

## **The Miracle is Me: Leibniz and The Ash'arite conception of Causality**

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### **Abstract**

The article examines the conception of causality in the philosophy of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz in dialogue with the Ash'arite theological tradition, with particular attention to the notion of divine omnipotence and the problem of miracles. Using a qualitative research design grounded in library-based analysis, textual analysis, a review of literature and most importantly discourse analysis to compare arguments. The study critically engages primary philosophical and theological texts alongside contemporary scholarly interpretation. The analysis reveals that, despite arising from distinct intellectual and religious contexts, Leibniz's metaphysical framework especially his theories of pre-established harmony and divine occurrence i.e miracles shares important conceptual affinities with the Ash'arites doctrine of occasionalism, which denies intrinsic causal efficacy in created beings. The study argues that both traditions ultimately locate true in causality in God. Thereby reframing miracles not as violations of natural order but as consistent expression of divine will. Although, Leibniz claim that the Ash'arite is radical in its doctrine, the research justified that the Ash'arite had a universal acceptance on their understanding of causality through occasionalism. By highlighting theses differences and tensions, the article contributes to a deeper comparative understanding of Western philosophy and Islamic theological approaches to causality, agency and miracles. It further demonstrates how cross-traditional analysis can enrich contemporary debates on metaphysics, philosophy of religion, and the relationship between reason and revelation, while opening avenues for future interdisciplinary research in comparative philosophy and theology.

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## **Introduction**

Occasionalism, the doctrine that God is the sole true cause of all events has a deep connection in Islamic theology, particularly in the Ash'arite tradition, and later resurfaces in Western philosophy through figures such as Leibniz Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz or widely known as Leibniz. Al-Ash'ari's occasionalism is a pinnacle of Islamic theology ever since its inception, the doctrine had massive impact throughout the science of cosmology by emphasizing divine omnipotence and the contingency of natural causality. Leibniz, responding to both Cartesian and Al-Ash'ari's occasionalism and critiques the denial of intrinsic causal powers in created substances and develops his own metaphysical system which argues that the doctrine of occasionalism could make God's miracles look ordinary. The central philosophical and theological argument lies in the conflicting views on causality and divine intervention. For Al-Ash'ari's occasionalism, he argues that God is the sole cause and denies any necessary causal connection in nature as a result it challenged the Empirical science belief which posits that cause and effect are necessary. Leibniz heavily criticizes this by arguing that such a view leads to perpetual miracles and downplaying the autonomy of created substances and the intelligibility of the world. Therefore, the study is important to illuminate enduring debates about the relationship between divine omnipotence, natural laws and the importance of reason by its usage and limitations would also be crucial in understanding the debate to both Islamic and Western intellectual traditions (Robert, 2026). To achieve this, the study will answer the following research questions:

1. What are the philosophical and theological foundations of Al-Ash'ari's occasionalism?
2. How does Leibniz critique the denial of intrinsic causal powers in occasionalism?

3. What are the implications of their views for understanding natural causality and miracles?
4. How do their systems reconcile divine omnipotence while dealing with the autonomy of intellect and created substances?

Thus, the objective of this study is to comparatively analyse the positions of Al-Ash'arī and Leibniz, assess the theological and metaphysical implications of their arguments, and identify the central metaphysical concepts governing divine omnipotence, reason, and created substances in their respective philosophical systems.

### Methodology

This study employs a qualitative, comparative philosophical methodology grounded in systematic textual analysis to examine the metaphysical and theological positions of Al-Ash'arī and Leibniz on causation and divine agency. Through close reading and conceptual analysis of primary and secondary texts, the research analyses their arguments within their respective theological frameworks, identifies key metaphysical concepts, and situates these positions within their historical and intellectual contexts. An intercultural, bricolage-based approach is adopted to facilitate cross-traditional comparison while addressing Eurocentric bias and disciplinary boundaries. It is important to note that the research not only will be consulting texts written by Al-Ash'ari but also his line of thinking, the Ash'arites with scholars like Al-Ghazali and Al-Razi. This also involves in consulting primary sources of Al-Ash'ari such as *The Theology of Al-Ash'ari* by R.J. McCarthy (Al-Ash'ari, 935 C.E, Trans. McCarthy, 1963) and for Leibniz, his *Discourse on Metaphysics* would explain how he built his critique on Al-Ash'ari's occasionalism from western philosophical standpoint

