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Persistence and divine conservation

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Abstract: **Plausibly, if an object persists through time, then its later existence must be caused by its earlier existence. Many theists endorse a theory of continuous creation, according to which God is the sole cause of a creature's existence at a given time. The conjunction of these two theses rather unfortunately implies that no object distinct from God persists at all. What strategies for resolving this difficulty are available?**

Introduction

Some thinkers have believed that a necessary condition of an object's persistence through time is a causal connection between the object's earlier states and its later states. Such a condition might be thought to be needed in order to distinguish genuine persistence from instantaneous replacement by an exact duplicate. It seems possible that a contingently existing object cease entirely to exist, and that this change should go unnoticed because an exactly qualitatively similar object takes his place, and does so seamlessly, i.e. leaving no intermediate time at which neither of the two exists. This is what would happen, it seems, if the object's existence were not at least a partial cause of the existence of a very similar object only a moment later. If there were no causal connection, we would have a case not of persistence but of replacement by a duplicate. ('Replacement' for short.) Let us call the condition that causal dependence between a thing's earlier and later states is necessary for persistence the immanent-causation thesis.

Some thinkers have been occasionalists. That is, they have believed that only God (or perhaps God's actions) can be genuine causes. Other objects or events are at best occasional causes. To say that something is an occasional cause is not to say that it is a cause at all, but only that it provides the occasion on which God acts. All genuine causation is due to the first cause; there is no secondary, creaturely causation. The beaker of water is placed above the flame, the water is heated. But it is God who brings about the water's being heated, the beaker's placement merely providing the circumstances of God's causal activity.

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The conjunction of occasionalism and the immanent-causation thesis entails that no object distinct from God persists through time – an unattractive result. If persistence requires immanent causation and only God can truly cause, then what we ordinarily regard as persistence is 'occasional persistence'. That is to say, ordinary objects do not persist at all, but the states of whatever momentary objects exist are merely the occasions for God to cause similar things to exist later on. (The term 'occasional persistence' is thus misleading, but it preserves the analogy with 'occasional cause', which is also misleading.)

Some would say the believer in persistent creatures must reject occasionalism. Many theists would be willing to do so; occasionalism has been a minority view. However, the same question looms if we hold the much more widely held view that every persisting object exists only because God holds it in existence at each moment. The notion of continuous creation, intended to explicate God's providential conservation of his creatures, poses something of a threat to the creatures' persistence through time. Can this threat be escaped?

The immanent-causation thesis

Let's assume that the relata of the causal dependence relation are events, and that events are objects' exemplification of properties at a time or times. The immanent-causation thesis, then, is this:

> Necessarily, if a contingent object O exists at a time *t* and *t* is not the earliest time at which O exists, then O's existing at *t* depends causally on O's existing at some earlier time.

Put briefly, immanent causation is necessary for persistence. By 'immanent causation' I mean intra-object causation, causation of an object's state by some other state of the object.[1] No particular account of that causation is assumed here. The words 'immanent causation' can attach to either the analysandum or the analysans, to the notion to be analysed or to a certain analysis of it. I will attach it to the analysandum.

Many philosophers have either assumed or asserted the immanent-causation thesis.[2] The thesis has also been pivotal in the contemporary debate about resurrection and personal identity, where the immanent-causation thesis has generally been treated as a constraint on physicalist theories.[3]

Continuous-creation theory

The version of continuous-creation theory I'd like to begin with is due to Philip Quinn.[4] The theory is one in which created things depend on God's sustaining activity, not only when they are first created, but at all later times as well. Quinn aims to show that such a theory need not commit its proponent to occasionalism, contrary to the claims of some. This should be welcome in the present context. If occasionalism, together with the immanent-causation thesis,

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has an unpalatable and unbelievable consequence, perhaps a weaker theory of conservation is needed.

Quinn states his theory of conservation this way:

> Necessarily, for all [contingent individuals] *x* and [instants] *t*, if *x* exists at *t*, God willing that *x* exists at *t* brings about *x* existing at *t*.[5]

Note that on this theory the divine activities of creation and sustenance have the same account. The case in which time *t* is the first instant at which an object exists is not an exception to the general rule.

Quinn proceeds to argue that on the three main theories of causation currently in circulation (constant-conjunction theories, counterfactual theories, and necessitarian theories), his continuous-creation theory does not have the consequence that God brings about every event. God causes the existence of each contingent thing – that is, each event of the type *x existing at t* is brought about by *God's willing that x exist at t* – but created things may cause an object to have properties other than existence. Only God makes a thing exist, though others may shape its character. As Quinn sums matters up, 'God and the lit match collaborate to produce the heated water: God provides the water, and the lit match provides the heat.'[6] The provision of the heat is itself collaborative in a way that the provision of the water is not. The match's causal contribution depends on the match's existence, which in turn depends on God's causal activity.[7] Still, the match does have a causal contribution. Quinn seems to me to be successful in crafting a continuous-creation theory that does not imply occasionalism.

