' (Kvanvig and McCann, 'Divine Conservation', p. 15). They think that they are re-affirming Quinn's position, but his view is much more radical than the common claim that every instant of a creature's existence is equally contingent, as is evident from his affirmation that God's conservation of the same individual could be discontinuous. For Quinn, an individual is re-created anew at every instant at which it exists. McCann does not dispute that such continuous re-creation would preclude diachronic identity; instead, he attempts to block the inference from conservation to continual re-creation by denying that the world is 'in any process of continually passing away and being re-created', with the emphasis on *process*: 'there can be no process of the world's passing away, just as there can be none of its coming to be' (McCann, 'Creation and Conservation', p. 307). But it is no part of Islamic occasionalism that ceasing to exist and being created are processes; quite the contrary. At each successive instant God creates *e* afresh, rather than acts upon *e* to preserve it from instant to instant. Thus, the absence of process is irrelevant to whether continual creation precludes diachronic identity. Kvanvig and McCann also affirm in their early work that secondary causes are operative in nature to produce changes in things (Kvanvig and McCann, 'Divine Conservation', p. 16), but in their later article they argue that in fact there is no causal nexus among things and events in the world because both diachronic and synchronic causation are impossible (Jonathan L. Kvanvig and Hugh J. McCann, 'The Occasionalist Proselytizer: a Modified Catechism', in *Philosophical Perspectives*, vol. 5: *Philosophy of Religion*, ed. James E. Tomberlin [Atascadero, Calif.: Ridgeview Publishing, 1991], pp. 598–609). Perhaps they mean only to re-affirm their earlier position that secondary causes produce only changes in things, not their existence; but their arguments, if successful, seem to strike down any causal relations between creatures. They claim not to defend the view that there are no genuine interactions among creatures; but it is difficult to see what room is left in their account for such. When they say of the collision and acceleration of billiard balls, 'It is simply a question of the things God creates being what they are rather than something else' (Ibid., pp. 611–612), this sounds very much like Islamic occasionalism. God creates things afresh in different states of being at each successive instant, and secondary causal relations become mere Humean relations.

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doctrine of eschatological resurrection as positive support of his position.[24] But traditionally the identity of resurrected persons was vouchsafed by the doctrine of the intermediate state of the soul or by God's using the remains of or the same material particles that constituted the mortal body, and apart from these doctrines it is very difficult to see why a body created *de novo* in the end time is the same person or body which lived and ceased to exist long before.[25]

Quinn also denies that his account of conservation implies type (2) occasionalism. This is because his state-state causation says nothing about whether or how events are brought about. For all it says, events like *x* being *F* at *t* have causes only in Hume's sense, not in the sense of being brought about by God. Indeed, Quinn confesses that the empiricist in him inclines him toward such a position.[26] But such a position seems both implausible and theologically unacceptable. If the fire when brought into proximity with the cotton does not blacken the cotton, but is merely part of an event regularly conjoined and continuous with the event of the cotton's turning black, then the fire's being brought into proximity with the cotton is merely the occasion upon which the cotton turns black. But if God, then, does not turn the cotton black upon such occasions, as Islamic occasionalists believed, then the cotton's turning black seems to be utterly mysterious and magical. This is not only incredible, but impugns the providence of God. Moreover, if God does conserve *x* at *t*, then He must not only conserve *x* in abstraction, but *x* in its concrete particularity with all its properties.[27] God does not simply conserve the piece of cotton at *t*, but the blackened, smoldering piece of cotton at *t*. For the cotton to exist in all its particularity at *t* God must bring about its existing with its properties. Therefore, conservation requires God to be a cause of *x* being *F* at *t*. If, then, there are mere Humean causes in nature, occasionalism follows.

