CHAPTER TEN

Berkeley's Strange Semi-Occasionalist Mystery: Finite Minds as Causes

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10.1 Introduction

Berkeley allegedly signals his departure from the occasionalism of Malebranche in an entry in his notebooks: "We move our legs ourselves. 'tis we that will the movement. Herein I differ from Malbranch."[1] Nonetheless, many commentators have argued that Berkeley is an occasionalist or "semi-occasionalist" despite his protest.[2] Here I provide a new line of argument for attributing a limited form of occasionalism to Berkeley, based on his acceptance of Malebranche's account of causation.

Berkeley believed that genuine causes necessitate their effects and nevertheless attempted to make room for the view that finite minds could, in some limited cases, be genuine causes. That is, I here argue that there is reason to think that Berkeley believes that the wills of finite minds can necessitate some effects and be genuine causes in their own right. To be specific, Berkeley holds that imaginative wills necessitate the effect of the presence of an idea of imagination. In virtue of our power to imagine, we cause ideas of imagination.

In order to defend this thesis and explore its plausibility, I start by briefly characterizing some relevant concepts before reviewing the textual evidence that has generated some controversy over Berkeley's views. I then argue that Berkeley's conception of a cause is Malebranchian. Once we know what he takes a cause to be, I consider Berkeley's reasons both for wanting finite minds to have causal power as well as the details of how such a view is plausible. Berkeley invokes a distinction between volition and power, which turns out to be instrumental in his thinking. I conclude with a brief analysis of the plausibility of some of the key claims Berkeley requires.

10.2 Some Conceptual Geography

Proper, full-blooded occasionalism is the view that God is the *only* genuine cause. The emphasis is important as it implies that no other entity (mind or body) has any causal efficacy.[3] I shall abbreviate this view as OCC (and when I use the word "occasionalism" alone I am referring to this strong conception). It is possible, however, to limit the view. The most important of these restrictions is to the physical, sensory world. The view that God is the only genuine cause *of physical events* (leaving open the possibility for genuine causes outside of the physical realm) is a form of "semi" occasionalism that I shall abbreviate here as OCP. A number of scholars, including Lisa Downing in particular, have made use of this concept in attributing a limited occasionalism to Berkeley.[4]

At times, however, it is useful to also limit our conception of occasionalism to one of the primary arguments typically used in its defense, the argument from the conception of causation.[5] The view that the only causes are those that necessitate their effects, I abbreviate here as NEC. An event necessitates an effect when the latter cannot logically fail to occur (immediately) after the former. Thus necessitation in this context requires more than constancy of experience. NEC is not itself a semi-occasionalist view, but it plays a crucial role in many forms of occasionalism. According to this division of concepts, Malebranche is a proper occasionalist (OCC) because NEC is true *and* his assertion that God is the only entity with the power to necessitate effects. NEC is compatible with OCP as well; only God has the ability to necessitate effects in the sensory world. Nonetheless, other agents might necessitate non-physical effects.

OCP and NEC conceptually come apart with the supposition that there are genuine causes in the non-physical realm that nonetheless do not necessitate their effects. In other words, NEC requires a conception of causation as necessary connection whereas OCP does not. One might suppose that minds have certain causal powers without thereby necessitating their effects. Certain theories of causal over-determination might fall into this category. In these cases NEC would be false but OCP might nonetheless be true.

For Berkeley, who does not believe that any apparent causes in the physical world necessitate their effects beyond the will of God, I argue that NEC in conjunction with certain theological considerations entails OCP. Hence, only God's will is causally potent in the physical world. I argue below that Berkeley endorses OCP in part *because* he believes the stronger NEC. Thus Berkeley endorses OCP and NEC, but not OCC. Furthermore the *reason* Berkeley endorses OCP stems equally from theological as well as metaphysical grounds.

One might wonder where concurrentist theories fit into this taxonomy. Concurrentists hold that finite minds are genuine causes, but they do not believe that finite minds, strictly speaking, necessitate their effects since the presence of God is required for any efficacious cause.[6] Thus concurrentists deny NEC in virtue of the rejection of the necessary connection theory of causation. They also deny OCP on the grounds that the presence of a finite mind is *never* sufficient to bring about an effect, since God's concurrence is always required (whether in the physical world or not). Since one can imagine a finite mind willing some event such that God might withhold its concurrence, the wills of finite minds are not proper causes (on this necessitarian view). As a result, concurrentism is a rejection of occasionalism full stop. Therefore, in arguing that Berkeley is a kind of semi-occasionalist, I am rejecting McDonough's reading of Berkeley as a divine concurrentist, although it lies beyond the scope of this endeavor to engage his analysis directly.

10.3 Arguments for Occasionalism

Traditional interpreters of early modern occasionalism highlight primarily metaphysical reasons for endorsing the view. Malebranche himself provides two explicit arguments for occasionalism, both of which appeal to metaphysical concerns. The first argument involves the concept of a cause, which Malebranche famously defines as "necessary connection". "A true cause as I understand it is one such that the mind perceives a necessary connection between it and its effect."[7] One event (or agent) may be said to cause a certain effect only if that event (or agent) necessitates the effect. Since only God is omnipotent, only God's will necessitates its effects. Hence, OCC is true.

Malebranche's second argument involves divine conservation. Like Descartes before him, Malebranche asserts that God continuously creates the world. As a result, every created thing depends on God in a way that rules out secondary or supplementary causes. Since continuous creation precludes the possibility of other kinds of necessary connections, only God is a genuine cause.[8] Since I contend that the first argument more directly concerns Berkeley, in this paper I shall focus on the necessary connection argument.