The problem is that this theory, too, when conjoined to the immanent causation thesis, implies that there are no persistent creatures. Persistence requires immanent causation for a thing's later existence, but continuous creation identifies God (or God's willing) as the cause.

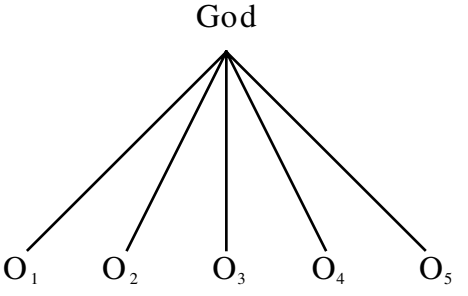


Diagram: Causal relations according to continuous-creation theory.
Each O_n is an event, object O's existing at time *n*.
In each case the event depends solely on God's activity and not on earlier events in the series.

A co-operative model of bringing about an object's existence might seem helpful here, but in order to make his theory a continuous-creation theory Quinn

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explicitly understands the *bringing about* relation to be marked by totality and exclusivity. In his words,

> … what does the bringing about is the total cause of what is brought about; nothing else is required by way of causal contribution in order for the effect to obtain. … what does the bringing about is the sole cause of what is brought about; causal overdetermination is also ruled out.[8]

It is striking that even an attempt to distance continuous-creation theory from occasionalism does not distance the view far enough to avoid this puzzle about the possibility of persistence.

Are there, perhaps, other formulations of continuous-creation theory, ones that avoid the problem? It won't do to switch the ground of identity from God's activity to the creature's, i.e. to ground the identity of object A with a quickly following object B in A causing B's character. Whether or not such a theory is successful, it is not a continuous-creation theory. To say that A's causal activity is the ground of B's identity with A is to say that the existence of B (i.e. of A) at the later time is caused in part by A. So in this case, God is not the sole cause of the object's existence at the later time. And if the divine cause is not the sole, total cause of its existence – if God's act of will does not (in Quinn's sense) bring about its existence – then persistence does not happen by continuous creation after all.

Jonathan Edwards characterizes the notion of continued (or continuous) creation precisely: a created thing's existence at a given moment 'is not merely in part from God, but wholly from him'.[9] This is what makes God's preservation of created things 'equivalent to a *continued creation*, or to his creating those things out of nothing at each moment of their existence'.[10] Edwards adds that God's upholding created substance 'differs not at all from the first creation, but only *circumstantially*'.[11] The definition of this term of art 'continuous creation' rules out the co-operative models of persistence that might satisfy the immanent-causation thesis. In short, it does not seem that any other version of continuous-creation theory could do better with the persistence puzzle than Quinn's theory does.

The sense of 'continuous creation'

It is important to notice that Edwards's definition of 'continued creation' is narrower than a historically and presently common definition of the term. Often '*continuata creatio*' and its translations refer simply to creation as an ongoing act, God's continuing preservation of the world that depends on Him – that is, as conservation. In contrast, Edwards says that what characterizes continuous creation is the resemblance of the preservation at each moment to the creation at the first moment, not only in that the Creator's work sustains what exists, but also in that no other agent acts to sustain. Edwards's continued creation is distinct from conservation *per se*. Often, however, 'continuous creation' is used as another name for conservation.[12]

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My usage follows Edwards's. I've typically used the phrase 'continuous-creation theory' to make clear that it is one among several ways of understanding divine conservation. Quinn's theory is a continuous-creation theory, but Aquinas's seems not to be, since he says that some created things are preserved through secondary causes.[13]

The terminological differences produce some dangers. One of these is that discussion of continuous creation in the broader sense can easily give the impression that continuous creation in the narrower sense is part of Christian orthodoxy. A quickly following danger is the restricted range of solutions to the puzzle with which we began.

To that puzzle we now return. We saw above that we need to reject continuous-creation theory, the immanent-causation thesis, or the persistence of created objects. For present purposes I will take it for granted that some created object persists over some interval of time. The question, then, is whether divine conservation should be understood as something other than continuous creation, or the necessity of immanent causation for persistence should be denied (or both). Let's explore those strategies in turn.

Denying the immanent-causation thesis

Suppose first that we deny the immanent-causation thesis. This raises a question about what makes for the difference between persistence and replacement. Were we affirming the immanent-causation thesis, we could give an answer (or at least a partial answer) by pointing out that persistence has a necessary condition that replacement does not, viz. immanent causation. So we would like, if possible, to identify an informative necessary condition of persistence that is absent in cases of replacement. The question of what such condition there might be I will call the 'persistence/replacement question'.

Once we have ruled out immanent causation, it is difficult to see what might distinguish cases of persistence from cases of replacement. Spatial location does not do the job. Nor do momentary intrinsic properties, the like of mass, shape, charge, and mental state. I am dismissing what we might call a 'bare' psychological continuity theory of persistence rather quickly – but surely God could replace me, or any conscious creature, with a psychological duplicate.