Quinn does entertain as well an account of secondary causation according to which secondary causes act to bring about their effects, just as God does. But he insists that such an account is compatible with his doctrine of conservation because that doctrine does not entail that God willing *x* is *F* at *t* brings about *x* being *F* at *t*. This account, however, is incompatible with divine providence. For either God wills that *x* is *F* at *t* or not. If not, then God is utterly indifferent to what happens in the world, conserving it in being but not caring what happens in it, which denies God's providence. Suppose, then, that God does will that *x* is *F* at *t*. Then His will is either directive or permissive. If His will is directive, then God is impotent, since on Quinn's account *x* being *F* at *t* is not brought about by God willing that *x* is *F* at *t*.

[24] Quinn, 'Continuous Creation', p. 76.

[25] For discussion see Stephen T. Davis, *Risen Indeed* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1993), chap.7.

[26] Quinn, 'Secondary Causes', p. 60.

[27] On this point see the extremely interesting piece by Alfred J. Freddoso, 'God's General Concurrence with Secondary Causes: Why Conservation is not Enough', in *Philosophical Perspectives*, pp. 553–85.

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But if God's will is merely permissive, then divine providence is again denied, since God does not directly will anything to happen.

The same point can be made in another way. Suppose that x being F at t brings about y being G at t^*. The latter state of affairs entails that y exists at t^*, a state of affairs which, on Quinn's account, is brought about by God willing that y exists at t^*. Such a circumstance seems to preclude God's free choice not to will that y exists at t^*. Granted, x being F at t does not bring about God willing that y exists at t^*, since *bringing about* is not closed under entailment. Still, given the efficacy of secondary causes, God seems to have no choice but to will that y exists at t^*. Quinn, however, interprets this entailment in terms of divine concurrence: x being F at t cannot act to bring about its effect unless divine volition actively concurs in bringing about its effect at that time. But Quinn cannot mean that y being G at t^* is brought about both by x being F at t and God willing that y is G at t^* (which is what divine concurrence holds) for his account precludes this. Rather he must mean that God wills that y exists at t^* because He knows what x being F at t will bring about and He wills that its effect should be produced. In other words, He wills that y is G at t.* The same goes for x being F at t , otherwise He would not have willed that x exist at t. On Quinn's account of concurrence, then, God does actively will the effects of secondary causes, but His will is impotent, bringing about nothing in that respect. Not only does this impugn divine omnipotence, but it remains mysterious why God willing that y exists at t^* should be causally efficacious and yet His willing that y is G at t^* is not. Moreover, the same problem discussed above reappears on this account: in order to bring about y existing at t^*, God must bring about y existing with all its properties at t^*, so that conservation implies genuine divine concurrence, namely, God,s bringing about y being G at t^*.

It is therefore unhelpful to blur the distinction between divine conservation and creation. The fundamental difference between creation and conservation, as we have seen, lies in the fact that in conservation, as opposed to creation, there is presupposed a subject on which God acts. Intuitively, conservation involves God's preservation of that subject in being over time. A fundamental flaw in Quinn's definition of conservation is that he construes it as instantaneous. Not only does this subvert the meaning of 'conservation', but it spawns counter-intuitive results as well. For example, on Quinn's (D_7) an individual which exists only for an instant is not conserved because it fails to exist at a *prior* time; but intuitively we should say that the reason it is not conserved is because it fails to persist until a *later* time. Or again, an individual which exists merely for an instant is, on (D_7), conserved so long as it also existed at a single, remote, prior instant, a scenario which intuitively has nothing to do with conservation. Or again, an individual which exists for only a finite time but lacks a first instant of existence is, on Quinn's account, conserved, but never created; but then one by definition has precluded the

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universe's being such an individual – unless one is prepared to abandon the doctrine of creation.

All this serves to underline the fact that conservation ought to be understood in terms of God's preserving some entity *e* from one moment of its existence to another. A crucial insight into conservation is that unlike creation, it does involve transition and therefore cannot occur at an instant. We may therefore provide the following explication of divine conservation:

E_3. God conserves *e* iff God acts upon *e* to bring about *e*'s existing from *t* until some $t^* > t$ through every sub-interval of the interval $t \rightarrow t^*$

In this light the statement that creating and conserving the world are, with respect to the act itself, indistinguishable is misleading. For creating and conserving cannot be adequately analyzed with respect to the act alone, but involve relations to the object of the act. The act itself (the causing of existence) may be the same in both cases, but in one case may be instantaneous and presupposes no prior object, whereas in the other case occurs over an interval and does involve a prior object.