One can certainly find sympathetic echoes in Berkeley that might make one believe he endorsed OCC along precisely the metaphysical lines Malebranche presents when emphasizing the necessary connection analysis. Berkeley clearly argues that there is no necessary connection between ideas, since those relations are only of sign to signified. In fact, many of the things we take to be causes are not causes at all. "[T]he connexion of ideas does not imply the

relation of *cause* and *effect*, but only of a mark or sign with the thing *signified*. The fire which I see is not the cause of the pain I suffer upon my approaching it, but the mark that forewarns me of it."[9] Fire is in fact a sign from the Author of Nature to guide us in our way in the world. Thus genuine causality in the physical world is limited to God. He even explicitly admits that there are occasional causes (of which he says that they are "in truth but signs") when referring to physical processes.[10] Nicholas Jolley interprets these texts as evidence that Berkeley is "in the grip of a Malebranchian argument".[11] He reads *Principles* 31 as evidence of such influence.

> That food nourishes, sleep refreshes, and fire warms us; that to sow in the seedtime is the way to reap in the harvest, and in general, that to obtain such or such ends, such or such means are conducive, all this we know, not by discovering any necessary connection between our ideas, but by the observation of the settled laws of nature, without which we should be all in uncertainty and confusion, and a grown man no more know how to manage himself in the affairs of life, than infant just born.[12]

There is an implicit denial that necessary connection obtains when we consider the regularities of the physical, sensory world.[13] I accept Jolley's point. The evidence that Berkeley is thinking along Malebranchian lines (and in Malebranchian language) is compelling. I shall extend this claim subsequently, arguing that Berkeley thinks about (efficient) causation entirely in Malebranchian terms.

There is one place where Berkeley apparently endorses strong occasionalism—but it appears early in the *Notebooks*.

> + Strange impotence of men. Man without God. Wretcheder than a stone or tree, he having only the power to be miserable by his unperformed wills, these having no power at all.[14]

The passage is also accompanied by the controverisal "+" mark in the margin, which some have taken to be a "black mark" signifying later rejection. As Walter Ott and I have argued elsewhere, we prefer to treat the mark cautiously.[15] One ought not suppose that "+" marked entries are clearly Berkeley's final, considered views without corroborating evidence from the published works (although the absence of published corroboration is not enough to dismiss them out of hand either). And here is another example that supports our earlier caution: he more often than not contradicts his bold assertion of impotence, not only in his published works but also in the *Notebooks*! "We move our legs ourselves" (N 548) is a clear example. Thus there is clear need to be careful with the evidence from his unpublished musings.

All of this evidence, however, to the extent that it *is* evidence, points toward making Berkeley an occasionalist by virtue of noting Berkeley's endorsement of NEC. Adherence to NEC is not, however, sufficient to force one to OCC. My contention is that Berkeley *accepts* Malebranche's claim that causation requires necessary connection, but *rejects* the strong occasionalism of Malebranche by implicitly accepting the causal power of imaginative volitions. I start by analyzing the evidence that Berkeley accepts NEC and then turn to examine both why and how Berkeley chooses OCP over OCC.

10.4 Berkeley as Malebranchian about Causation

Upon examination of the texts, the evidence that Berkeley adopts and employs the Malebranchian language of necessary connection in his thinking about causation is persuasive. For Berkeley, as for Malebranche, a genuine cause is one whose effects are necessitated. The evidence stretches throughout Berkeley's published works and some of the passages are particularly explicit, as in his *Theory of Vision Vindicated and Explained.*

> To perceive is one thing; to judge is another. So likewise, to be suggested is one thing, and to be inferred another. Things are suggested and perceived by sense. We make judgments and inferences by the understanding. What we immediately and properly perceive by sight is its primary object, light and colours. What is suggested or perceived by mediation thereof, are tangible ideas which may be considered as secondary and improper objects of sight. We infer causes from effects, effects from causes, and properties one from another, *where the connection is necessary.*[16]

Berkeley is keen to establish that ideas are utterly passive and hence not causally powerful, merely being signs for things signified. Part of his argument is the contingency of the connections between ideas. Where the connection between ideas can be contingent there can be no causation.

> Ideas which are observed to be connected with other ideas come to be considered as signs, by means whereof things not actually perceived by sense are signified or suggested to the imagination, whose objects they are, and which alone perceives them. And as sounds suggest other things, so characters suggest those sounds; and, in general, all signs suggest the things signified, there being no idea which may not offer to the mind another idea which hath been frequently joined with it. In certain cases a sign may suggest its correlate as an image, in others as an effect, in others as a cause. But where there is no such relation of similitude or causality, *nor any necessary connexion whatsoever*, two things, by their mere coexistence, or two ideas, merely by being perceived together, may suggest or signify one the other, their connexion being all the while arbitrary; for it is the connexion only, as such, that causeth this effect.[17]

His thinking here is consistent throughout his career. He repeatedly stresses the lack of necessary connection between ideas, in particular between ideas and bodies.[18] The point is most perspicuously made in the middle of the *Principles*.

> To all which my answer is, first, that the connexion of ideas does not imply the relation of cause and effect, but only of a mark or sign with the thing signified. The fire which I see is not the cause of the pain I suffer upon my approaching it, but the mark that forewarns me of it. In like manner, the noise that I hear is not the effect of this or that motion or collision of the ambient bodies, but the sign thereof . . .[19]

The reason that Berkeley denies that there are any causes (besides God) in the physical world is exactly Malebranchian: there are no natural necessary connections in the sensory world. "But what reason can induce us to believe the existence of bodies without the mind, from what we perceive, since the very patrons of matter themselves do not pretend, there is any necessary connexion betwixt them and our ideas?"[20] He takes it as *generally accepted* (even by materialists) that there are no necessary connections in the sensory world. We know things about the physical world, but "not by discovering any necessary connexion between our ideas".[21] Berkeley is firmly in the grips of the Malebranchian concept of a cause. Thus if minds have any causal power, in those cases they necessitate their effects.