How else might one account for the difference between persistence and replacement? Below we will consider three answers: first, the difference is grounded in immanent causation of character rather than existence; second, the difference is grounded in a difference in divine intentions; and third, there is no further account to be given. But before these, one pre-emptive consideration.

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Temporal parts and mereological universalism

Could we avoid the whole puzzle by adopting temporal parts along with mereological universalism? Let's call the proponent of temporal parts who believes that every plurality of objects has a mereological sum a Lewisian. If the Lewisian were right, there would be persisting objects (objects existing at more than one time), causal connections or no, so the immanent-causation thesis would be false. What distinguishes persistence from replacement for the Lewisian, if anything does? The 'replacement' case does have a persisting object, itself the sum of two or more objects of the same sort (e.g. two people).[14] But when the immanent-causal chain is broken in this way we cannot plausibly claim the whole is one person. Rather, it is the sum of two (or more) people. Even for the Lewisian there is a real difference between persistence of an individual person and replacement by another. So consider a kind-relative version of the immanent-causation thesis:

> Necessarily, if a human being H exists at a time *t* and *t* is not the earliest time at which H exists, then H's existence at *t* is caused by H's existence at some earlier time.

A restricted immanent-causation thesis like this (and many similar versions) will be plausible to the Lewisian. Arbitrary sums need not be united by any immanent-causal relations, but humans must be. I conclude that Lewisians (as well as temporal-parts theorists with less ambitious mereologies) face a serious puzzle here. For simplicity I will continue to refer to the immanent-causation thesis in its original version.

Identity grounded in causation of character

Recalling our earlier thought, suppose that immanent causation of an object's *character* is necessary for its persistence, though God is the sole cause of its existence at any moment. An apple's existence at a particular time, say, is due entirely to divine causal activity. The same apple exists from one moment to another only if its character – its firmness, sweetness, size, and so on – at an earlier moment causes its character at a later moment. The apple is thus causally active, and occasionalism is false. But the apple does not cause its later existence. Rather, its causal activity is a necessary condition of God's causing its later existence; if God wants the apple to persist, He must arrange for immanent causation of character as well as His own causal activity.

As noted above, such a theory is not a continuous-creation theory. It also violates the immanent-causation thesis, which requires immanent causation of *existence* for persistence. The present tack thus takes both of the main strategies for preserving in theory the persistence of creatures. The view is prima facie consistent, and it answers the persistence/replacement question. So far forth, it seems to be a viable solution to our puzzle.

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It raises questions of its own, however. Given that immanent causation of character is necessary for persistence, is it sufficient as well? Presumably not – that is to say, causation of character is not sufficient for the identity of the agent with the patient; the identity of agent and patient that makes causation immanent *is* sufficient, but it's the *causation* that we are now concerned with. If there is secondary causation at all, apparently one object's states sometimes cause those of another. Were there any doubt on this point, we could observe that more than one object may have causal influence on the character of an object. The heat of the match and coolness of the air together bring about the tepidity of the water, but the water is not identical to the match or to the air. Besides this, the character of the first created objects could only have been caused by God's action, but of course God is distinct from the objects so created.

What, then, *is* sufficient for persistence? Why does causation of character result in the persistence of the agent in some cases but not in others? Similarity of cause and effect might seem a good candidate, since the states of persisting objects tend to resemble each other much more than they do the states of their environments. Then again this would rule out the possibility of a persisting object that underwent radical, instantaneous change – not a clear impossibility. And there are other difficulties. Similarity comes in degrees; identity does not. That there is some critical degree of similarity that supports identity, while the slightest bit less does not, strains credibility. There is also the matter of multiple causes or, better, causal factors. If the character of an object is caused in part by its earlier character and in part by its environment, why is it the latter that (so to speak) passes its identity to the causal patient?

I have not shown that the present theory must fail. Still, as it stands, the theory that grounds identity in immanent causation of character is short on independent motivation and surrounded by threats. Let's turn toward two other (hopefully more promising) answers to the persistence/replacement question.

Divine-fiat theory

Suppose that immanent causation is not needed for persistence but that an object persists rather than being replaced simply because God intends the object to persist. A necessary condition of an object's persistence is a divine intention (or 'decree') that it persist, and this intention is absent in all cases of replacement. Had God intended merely that there be something very similar at later times, the similar object (or objects) would have been a duplicate (or duplicates) instead. Let's call this the divine-fiat theory.

A couple of misunderstandings should be forestalled. It might look as if such a view commits it holder to a pernicious haecceitism, distancing the 'thisnesses' from the 'suchnesses', but that's not quite right. To show that the view committed us to haecceitism, we would need 'qualitatively identical' objects (or worlds) that are nonetheless distinct, as in the case of Max Black's iron spheres.[15]

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On the divine-fiat theory the two possibilities of a creature's persistence and replacement *do* differ with respect to qualitative properties – in particular, with respect to qualitative relational properties. In one world, God has an intention toward the creature at a certain time, an intention to preserve it; in the other world, God has no such intention at that time. And the relational property *being willed to persist* is pretty clearly qualitative, even if God's intentions do determine how many haecceities are instantiated.