CREATION, CONSERVATION, AND TENSE

The doctrine of creation also involves an important metaphysical feature which is rarely appreciated and is missed by Quinn's tenseless definitions: it commits one to a tensed or, in McTaggart's convenient terminology, an A-Theory of time.[28] For if one adopts a tenseless or B-Theory of time, then things do not literally come into existence. Things are then four-dimensional objects which tenselessly subsist and begin to exist only in the sense that their extension along their temporal dimension is finite in the *earlier-than* direction. The whole four-dimensional, space-time manifold is extrinsically (as opposed to intrinsically) timeless, existing co-eternally with God. The universe thus does not come into being on a B-Theory of time, regardless of whether it has a finite or an infinite past relative to any time. Hence, clause (iii) in E_2 represents a necessary feature of creation. In the absence of clause (iii) God's creation of the universe *ex nihilo* could be interpreted along tenseless lines to postulate merely the finitude of cosmic time in the *earlier than* direction.

What about conservation? At first blush this notion would seem to be much more amenable to a tenseless construal. God can be conceived to act tenselessly on *e* to sustain it from t_1 to t_2. But a moment's reflection reveals this construal to be problematic. What if *e* exists only at *t*? Or what if *e* is the whole, four-dimensional space-time block? In neither case can God be said to conserve *e*, according to our definition. Yet on a tenseless view of time God is the source of being for such entities and therefore in some sense sustains

[28] On A- versus B-Theories of time: see Richard Gale, 'The Static versus the Dynamic Temporal: Introduction', in *The Philosophy of Time*, ed. Richard M. Gale (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1968), pp. 65–85.

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them. Similarly, if we countenance timeless, abstract objects in our ontology, then God must be the source of their being as well. In their case there is properly speaking no conservation, no preserving them in existence from one moment to another. The existence of such entities would seem to necessitate a third category of creation not contemplated by the classical theologians, since they admitted no timeless entities apart from God, what we might, on the pattern of *creatio originans* and *creatio continuans*, as a *façon de parler* call *creatio stans*, a sort of static creation. *Creatio stans* is the relation appropriate to a B-Theory of time. We can use 'sustenance' as the technical term for such divine action and explicate it as follows:

E_4. God sustains *e* iff either *e* exists tenselessly at *t* or *e* exists timelessly, and God brings it about that *e* exists.

The very idea of the need for conservation in being thus also implies an A-Theory of time, according to which temporal becoming is real and moments of time do elapse and cease to be. Conservation of an entity is necessary if that entity, like the moment at which it exists, is not to lapse into non-being. On a B-Theory of time, no such lapse occurs, and so conservation is unnecessary, indeed, excluded, if God is timeless. Rather God is engaged in sustaining the four-dimensional universe as a whole and every entity in it, whether that entity has a temporal extension or exists merely at an instant. Thus, even conservation is compromised if definitions of it are given which are compatible with a B-Theory of time.

CONCLUSION

In summary, we have seen that Scripture and tradition conceive of God as both the Creator and the Conservor of the world, the former having reference to His initial act of bringing the universe into being out of nothing and the latter referring to His preservation of the world in being from one moment to another. The widespread tendency among scholars to conflate these two actions on God's part flouts the witness of Scripture and the Church, has heightened the sense of theology's irrelevance to the real world, and runs roughshod over important philosophical differences between the two. Creation is distinct from conservation in that the former does not presuppose a patient entity but involves God's bringing something into being, whereas the latter does presuppose a patient entity and involves God's acting on it to preserve it from one moment to another – notions which both imply a metaphysic of objective temporal becoming.

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