10.5 Finite Minds and Causal Power

A variety of texts have been used to argue that Berkeley is committed to the causal power of finite minds. In addition to N 548 previously cited ("We move our legs ourselves."), several passages seem to directly imply that OCC is false. Before we can profitably investigate those passages, however, we need to clarify some of the language about causation.

There is a distinction between two putative kinds of causation. Consider the two following events.

(1) I cause my leg to move.
(2) I cause the volition that my leg move.

Berkeley believes that (2) is possible (and in fact happens), but despite some cloudiness in the texts, as shall become apparent he must reject (1). In fact, Berkeley never says that finite minds *cause* physical events like moving limbs. Instead, he says that finite minds have the *power* to move limbs and so forth. The movement of a leg is a sensory event involving ideas of sense where there

is no necessary connection with a particular will. Hence, there is no causation, strictly speaking. Consider the entire entry of N 548.

> S We move our legs ourselves. 'tis we that will the movement. Herein I differ from Malbranch[22]

Berkeley expounds on his initial claim by invoking the will. There is thus some reason to suspect that Berkeley is operating with a distinction between power and volition, which in turn I shall argue leads to a distinction between powers and causes. Let's examine some of the texts traditionally thought to support Berkeley's claim for type (1) causation.

As a start, recall that for Berkeley, *only* minds are active. Thus, even motion is not an instance of genuine power, it involving only passive ideas (although there might be causes of motion). In the *Three Dialogues* Berkeley has Hylas agree with Philonous, stating "I agree with you. And indeed it is very plain, that when I stir my finger, it remains passive; but my will which produced the motion, is active."[23] The assertion is that minds are causally efficacious even though sensory objects are not. That prepares us for the following, where Berkeley apparently claims that minds can cause physical events.

> PHILONOUS: In plucking this flower, I am active, because I do it by the motion of my hand, which was consequent upon my volition; so likewise in applying it to my nose. But is either of these smelling?
>
> HYLAS: No.
>
> PHILONOUS: I act too in drawing the air through my nose; because my breathing so rather otherwise, is the effect of my volition. But neither can this be called *smelling*: for if it were, I should smell every time I breathed in that manner.[24]

The suggestion at first pass is that we are causally active in moving our hands to pluck the flower and bring it forward to our nose, as those motions are "consequent" upon our volitions.

The most potent of the passages produced for thinking that Berkeley endorses the causal power of the mind to produce physical effects comes in *De Motu*.

> Besides corporeal things there is the other class, viz. thinking things, and that there is in them the power of moving bodies we have learned by personal experience, since our mind at will can stir and stay the movements of our limbs, whatever be the ultimate explanation of the fact. This is certain that bodies are moved at the will of the mind, and accordingly the mind can be called, correctly enough, a principle of motion, a particular and subordinate principle indeed, and one which itself depends on the first and universal principle.[25]

Here Berkeley seems for many to be unequivocal. Thinking things have a *power* to move bodies and these passages have led many to think that there is a problem of consistency. Berkeley seems to endorse the causal power of minds in the physical world, yet is committed to denying that same power in virtue of his own conception of causation.

George Pitcher has attempted to resolve the apparent conflict in the texts by arguing that Berkeley should have simply endorsed occasionalism, even though he did not.[26] Ken Winkler has proposed a novel reading of Berkeley that emphasizes final causes in Berkeley's analysis of action.[27] More recently Jeffrey McDonough has argued that Berkeley ought to be read as a concurrentist, abandoning occasionalism entirely. Sukjae Lee criticizes all these views, arguing that finite minds are causally active, but only with respect to our volitions that pertain to our imaginative faculties.[28] I refer the reader to this excellent set of exchanges, but do not wish to rehash what has come before. Instead, I want to argue that Lee's final diagnosis is, in the main, correct, but also want to extend his analysis. Berkeley does *not* hold that we causally contribute to the movement of our physical bodies, but he holds that we *do* causally contribute to the production of ideas of the imagination. Whereas Lee stops at the claim that Berkeley believes that our imaginative volitions have causal power, I attempt to explain precisely how and why they do according to Berkeley.

The key is that Berkeley distinguishes the concepts of power and volition, which in turn lead to a distinction between power and cause. Berkeley is drawn to this distinction for theological reasons, which must be unpacked alongside the metaphysical views.

10.6 Finite Minds as Divine Exemplars

There are at least two important theological reasons why Berkeley wants the upshot of causal efficacy for finite minds. The first is that Berkeley wants to give substance to the claim that finite minds are created in the image of God and the second is that he wants to avoid the "author of sin" problem that appears to be especially worrisome for occasionalists.

Berkeley is keen to emphasize the Christian tradition that stresses the similarities between humanity and God without thereby undermining the grace and power of the latter. Berkeleian immaterialists have a natural way of reading this doctrine that is consistent with both his metaphysics and Christian orthodoxy.

> It is evident there are two parts in the composition of man: The mind which is pure and spiritual, which is made in the image of God, and which we have in

> common with angels: and the corporeal part containing the senses and passions which we have in common with brute beasts. The former tends to the knowledge and love of God as its true center, to vertue piety and holiness, to all things excellent and praise-worthy; the later inclines to the world, to sensible objects, to carnal things such as may gratify our grosser affections and appetites.[29]

Since there cannot literally be a *spiritual* "image" of God, Berkeley takes the doctrine to mean that our mental powers are analogous to that of God, just to a lesser degree. Our minds made in the image of God implies that our minds have—again, to a lesser degree—the same capabilities and powers of the mind of God. Foremost among those powers is that of volition. Finite minds, like God, can *will*. Berkeley is thus much like Descartes in embracing the image of God hypothesis, which also serves to separate him from Malebranche. As Jolley has noted, firmly embracing the doctrine makes the mind "altogether too godlike" for Malebranche, who wishes to reserve *all* causal power to God.[30]

The exact manner in which we are like God turns out to matter for our present investigation. God is powerful, active, and wills. Berkeley initially struggles with how finite minds imitate the divine. Early in his career, he seems to straightforwardly identify power with causal efficacy.