It may be that the possibility of exactly similar yet distinct iron spheres does commit us to haecceitism, but the divine-fiat theory of persistence does not. A fortiori, the divine-fiat theory does not commit us to any evidently pernicious form of haecceitism, such as what Robert Adams calls extreme haecceitism.[16]

Objection: The 'only-x-and-y' principle

However, there are other worries in the same vicinity. The divine fiat theory seems to violate what some philosophers have called the 'only-*x*-and-*y*' principle. The principle takes a number of forms,[17] but roughly it is the idea that only facts about *x* and *y* could have made a difference to the issue whether *x* is identical to *y*. Identity cannot depend on what some *other* thing does or fails to do. The principle is often used to challenge closest-continuer theories of identity over time. If an object undergoes fission and each of the two resulting objects is an equally close continuer of the original, then neither can be identical to the original on the closest-continuer theory, since the theory cannot distinguish between candidates. If only one of the two continuers survives – the other being pre-emptively destroyed during the failed 'fission' process – the theory tells us that the sole continuer is identical to the original. But this is a violation of the 'only-*x*-and-*y*' principle. Whether the original and a given continuer are identical depends on what happens to the other continuer, and this, the argument goes, shows us that the closest-continuer theory is false.

The divine-fiat theory of persistence at least appears to violate the 'only-*x*-and-*y*' principle. Here, whether the object or objects which exist over a certain interval are identical depends not on the survival of some other object but on what God intends. Should this worry the divine-fiat theorist?

How obvious is it that the 'only-*x*-and-*y*' principle is true? We might note that the sorts of cases which make the 'only-*x*-and-*y*' principle plausible in debates about closest-continuer theories are not much like the relevant cases here. We might suspect that some principle more narrowly worded than our 'only-*x*-and-*y*' principle, which is neither clearly articulated nor aptly named, serves the purpose of ruling out closest-continuer theories of identity over time.

In fact, the principle I'll call *the necessity of identity* does just that. The principle says that everything is necessarily self-identical. To put it in logicians' jargon, for

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all *x*, for all *y*, if *x* is identical to *y* then necessarily *x* is identical to *y*. It rules out closest-continuer theories this way. Let O be the object that undergoes fission, and let A and B be the two equally close continuers. According to the closest-continuer theory, if B had been pre-emptively destroyed, then A, the only candidate for the role of continuer, would have been identical to O. So in some possible world, A is identical to O. It is also true in that world that A is necessarily identical to O, and so A and O are identical in every possible world in which one of them exists. This, however, conflicts with the theory's consequence that neither A nor B is identical to O.

As far as the objection to closest-continuer theory is concerned, then, the hazy 'only-*x*-and-*y*' principle is superfluous. It is open to the divine-fiat theorist simply to reject it, if it is in fact inconsistent with that theory.

Objection: The necessity of identity

The necessity of identity is more difficult to reject. Does it furnish us with a successful argument against a divine-fiat theory?

Consider this one: 'If facts of identity depend on divine fiat, God could make me identical to a poached egg. Or God could make me identical to more than one thing if He so chose. But since each of these is manifestly impossible, the divine-fiat theory is necessarily false.'

The divine-fiat theorist need not grant that it is possible for God to *intend* for me to be identical to a poached egg. Likewise the defender of creation *ex nihilo* need not grant that it is possible for God to will that a perfectly spherical cube come into being. On each view, what exists depends on God's creative or sustaining activity, but that is not to say that this activity operates without logical constraints. This objection doesn't really get started.

But it is an occasion to clarify what the theory says. We introduced the divine-fiat theory as an answer to the question, 'What makes for the difference between persistence and replacement?'. To answer that question, the theory need not say that God could make an object identical to a radically dissimilar object. So far, the theory doesn't say much about the range of cases in which both persistence and replacement are possible. Suppose that one of your essential properties is *being human*. If so, then there is no need to distinguish between cases in which you are replaced by an ibex from cases in which you, persisting, become an ibex. The latter isn't possible. Our puzzle about persistence never arises.

So the divine-fiat theory does not entail that the identity relation could hold between any two kinds of things at all, much less between two or more distinct things. Perhaps the divine-fiat theorist could grant that causal relations in the world do not determine God's fiat, but it does not follow that there are no restrictions at all on how the fiat could be issued. For example, the question whether temporal gaps are possible is not settled by the divine-fiat theory. Gaps

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are accommodated easily enough: something that exists after an interval during which it didn't exist is identical with something that existed before the interval provided that God decrees the former to be the latter. (To put it another way, God need only intend that same object exist before and after the gap.) But it is equally consistent with divine-fiat theory to say that continuity in time is a necessary condition of persistence. One consequence of this would be that it is impossible that God intend an object to have temporal gaps.