> + The simple idea call'd Power seems obscure or rather none at all. but onely the relation 'twixt cause & Effect. Wn I ask whether A can move B. if A be an intelligent thing. I mean no more than whether the volition of A that B move be attended with the motion of B, if A be senseless whether the impulse of A against B be follow'd by ye motion of B.[31]

He is yet more explicit a few entries later.

> + Power no simple Idea. it means nothing but the Relation between Cause & Effect.[32]

Both passages have the troublesome "+" symbol in the margin beside the entries which should urge the reader to caution. If nothing else, Berkeley's own mature views about the nature of ideas provide one reason why he would be hesitant about the thoughts expressed here. Ideas are utterly passive; there can be no idea of an active power or a relation. Minds relate and act; ideas do nothing.

Berkeley, however, eventually works his way to a more sophisticated position. He separates power and volition, keeping the original connection of the concept of power with the relation between an instance of willing and its effects.

> S There is a difference betwixt Power & Volition. There may be volition without Power. But there can be no Power without Volition. Power implyeth volition & at the same time a Connotation of the Effects following the Volition.[33]

To say that an agent has power is only to note that there is some kind of connection between an act of volition and some consequent idea. God is all-powerful because God's will necessitates its effects in the physical world, the world of ideas and their contents. We come to understand the concept of power by noting the relationship between an instance of willing and sensory effects. Thus, we come to think that we have the power to move our legs ourselves because we notice that instances of certain acts of volition are followed by particular sets of ideas. We can will without those willings producing their intended effects. Hence, there can be will (activity) without power, because the ideas that follow some acts of the will are not the ones intended. The very concept of power implies a connection between some sensory upshot and a preceding volition, but that concept does not require a necessary connection. I have the power to press a key on a piano; that is, my willing to produce a certain idea is often associated with exactly that upshot. When the idea obtains (i.e. is perceived) after my act of willing (that idea), that is an instance of power. But the volition and idea are not always so associated and thus I am not, properly speaking, the cause of the idea even when I willed that exact outcome. Necessary connections are causes. When God wills the key to be pressed, it is not possible for any other effect to obtain. Thus God, unlike myself, causes the effect.

One clear manner by which we might separate mere powers from causal ones is the source of the alleged causal influence. We know, for instance, that any time an event occurs following an act of another mind's volition, we are not the cause.

> S What means Cause as distinguish'd from Occasion? nothing but a Being which wills when the Effect follows the volition. Those things that happen from without we are not the Cause of therefore there is some other Cause of them i.e. there is a being that wills these perceptions in us.[34]

When the effect comes "from without" we are not the cause. When the effect is not under our control, experience has taught us that there are no necessary connections. Nonetheless, the entry clearly establishes that a genuine cause is one where an effect follows the volition. Thus Berkeley operates with a distinction between power and cause.

The distinction turns out to be crucial. We are created in the image of God insofar as we are active minds that will and have power. Unlike God, we

are causally impotent in the sensory world. Our wills do not necessitate the corresponding ideas of sense in the physical world. But we are nonetheless endued with power. Owing to the regularities of the world established by the Author of Nature, we frequently do find in our experience that our volitions are attended by ideas in a predictable fashion. As such, we are powerful beings. Thus, if challenged to explain Berkeley's claim that we "move our legs ourselves" we see that he has already provided us with the relevant distinction. The entire entry from the *Notebooks* is as follows:

> S We move our legs ourselves. 'tis we that will the movement. Herein I differ from Malbranch.[35]

What he means when he says we move our legs ourselves is that we have the power to do so. That is, leg movement does occur after instances of willing. But Berkeley does *not* say that we *cause* our legs to move. Careful attention to the texts reveals that Berkeley never says that finite minds are causes with respect to the sensory world. Instead, he says that minds have the power to do so, that is, instances of our volition are correlated with certain effects. The stronger that correlation, the greater the power. As I shall shortly argue, for Berkeley our strictly *causal* power is limited to acts of the will, and our causal *power* is limited to acts of the imagination, whose effects are necessitated by those volitional acts.

Lee adopts a similar line of analysis in reading Berkeley.[36] Furthermore, Lee advances an interpretation of Berkeley friendly to my purposes here.

> I suggest we take Berkeley's comments at face value, in the following manner: we have the power to produce volitions, and this power comprises the inner core of our activity in such a way that, even if we were to possess just these powers, we would be genuinely active in virtue of them.[37]

Lee recognizes that for Berkeley, finite minds have the literal power to produce ideas of imagination from an act of the will. I refine this view by arguing that for Berkeley we have the *causal* power to produce imaginative volitions. This separates imaginative willings from those concerning the sensory world, where we have no volitional control over the resultant sensory ideas (necessary connection) and hence no causal agency. At this point Lee motivates his reading by arguing that Berkeley needs finite minds to have a sense of causal power in order to understand the causal activity of God. I take this to run hand in hand with my claim about the image of God hypothesis.

The analysis I provide here also enables us to deal with the difficult *De Motu* passage noted above. I contend that Berkeley's endorsement of NEC but not OCC is not challenged by the passage at all. For convenience, I reproduce the passage again.

> Besides corporeal things there is the other class, viz. thinking things, and that there is in them the power of moving bodies we have learned by personal experience, since our mind at will can stir and stay the movements of our limbs, whatever be the ultimate explanation of the fact. This is certain that bodies are moved at the will of the mind, and accordingly the mind can be called, correctly enough, a principle of motion, a particular and subordinate principle indeed, and one which itself depends on the first and universal principle.[38]

The phrase "our mind at will can stir and stay the movements of our limbs" is worrisome for occasionalist readers of Berkeley. Lee tries to undermine the passage by claiming that Berkeley is more hesitant here about his commitment to OCC than it appears at first blush.[39] I have no objection to his analysis, but I think a stronger case can be made. Berkeley notes at the outset of the passage that thinking things have a *power* of moving bodies. We now know that invocations of power for Berkeley involve relating volitions to effects. And indeed, upon reflection we do find that many of our volitions are correlated with events in the physical world. Yet this does not imply causal efficacy. Berkeley takes pains to emphasize that power requires volition even though that is not sufficient to generate a necessary connection. Thus when he continues to note that "our mind *at will* can stir and stay the movements of our limbs", he is only noting what we typically find in our experience, viz., that our volitional acts tend to correspond with sensory upshots. The following dependent clause, "whatever be the ultimate explanation of the fact", signals Berkeley's point. Simply noting the connection is not sufficient to identify the *cause* (i.e. what produces a necessary connection, if there is one).

10.7 The Author of Sin

The insight that there is a distinction between causal efficacy and the typical production of events following upon an act of the will produces a critical benefit for Berkeley. It allows him to solve the "author of sin" problem in a manner that he sees as consistent with his own immaterialist metaphysics. The author of sin problem is particularly acute for occasionalists. If God is the *only* agent in the universe with causal power, whatever evil acts are performed in the universe are done so at a minimum with the active consent of God. As a murderer prepares to harm an innocent, it is God who eventually

pulls the trigger and is causally responsible for the resultant evil. Even if the intention to do unjustifiable harm is not God's, one might reasonably wonder why an omnipotent and omni-benevolent being would not simply refuse to carry out the action. Berkeley's solution is prompted by his understanding of the distinction between power and volition. Sin, according to Berkeley, is purely a creature of the will. He is quite clear about the problem and its solution in the *Three Dialogues*.

> HYLAS: You are not aware, Philonous, that in making God the immediate author of all the motions in Nature, you make him the author of murder, sacrilege, adultery, and the like heinous sins.
>
> PHILONOUS: In answer to that, I observe first, that the imputation of guilt is the same, whether a person commits an action with or without an instrument. In case therefore you suppose God to act by the mediation of an instrument, or occasion, called matter, you as truly make Him the author of sin as I, who think Him the immediate agent in all those operations vulgarly ascribed to Nature. I farther observe, that sin or moral turpitude doth not consist in the outward physical action or motion, but in the internal deviation of the will from the laws of reason and religion. This is plain, in that the killing an enemy in a battle, or putting a criminal legally to death, is not thought sinful, though the outward act be the very same with that in the case of murder. Since therefore sin doth not consist in the physical action, the making God an immediate cause of all such actions, is not making him the author of sin . . .[40]

The critical claim comes with his characterization of sin as "the internal deviation of the will from the laws of reason and religion". The view is both clever and orthodox. Aquinas, for instance, advances the same position.

> We do not impute to anyone as sin any act that is in no way in the person's power. And so if a person should take hold of another person's hand against the latter's will and use it to kill someone, we do not impute the sin of murder to the person whose hand struck the blow but to the person who used the hand . . . sin does not consist of the members' external acts; rather, sin consists of the will's internal acts that make use of the body's members.[41]

Traditional Christian theologians think of sin as a "turning away from God" (God's will).[42] We cannot literally cause physical events on our own (i.e. no act of our will necessitates an effect), so such a turning away from God cannot properly be expressed in the physical world. What remains is the will. In his

early notebooks Berkeley explicitly asserts that morality is a matter of volition and not outward act.

> Mo We have no Ideas of vertues & vices, no Ideas of Moral Actions wherefore it may be Question'd whether we are capable of arriving at Demonstration about them, the morality consisting in the Volition chiefly.[43]

Thus the sinful act is the volition which is not consonant with God's will. Actually killing an innocent is not in itself sinful, for that might be no different in outward appearance from a mere accidental death (the same effect). The distinction lies all and only in the *intention* associated with the result. Thus the sinfulness is entirely located in the act of the will. Nonetheless, one might balk at attributing this view to Berkeley on the grounds that it is a weak defense. It still leaves Berkeley's God responsible for the ultimate execution of a sinful act even if not responsible for the sin. The accusation is fair enough, but Berkeley sees it.

> As to guilt, it is the same thing whether I kill a man with my hands or an instrument; whether I do it myself or make use of a ruffian. The imputation therefore upon the sanctity of God is equal, whether we suppose our sensations to be produced immediately by God, or by the mediation of instruments and subordinate causes, all which are his creatures, and moved by his laws. This theological consideration, therefore, may be waived, as leading besides the question; for such I hold are points to be which bear equally hard on both sides of it. Difficulties about the principle of moral actions will cease, if we consider that all guilt is in the will, and that our ideas, from whatever cause they are produced, are alike inert.[44]

His initial line of defense is simply to argue that materialists can do no better in solving the problem. That, however, only speaks to the coherence of immaterialism vis-à-vis its materialist rival. At the end of the passage he returns to his basic position: sin is located *entirely* in the will. Since we are free beings, God is not responsible for the sinfulness of the associated act, even if the efficient cause of it. If one objects that Berkeley's view is still suspect since it essentially makes God an *instrument* of finite wills (and some evil ones to boot), Berkeley would likely employ the same defenses. First, materialists can do no better. Second, since the sin is located in the free act of willing, God is an instrument only in the sense that God chose to impose law-like regularities on the world.