A second objection: 'There is still a problem, even when the thing or things in the scenario are of the same kind. Take Dean, a human being, and suppose he exists at a given time. A moment later a very similar human being exists. Call him Dean*. Whether Dean is identical to Dean* depends on a divine fiat, and so it is a contingent matter, contrary to the necessity of identity.'

Here there is confusion. According to the divine-fiat theory it is contingent that Dean is identical to the person who exists shortly thereafter. God might have sustained Dean in existence, or might have replaced him. However if 'Dean*' is a rigid designator, referring to the same individual across possible worlds, then it is not contingent that Dean is identical to Dean*. There are two possibilities. If Dean is identical to Dean*, then, had Dean been replaced, Dean* likewise would not have existed afterward. On the other hand, if the two are not identical, Dean* has replaced Dean. Had Dean persisted, Dean* would not have come into existence. In neither case is the identity contingent. The objection as it is stated above confuses rigid and non-rigid uses of 'Dean*'.

Objection: The theory is vacuous

The objections we have considered have failed, but the divine-fiat theory may still sound like a cop-out, less an account of persistence than a refusal to give one. Here is a concrete version of the concern: 'What makes for the difference between God's decree that an object persist and God's decree that it be replaced? To answer this question, you will need to appeal either to primitive differences between the notions *persistence* and *replacement*, or else you will need to appeal to differences in the analyses of persistence and replacement. Either way, you will end up answering the question without appealing to divine fiats. Ultimately, then, the answer to your earlier question about what makes for the difference between persistence and replacement does not involve divine fiats, and the theory is vacuous.'[18]

Implicit in the objection is the assumption that the divine-fiat theory is an attempted analysis of the conceptual distinction between persistence and replacement. If to analyse the difference between divine decrees one must appeal to a primitive difference between persistence and replacement, then such a difference is enough to distinguish them and it is unnecessary to mention divine decrees. If, on the other hand, there is some difference in the conceptual analyses of persistence and replacement that could serve to analyse the difference between

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divine decrees, then again there is a way to analyse the distinction between persistence and replacement without appeal to divine decrees.

The divine-fiat theory, however, does not aim to give a conceptual analysis. The relevant notions are understood clearly enough in terms of time and identity. What the theory aims to do is say under what conditions persistence may and must occur. This may tell us nothing about the constituents of the concept of persistence, but it will be enough to answer the persistence/replacement question. If the theory is true, an intentional act of God is needed for an object to persist; such an act is not needed for an object to be replaced. In other words, the divine-fiat theory only needs to supply an informative necessary condition of persistence that is not a necessary condition of replacement, and for this it does not matter whether there are conceptual analyses of persistence and replacement that do not involve the notion of a divine decree.

If there are lingering worries, it may help to compare the divine-fiat theory with the notion of creation *ex nihilo*. It is virtually undisputed among theists that God created the world out of nothing. (The most conspicuous counter-examples are the Islamic Aristotelians Averroes, Avicenna, and al-Farabi, who believed in the eternity of the world, and those Platonists and Plotinians who regarded the world as an emanation of God.) This entails that divine intentions can be ontologically efficacious on their own, without the help of created things. The idea of creation *ex nihilo* is a divine-fiat theory of the becoming of the created order. It doesn't look like a cop-out. Whatever one might think of the idea, it is a theory with a distinctive, substantive content. Of course, the divine-fiat theories of becoming and persistence are not precisely the same, but the similarity may help mitigate the aura of vacuity that some will find in the latter.

Anti-criterialism and the 'no-account' theory

A final response to the persistence/replacement question is that there is nothing more to be said, i.e. that there are no informative necessary conditions of persistence not shared by replacement. An object either persists or it doesn't. The only thing that's missing in the replacement case is identity (and whatever necessarily goes with identity, such as instantiation of a certain haecceity). Let's call this reply the 'no-account' theory. It may be attractive to those who regard the divine-fiat theory as vacuous: divine fiats give no answer to the question and nothing else can either.

The 'no-account' theory bears some resemblance to anti-criterialism,[19] though the two are not the same. Anti-criterialism is the view that there are no informative necessary and sufficient conditions of persistence through time. One could adopt anti-criterialism and still hold that there are informative necessary conditions of persistence not shared by replacement.

For example, an adherent of the immanent-causation thesis will say that immanent causation is an informative necessary condition of persistence, but

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might yet deny that this or any other informative condition is both necessary and sufficient. For another example, consider the anti-criterialist who allows that there are informative necessary and sufficient conditions for belonging to some natural kind,[20] and that belonging to this kind is an essential property of whatever has it. Then belonging to that kind will be a necessary condition of the persistence of any member of that kind. Whatever the appeal of the 'no-account' theory, anti-criterialism does not apparently entail or provide direct support for it.