In general this second response makes more sense when paired with Berkeley's views about the natural world. God is the Author of Nature, where the "text" is the regularities we observe in the physical world. Where God follows

his own laws according to his own perfect will, there can be no imputation of blame and there is no diminishing of the power of the divine.[45] The sinful volition of a finite mind is made actual because God acts consistently in order to provide laws that enable us to regulate our behavior. To suppose that God is in any way morally tainted by such events is tantamount to blaming the mechanisms of a weapon for functioning according to the laws of physics. We do not think that objects bound by physical laws are morally culpable. It is, in a sense, a categorical mistake to attribute moral blame to God for conserving the functioning of the physical world.

10.8 Berkeley: Finite Minds as Necessitating Effects

At this point we can see why Berkeley is wedded to the view that finite minds have some causal power: it provides him with a palatable theological position with respect to a tricky problem with the metaphysics of his semi-occasionalism.[46] As a result, it is clear that Berkeley *wants* finite minds to be causally efficacious. Consider the end of Philonous' speech initially reproduced above.

> Lastly, I have no where said that God is the only agent who produces all the motions in bodies. It is true, I have denied there are any other agents beside spirits: but this is very consistent with allowing to thinking rational beings, in the production of motions, the use of limited powers, ultimately indeed derived from God, but immediately under the direction of their own wills, which is sufficient to entitle them to all the guilt of their actions.[47]

I note again that this passage does not attribute causal efficacy to finite minds; it attributes *powers* to them (which is consistent with Berkeley allowing that agents "produce" motions in the relevant sense). The question now is *how* Berkeley thinks that it is plausible that finite minds have powers that merit moral culpability. Mere correlation between two events is not sufficient; Berkeley needs the limit case of a cause. Since we know that causal power for Berkeley is just necessary connection, we already have the answer. Berkeley believes that finite minds, with respect to at least some cases, have the power to necessitate their effects. We further know that that power is the power of our faculty of imagination.

In order to be morally culpable for an effect, one must form an intention to produce a particular outcome. As we have already seen, finite minds do not necessitate the effects of their wills in the physical world. In what sense, then, can one be held morally responsible? Berkeley replies by locating sinfulness in the act of the will itself. And this makes sense when one learns that Berkeley requires the presence of an idea for any act of the will. For volitional acts, those acts are paired with ideas of the imagination. The relationship between

the will and ideas of the imagination fits the bill and provides Berkeley with the resources he needs.

I start with what I take to be a critical passage, an entry from his notebooks.

> Mem: to enquire diligently into that strange Mistery viz. How it is that I can cast about, think of this or that Man, place, action wn nothing appears to Introduce them into my thoughts. wn they have no perceivable connexion wth the Ideas suggested by my senses at the present.[48]

Berkeley is here thinking about ideas that he generates himself, *viz.* ideas of the imagination. Recall the distinction that he invokes in his published works. Ideas come in roughly two different kinds: ideas of sense that are volitionally independent of the minds that perceive them and constitute the "external" physical world we perceive, and ideas of imagination, which are volitionally dependent on the mind perceiving them. Ideas of imagination are "less real" for Berkeley as they need not obey the laws of the physical world as laid down by the Author of Nature.[49] Hence Berkeley's puzzlement: what accounts for his mysterious power to conjure ideas with no sensory (i.e. external) prompting. And what is the *nature* of this power (i.e. is it causal?) One might balk at the implicit assumption here: that we in fact *do* perceive ideas of the imagination without *any* sensory prompting (which is distinct from the claim that imaginative perception is possible without the prior experience of sensory ideas). I want to set that concern aside for the moment and grant Berkeley the point.

Berkeley believes that it is not possible for any mind to will without an idea as an object. This is popularly termed as the denial of blind agency.[50] The view was commonplace among the early moderns.

> G.S. The propertys of all things are in God i.e. there is in the Deity Understanding as well as Will. He is not Blind agent & in truth a blind Agent is a Contradiction.[51]
>
> S It seems to me that Will & understanding Volitions & ideas cannot be severed, that either cannot be possibly without the other.[52]

That is, it is *logically necessary* for an idea to be present when the mind wills. Volition requires the presence of an idea and Berkeley is clear about this implication.

> S.E. Distinct from or without perception there is no volition; therefore neither is their existence without perception.[53]

Thus, if the mind has the power to will an idea of the imagination, since that very power conceptually requires the presence of an idea, the volition

is necessarily connected to an idea, and hence qualifies as a cause. The very (mysterious) ability we find by experience we have to conjure up ideas of the imagination at will guarantees that we cause them. Furthermore, the necessary connection between the idea of imagination and our volition makes us morally culpable. When I form the intention to harm an innocent, that intention comes paired with an idea (or set of ideas) such that I am responsible for its content.

One might object that attributing such a reading to Berkeley runs directly afoul of Malebranche, who already has an argument that such a view undermines itself and denies the mind any genuine causal power. One might suppose that Malebranche reasons as follows.

1. To imagine is to produce an idea in the mind that wasn't there before.
2. Any act of the mind requires an idea to direct it (denial of blind agency).
3. Thus, to produce the idea of x requires that one have the idea of the x.
4. Thus, we don't actually produce any ideas; the mind has no power even over its own thoughts.
5. Hence, the supposition that the mind has causal power is false.

The reasoning seems valid, but Berkeley is not threatened by the argument. He denies the first premise. To imagine is *not* to produce an idea that in no sense was in the mind previously. Our faculty of imagination requires a sort of repository of sensory ideas previously perceived. Berkeley would instead argue that to imagine is to voluntarily produce a (possibly new) idea in the mind by way of manipulating sensory ideas already perceived.