What else is to be said for the 'no-account' theory? Perhaps, following a line of argument for anti-criterialism, one could argue that the 'no-account' theory is the default position; one should hold it in the absence of reasons to believe its contrary. In this case, at least, there are some clear candidates for reasons to believe the contrary. Both the notions of immanent causation and divine decree suggest necessary conditions for an object's persistence. As we have noted, the immanent-causation thesis has been plausible to a variety of philosophers. Among theists (who may or may not affirm the immanent-causation thesis) there will be disagreement about whether a divine decree is needed in each case of persistence, but it will be much less controversial that divine permission is needed, i.e. that God must at least allow whatever persistence occurs. Many, then, do have reason to believe that there are necessary conditions of persistence not shared by replacement, and treating the 'no-account' theory as the default does not look especially promising.

Anti-criterialism and the divine-fiat theory

Does anti-criterialism support the divine-fiat theory? For that matter, what is the difference between them? Both of the two are in some sense negative theories. Anti-criterialism rules out whatever informative conditions may be offered as necessary and sufficient for persistence, and the divine-fiat theory likewise rules out a wide range of proposed conditions, at least those that entail the immanent-causation thesis. Neither specifies secondary causes necessary and sufficient for persistence, since on each view there are none.

As they are stated, the obvious difference between the two views is the divine-fiat theory's use of divine intentions. The informativity or uninformativity of the theory will determine whether or not it is consistent with anti-criterialism. The divine-fiat theory proposes a necessary condition of persistence, and its proponent will naturally regard this condition as sufficient as well. If it is also informative, then it is a condition of the sort which anti-criterialism rules out.

Initially the divine-fiat theory does seem informative. It entails theism, for one thing. An atheist who somehow came to see that the divine-fiat theory was true would certainly have learned something. But perhaps this isn't information of the right sort. Suppose we were looking for necessary and sufficient conditions

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of a proposition's being true, and someone proposed this 'divine-knowledge theory':

> Proposition P is true iff God knows P.

Theists typically affirm this biconditional, but it is another question whether it tells us anything about the nature of truth. Like the divine-fiat theory, it entails theism and so is informative in one way, but not in the way we are probably interested in.

This suggests that a distinction between notions of informativity is in order.[21] Here are some options:

> A condition is defined to be informative (for subject S) iff …
>
> … it expresses a proposition that S did not previously believe;
> … it expresses a proposition that is not self-evident to S; loosely, the condition expresses a substantive thesis;
> … it is a synthetic statement, one not true by virtue of the meanings of its terms;
> … it expresses a contingent proposition, one that rules out some possible worlds;
> … it is a conceptual analysis of its object: it purports to elucidate how the 'parts' of the concept together 'compose' it;
> … it is about its object's intrinsic nature.

Where the definiens is subject-relative, we may add that a condition is informative *simpliciter* iff, for many persons x who could reasonably be expected to understand it, the condition is informative for x. Each definition of 'informative' yields a specification of anti-criterialism.

The divine-knowledge theory has sometimes not been believed, it is not self-evident, and it is synthetic, so it is informative in these senses. But it is not contingent, is not a conceptual analysis, and, as noted, does not seem to provide information about the nature of knowledge.

The divine-fiat theory is informative and uninformative in the same ways. It has sometimes not been believed, it is not self-evident, and it is synthetic. It is not contingent, nor is it a conceptual analysis. If we may speak as if persistence were an object, then arguably the theory does not inform us about its object itself. One doesn't learn anything about what persistence is; that was already clear enough from the definition. The condition is not about what's intrinsic to persistence, but what relations it stands in.

So if the relevant notion of informativity is one of the last three given, anti-criterialism and the divine-fiat theory are consistent with each other. They are also mutually supportive to the extent that each conflicts with a wide range of competitors to the other. If the relevant notion of informativity is one of the first

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three such as the 'substantive-thesis' sense, then anti-criterialism and the divine-fiat theory are inconsistent.

Denying continuous creation

To this point, we have looked at two responses to the persistence/replacement question that would allow us to affirm continuous divine creation of persistent objects. We have not seen decisive objections to the divine-fiat theory (which is consistent with some construals of anti-criterialism and inconsistent with others). The 'no-account' theory, it seems, has little to be said for it. But, as we observed at the outset, any view that includes continuous creation and persisting creatures must deny the immanent-causation thesis, and this thesis has significant intuitive support for many philosophers.

So why not deny continuous creation? One could still hold that God brings each thing (or its constituents) into existence, so God's creative activity is a necessary condition of each event in nature. And one could hold that God provides whatever causal powers a created thing has.

An important question is whether there is any sense in which one could still say God sustains created things.[22] One strategy would be to hold that the persistence of created things requires divine permission, even if a specific divine decree or intention is not needed. Then it is divine permission that sustains things in existence.

The problem here is that to permit is merely to not intend to prevent – or, better, knowingly not to intend to prevent. God doesn't have to *do* anything to permit an object's continued existence. Permission is entirely negative. So while it's plausible enough that persistence requires divine permission, that permission really can't be regarded as God's sustaining activity. If we deny continuous creation, some other construal the notion of sustenance or conservation must be found.

Let's take a short look at some co-operative theories (theory-types, really) in which God and a creature together bring about the continued existence of that creature.

Joint-sufficiency theories

One way to design a co-operative theory is to say that God's causal contribution and the creature's causal contribution are jointly sufficient but individually insufficient for the continued existence of the creature. Let's say that a theory of this sort is a joint-sufficiency theory of divine conservation.

It looks initially as if this sort of view must have the difficulties of concurrentism.[23] If the account is truly co-operative, the effect depends on the causal contributions of both creature and Creator. But God's actions are, of necessity, efficacious, so that the creature's contribution is apparently unneeded after all.[24]

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However, we may avoid the difficulty if we suppose that God does not act by willing the later existence of the creature. Perhaps what God wills is instead a conditional, e.g. that the creature exist at a time t_2 if it existed with certain causal powers at t_1. In this case God's sustaining act is not by itself sufficient for the creature's existence at t_2 since it is possible that the creature not exist at t_1 and that God act in the same way without bringing about the creature's existence at t_2. (Of course the divine decree might also be disjunctive or general or both, as in 'Let whatever fundamental particles existed at t_1 exist at t_2, except in thus-and-such circumstances'.) So the necessary efficacy of God's actions need not render the creature's contribution superfluous.

We might worry whether such a theory is really co-operative if the creature in question *first* came into existence because of a non-co-operative act of God's will. Couldn't it turn out, on this theory, that the creature's existence at some later moment is entailed by God's creative will and sustaining will taken together? And if God's acts of will do determine that the creature exists at a later time, can we really say that the theory is co-operative?

I think the answer is that the theory does indeed allow God's will to determine the conservation of a creature, but that the theory may still be considered co-operative. If in calling a theory of conservation 'co-operative' we mean to say that the creature depends both on God and on the creature's earlier states, the crucial notion is dependence. Taking that as a counterfactual notion, the creature's later existence does depend on both God's sustaining will and the creature's earlier existence. If God had not willed to sustain the creature, it would not have existed at the later time, since neither the creature's earlier state nor God's other acts of will nor anything else suffices for its later existence. Likewise, if the creature had not existed at the earlier time, it would not have existed at the later time, since, on this theory, God's sustaining will by itself is not sufficient for the creature's existence.

So joint-sufficiency theories can be co-operative and give a non-trivial sense to the claim that God sustains objects in existence. It is not clear that historical defenders of concurrentism would accept such a view,[25] but it looks initially as if a successful account of concurrence might suggest a useful co-operative account of conservation of the sort sketched above.

Co-operative divine-sufficiency theories

Joint-sufficiency theories are not the only co-operative theories. Here is another theory-type. God's sustaining act of will *is* sufficient for the continued existence of the creature, and, because the immanent-causation thesis is true, God's act of will also requires the creature's earlier existence to bring about its later existence. Let's call such understandings co-operative divine-sufficiency theories.

Suppose that the act by which God sustains a creature includes the causal contribution of the creature; God brings about the creature's act. If we were to try

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to express it as a decree, it might begin 'Let the existence of object x at t_1 cause the existence of x at t_2'. Unlike the decrees of a joint-sufficiency theory, this decree would itself entail the persistence of the object under consideration.

What makes a theory of this sort co-operative is the necessity of the creature's causal contribution – in effect, necessity of the immanent-causation thesis itself. We may add that God's act of will is also necessary for the creature's continued existence, so it's clear that God sustains creation, that is, that no created thing would exist at a time but for a certain divine activity aimed at that thing's existence.

Assessment

Both of these co-operative theory-types show some promise. Both differ from continuous-creation theories in that they include causal contributions from the created object, whereas continuous-creation theory rules these contributions out.

We have canvassed a range of theories to see whether the persistence of created objects can be maintained in light of the fact that this persistence is inconsistent with the conjunction of the immanent-causation thesis and continuous-creation theory. What we have seen is that there are several theories of conservation that are, so far, viable. Co-operative theories consistent with the immanent-causation thesis might be developed in several ways, either as joint-sufficiency theories or divine-sufficiency theories. In either case, the theory would ultimately need to address a number of questions more fully. Do the co-operative accounts succumb to the kinds of objections that hampered medieval concurrentists? What understanding of the creature's causal contribution will allow us to maintain that such theories really are co-operative?

Should these fail, there is also the (unco-operative?) divine-fiat theory. I suspect it will be less palatable to many philosophers than the co-operative theories, though I do not know of any decisive objections to it. Its chief disadvantage seems to be its inconsistency with the immanent-causation thesis, which many philosophers have found intuitively strong.[26]

Notes

1. Contrast, e.g. Chisholm's use. See Roderick Chisholm 'Human freedom and the self', in P. van Inwagen and D. Zimmerman (eds) *Metaphysics: The Big Questions* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 356–365.
2. Dean Zimmerman in 'Immanent causation', *Philosophical Perspectives*, **11**, *Mind, Causation, and World*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), gives as examples Bertrand Russell, Sidney Shoemaker, David Armstrong, Peter van Inwagen, and Peter Unger. See 466 for the citations.
3. For example, see Peter van Inwagen 'Dualism and materialism: Athens and Jerusalem?', *Faith and Philosophy*, **12** (1995), 486; Kevin Corcoran 'Physical persons and postmortem survival without temporal gaps', in his *Soul, Body, and Survival* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 209; Hud Hudson *A Materialist Metaphysics of the Human Person* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 189; Dean Zimmerman 'The compatibility of materialism and survival: the ''falling elevator'' model', *Faith and*

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Philosophy, **16** (1999), 195. Trenton Merricks (to whose view we will return) denies that there are any informative necessary and sufficient conditions on persistence. The immanent-causation thesis gives only an informative necessary condition and would seem to be consistent with Merricks's view (which is not to say that he endorses it).