We now have all the basic pieces to the puzzle. Berkeley believes that causes necessitate their effects. Finite minds *need* to have causal power in order to (a) satisfy the requirements of the "image of God" doctrine for his immaterialist metaphysics and (b) to solve the author of sin problem which is otherwise so vexing. Berkeley makes room for the genuine causal efficacy of finite minds in his system by invoking the necessity of the presence of ideas for any instance of willing. Since some acts of the will might be thought to be paired with sensory ideas in the physical world, Berkeley invokes the distinction between mere power, where the presence of an idea is merely correlated with a volitional act, and causation, where the idea is linked to the volition by necessity. We may be said vulgarly to move our limbs ourselves, but that is an instance of mere power only, dependent on the Author of Nature and the regularities set down in the sensory world. But we are responsible for

our intentions and wills, because those actions are causally wedded to the corresponding ideas. Berkeley adopts OCP and leaves genuine causal power in the physical world to God, but theological considerations along with his commitment to NEC enable him to assert that finite minds nonetheless have causal power.

10.9 A Final Complication

Although I believe the interpretation of Berkeley I have constructed here accords well with the texts and has the merit of being broadly consonant with his immaterialism, there remains one final—and important—complication to address. If I am right, Berkeley believes that when we form intentions, those volitional acts are necessarily married with a particular idea or ideas. But by what right can he reasonably assert that for any particular intention he has, there is a necessary connection between that willing and *that* specific idea?

Consider a simple case. Might it not be possible to will the visual image of a chimera, but get it wrong? After all, Berkeley has no problem countenancing the possibility of error with respect to the sensory world. I intend to turn my eyes and perceive some idea, but it is not at all what I expected. Or after experiencing one idea, I infer another is to follow shortly, but my prediction is foiled. If error is possible with respect to our ideas of imagination, then one would have an excellent case for denying the necessity of the connection between the volition and its effect. We cannot appeal to God to guarantee the right connections, since such a move would undermine Berkeley's strategy for absolving God of responsibility for sin.

If faced with such a challenge, I conjecture that Berkeley would respond with two replies. First, he would invoke our own internal *intuitive* experience. We simply "know" that we do have this causal power, hence it must be the case that we cannot fail to generate the right idea. This knowledge is not empirical, but somehow stems from a first principle of sorts. This explanation is supported by Berkeley's odd appeal to our "mysterious" power to conjure ideas (presumably the *right* ones) without prior prompting. This power is itself foundational, such that any alleged mistakes would in fact be merely verbal.[14] If I were to try to imagine a chimera and imagine a tiger-lamb-chihuahua instead of a lion-goat-serpent, the correct analysis is that I have failed to imagine a chimera at all. Instead, I have imagined something else. Furthermore, this intuition is supported by our inclination to think that *attempts* to imagine X *are* imaginings of X. To imagine a goat is to imagine a goat, no matter the possible confusions about the word "goat". Berkeley's denial of blind agency directly supports this line of thinking. Any attempt to perform a particular will requires the idea antecedently.

Second, he would likely argue as many free will theorists do. We have a deep intuition that we are morally responsible for our volitional acts. The possibility of such acts requires a necessary connection of the sort here posited, hence those connections are necessary. The worry that one might see a *modus tollens* where Berkeley sees a *modus ponens* does not seem to concern Berkeley.

I confess that neither response strikes me as deeply satisfying, although I think both would have likely satisfied Berkeley and his contemporaries. Despite a careful review of the texts, I find no evidence that Berkeley is ever concerned about the possibility of error when it comes to ideas of the imagination. Yet there is a certain consistency and elegance to the reading I am ascribing to Berkeley that produces some evidential force in its own right. Whether the view is ultimately defensible in its own right also depends heavily on a great number of other claims Berkeley makes when constructing his immaterialist metaphysics. I conclude only with the contention that Berkeley was a form of limited occasionalist. He believed finite minds to be powerless in the physical world, but nonetheless to be robust, causally powerful agents capable of moral responsibility in virtue of their construction in the image of God.

10.10 **Acknowledgments**

I would like to thank Walter Ott, Nicholas Jolley, and Jeff McDonough for their insightful comments on earlier versions of this chapter.

NOTES

1 George Berkeley, N, 548; Works, 1:69: All citations from Berkeley— except those from Marc Hight, *The Correspondence of George Berkeley* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013)—are from George Berkeley, *The Works of George Berkeley*, Bishop of Cloyne, ed. A. A. Luce and T. E. Jessop, 9 vols. (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1948–1957). In referring to Berkeley, Works, the following abbreviations will be used for convenience—'3D' for *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*, 'N' for *Notebooks* (also known as the *Philosophical Commentaries*), 'PHK' for *Principles of Human Knowledge*, 'DM' for De Motu, 'TVV' for *Theory of Vision Vindicated and Explained*, and 'NTV' for *Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision*. Section numbers will be used for the *Principles, De Motu*, and the *Notebooks*; all others will be cited by volume and page numbers from the Works.

2 Occasionalist interpreters include George Pitcher, Ken Winkler, and Sukjae Lee. Semi-occasionalist interpreters include Nicholas Jolley and Lisa Downing.

3 See, for instance, Steven Nadler, *Occasionalism: Causation Among the Cartesians* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 1. He asserts that "the

central thesis of occasionalism . . . is that all causal efficacy in the universe belongs to God." He also emphasizes that "thoroughgoing" occasionalism requires both that God is the only cause *and* that no natural objects (including minds and bodies) have causal power. Ibid., 144.