4. Philip Quinn 'Divine conservation, continuous creation, and human action', in Alfred J. Freddoso (ed.) *The Existence and Nature of God* (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983); and *idem* 'Divine conservation, secondary causes, and occasionalism' in Tom Morris (ed.) *Divine and Human Action* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1988). The account is discussed in relation to physical cosmology in his 'Creation, conservation, and the Big Bang' in John Earman (ed.) *Philosophical Problems of the Internal and External Worlds: Essays on the Philosophy of Adolf Grunbaum* (Pittsburgh PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1993).
5. Quinn 'Divine conservation, secondary causes, and occasionalism', 54.
6. *Ibid*., 70.
7. *Ibid*.
8. *Ibid*., 53.
9. Jonathan Edwards *Original Sin* (1758), Clyde Holbrook (ed.) (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 1970), 402.
10. *Ibid*., 401. Emphasis in original.
11. *Ibid*., 402. Emphasis in original.
12. For example, see F. P. Siegfried 'Creation', in *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, www.newadvent.org; Richard A. Muller 'Continuata creatio', in *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 1985); Alan Richardson and John Bowden 'Creation', in *A Dictionary of Christian Theology* (Philadelphia PA: The Westminster Press, 1983).
13. *Summa Theologiae*, I.104.2.
14. *Maybe* the universalist will say that this is so in cases of ordinary persistence as well, so that, e.g. each person is a sum of several persons of shorter duration. David Lewis doesn't say this exactly, though he does believe in persons that are the sums of person-like stages and segments, and in the possibility of person-like wholes which are the sums of persons. See section 4 of 'Survival and identity' in his *Philosophical Papers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 55–77.
15. Max Black 'The identity of indiscernibles', in M. Loux (ed.) *Metaphysics: Contemporary Readings* (London: Routledge, 2001), 104–113.
16. Robert Adams 'Primitive thisness and primitive identity', *Journal of Philosophy*, **76** (1979), 5–26.
17. E.g., see Harold Noonan 'The only x and y principle', *Analysis*, **45** (1985), 79–83, and David Wiggins *Sameness and Substance* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), 95–96.
18. Thanks to Mike Rea for his articulation of the objection (which I have altered).
19. See Trenton Merricks, 'There are no criteria of identity', *Nous*, **32** (1998), 106–124.
20. Cf. *ibid.*, 113.
21. Merricks notes that it is not clear how we are to think of informativity (*ibid.*, 117). Of course both criterialism and anti-criterialism inherit the lack of clarity.
22. Christians have long seen the opening Christological passages of Colossians (1.16–17) and Hebrews (1.1–3) as indicating that Christ holds created things in existence. Since creation and sustenance are divine prerogatives, these passages are important in the biblical case for Christ's divinity.
23. Quinn says his theory entails 'a strong version of the doctrine of divine concurrence' ('Divine conservation, secondary causes, and occasionalism', 70). Note that this does not involve co-operation in bringing about any object's existing, but rather co-operation in making some other event occur. To return to the heated water example, God co-operates in heating the water not by bringing about the water's being heated, but by bringing about the water's continued existence, which is necessary for the water's being heated.
24. For Francisco Suarez's statement of the historical objection, see *Disputationes Metaphysicae*, disp. 18, or Alfred J. Freddoso, 'Medieval Aristotelianism and the case against secondary causation in nature', in Morris *Divine and Human Action*, 92. As Freddoso points out, Nicholas Malebranche was fond of highlighting the medieval Aristotelians' failure to reach any consensus on the nature of divine concurrence (*ibid*., 78).
25. See, for example, Freddoso's introduction to Suarez, *On Creation, Conservation, and Concurrence: Metaphysical Disputations 20–22* (South Bend IN: St Augustine's Press, 2002), xci.

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26. An ancestor of this paper was delivered as the Paul C. Wilt Phi Kappa Phi Faculty Lecture at Westmont College, 21 October 2002. My thanks to the commentators, James Taylor and Michael Sommermann. Another ancestor was read at the 2002 Midwest Division meeting of the Society of Christian Philosophers at Indiana University. Thanks to Dean Zimmerman and others for feedback there. For their helpful suggestions, thanks are also due to Trenton Merricks, Michael Rea, and two anonymous referees for *Religious Studies*.

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