4 "Nevertheless, if we restrict our attention to the physical realm, and discount the modest causal input of finite spirits, Berkeley emerges as a *Malbranchiste de bonne foi*, as one of his early critics put it. Berkeley argues, as had Malebranche, that the causes of physical change cannot be found in the realm of bodies. Rather, God is the sole true cause of the existence and properties of bodies. Berkeley's view, then, amounts to occasionalism for the physical realm, but not the spiritual; I will label this position 'semi-occasionalism.'" Lisa Downing, "Occasionalism and Strict Mechanism," in *Early Modern Philosophy: Mind, Matter, and Metaphysics*, ed. Christia Mercer and Eileen O'Neill (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 209.

5 For a discussion of the two principal arguments Malebranche in particular employs (necessary connection and conservation as continuous creation) see Sukjae Lee, "Necessary Connections and Continuous Creation: Malebranche's Two Arguments for Occasionalism," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 46, no. 4 (2008): 539–65.

6 Jeffrey McDonough provides a nice overview of the tenets of concurrentism while arguing that Berkeley endorses a form of divine concurrentism. See Jeffrey McDonough, "Berkeley, Human Agency, and Divine Concurrentism," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 46, no 4 (2008): 567–90, esp. 568–69.

7 Nicolas Malebranche, *The Search after Truth*, ed. Thomas Lennon and Paul Olscamp (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 450, 6.2.3. I pass over the complication of the *perception* of a necessary connection.

8 Yet another argument for occasionalism was made by Geulincx on the principle that A cannot cause B unless A knows how to bring about that B. This particular argument does not seem relevant to Berkeley's thinking and hence falls outside of the scope of this endeavor. See Charles McCracken, *Malebranche and British Philosophy* (New York: Clarendon Press, 1983), 105, and Nicholas Jolley, "Berkeley and Malebranche on Causality and Volition," in *Causality and Mind* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2014), 243.

9 PHK, 65.

10 Hight, *Correspondence*, 302: Berkeley to Johnson, 25 November 1729, Letter 194.

11 Jolley, *Causality and Mind*, 244.

12 PHK, 31.

13 I say "implicit" because one might read the passage as suggesting that we do not *navigate* through the world by picking out necessary connections

independently of whether they are *actually* present. As such, one might try to make room for the claim that Berkeley nonetheless believes that such necessary connections exist. That reading, however, would be decidedly un-Berkeleian. If there are parts of metaphysical reality that lay beyond our ken then such posits are equivalent to simply denying them. Compare Berkeley's analysis of the house in the *Three Dialogues*, where he reduces such speculations to the status of verbal games. Ibid.; 3D, 2:247–48. For further analysis of this passage and the larger point, see Marc Hight, "Berkeley and Bodily Resurrection," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 45, no. 3 (July 2007): esp. 448–53.

14 N, 1:107. All passages from the *Notebooks* are reproduced exactly as they appear in the Luce and Jessop *Works*, including the marginalia.

15 Marc Hight and Walter Ott, "The New Berkeley," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 34, no. 1 (March 2004): 1–24.

16 TVV, 42 (my italics).

17 TVV, 39 (my italics).

18 See, for a few examples, NTV, 17, 24, 104; PHK, 18, 31, and 43.

19 PHK, 65.

20 PHK, 18.

21 PHK, 31.

22 N, 1:548.

23 3D, 2:217.

24 3D, 2:196.

25 DM, 25.

26 George Pitcher, "Berkeley on the Mind's Activity," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 18, no. 3 (1981): 221–27.

27 Ken Winkler, *Berkeley: An Interpretation* (New York: Clarendon Press, 1989), esp. 104–36.

28 Sukjae Lee, "Berkeley on the Activity of Spirits," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 20, no. 3 (2012): 539–76.

29 *Works*, 7:88, Sermon VI, "On the Mystery of Godliness"

30 See Nicholas Jolley, *The Light of the Soul* (Oxford University Press, 1990), 80. I want to credit Walter Ott, who brought my attention to the connection between Berkeley and Descartes on this point.

31 N, 1:461.

32 Ibid., 493.

33 Ibid., 699. Note that these passages do not have the worrisome "+" mark.

34 PC, 499.

35 N, 1:548.

36 Lee, "Berkeley on the Activity of Spirits," 556.

37 Ibid., 559.

38 DM, 25.

39 Lee, "Berkeley on the Activity of Spirits," 567.

40 3D, 2:236–7.

41 Thomas Aquinas, *On Evil*, trans. Richard Regan (Cary, NC: Oxford University Press, 2003), II.2.vi.

42 See, for example, Josef Pieper, *The Concept of Sin*, trans. Edward T. Oakes SJ [originally: *Über den Begriff der Sünde*, Munich 1977] (South Bend, Indiana: St. Augustine's Press, 2001), 56. "[T]he essence of guilt consists in voluntarily turning away from God." My thanks to Jeremy Lachman for directing me to Pieper's text.

43 N, 1:669.

44 Hight, *Correspondence,* 303–4: Berkeley to Johnson, 25 November 1729, Letter 194.

45 Compare this line of defense to that of Malebranche, who argues that God's ways in the world must honor Him, i.e. God must will in simple, regular ways and act through general laws.

46 It is worth noting at this juncture that for Berkeley *only* minds are active and hence *could* be imbued with genuine causal power. In a letter to Samuel Johnson he remarks, "A proper active efficient cause I can conceive none but spirit; nor any action, strictly speaking, but where there is will." Hight, *Correspondence*, 302: Berkeley to Johnson, 25 November 1729, Letter 194.

47 3D, 2:237.

48 N, 1:599.

49 An important corollary to this claim is that God has no obligation to maintain any order or regularity with respect to the ideas of imagination we perceive.

50 For further discussion of Berkeley's denial of blind agency see Winkler, *Berkeley*, 207–16.

51 N, 1:812.

52 Ibid., 841.

53 Ibid., 674.

54 I owe this elaboration of the point and the example that follows to Walter Ott.