### Literature review

Since its inception, the theology of Al-Ash'ari was the dominant view amongst Muslims community and it is one of the most revolutionary methods in Islamic history. Due to its dynamics, the Ash'arites had participated in various discourse across disciplines particularly in the realm of cosmology. As a result, a doctrine to explain the mechanics of the cosmos emerge, hence occasionalism. The article will also engage in philosophical argumentation to critically assess the strengths and weaknesses of each position. This may include formulating counterargument and exploring the implications of each philosopher's views on contemporary philosophical discourse. Situating both scholars within their historical cultural contexts are also essential in understanding the intellectual environment of medieval Islamic philosophy and early modern European though can provide an insight into their motivations and influences

Despite sustained scholarly interest in occasionalism, several significant gaps remain in the existing literature. First, here is a lack of comprehensive comparative studies that systematically examine the nuanced formulations of occasionalism in both Islamic and Western intellectual traditions, particularly with sustained attention to the philosophical positions of Al-Ash'ari and Leibniz. Second, insufficient attention has been given to the role of historical and cultural context in shaping their perspective critiques of causation resulting in a limited understanding of how intellectual, theological and scientific milieus influenced their philosophical arguments. **Thirdly, the lack of interdisciplinary engagement** represents a significant limitation in current research. Occasionalism sits at the intersection of theology, metaphysics, and the philosophy of science, yet much of the scholarship remains confined within disciplinary boundaries. Philosophical analyses often neglect theological presuppositions, while theological treatments may underexplore philosophical and scientific implications. The absence of integrative approaches has prevented a fuller appreciation of how occasionalist theories challenge or complement naturalistic accounts of

causation and how they contribute to broader discussions on divine action, scientific explanation, and metaphysical necessity.

**Finally, the modern relevance of classical occasionalist critiques remains underexplored.** While occasionalism is frequently portrayed as a historical curiosity superseded by modern scientific explanations, relatively few studies examine its potential contributions to contemporary debates in the philosophy of science and religion. Questions concerning causal efficacy, laws of nature, contingency, and divine agency continue to animate modern philosophical discourse, yet the insights offered by classical occasionalist thinkers are seldom brought into conversation with these discussions. This gap reflects a broader tendency to marginalise non-dominant philosophical traditions and to underestimate the enduring conceptual resources embedded within historical critiques of causation.

By addressing these gaps, the present study aims to contribute to a more nuanced and integrative understanding of occasionalism as a cross-cultural philosophical discourse. Through comparative, contextual, and interdisciplinary analysis, this research seeks not only to recover neglected dimensions of classical debates but also to demonstrate their continued relevance for contemporary philosophical inquiry into causation, science, and religion.

### **The Root of Occasionalism**

Al-Ash'arī's doctrine of occasionalism constitutes a foundational theological position within classical Sunni Islam, asserting that God alone is the true and efficacious cause of all events, while created entities function merely as occasions for God's direct and continuous action (Shiojiri, 2007). Formulated in the 9th–10th centuries by Abu'l-Hasan al-Ash'ari, the doctrine emerged as a deliberate response to Mu'tazilite rationalism and to philosophical accounts of causality that attributed real causal power to created beings or natural processes, developments perceived as undermining divine omnipotence and sovereignty. Occasionalism thus affirms, in a carefully literal manner, the reality of divine attributes and the

absolute dependence of the cosmos on God's will at every moment (Frank, 1992). While some claimed that the Ash'arite rejected naturalistic explanations of causation, Ash'arite theologians nonetheless engaged deeply with philosophical reasoning, appropriating and reworking concepts from post-Avicennan thought to defend their position. This synthesis is especially evident in the works of later Ash'arites such as al-Ghazālī who employed sophisticated logical and metaphysical arguments to critique necessary causation and to reinforce the view that apparent regularities in nature reflect God's customary practice rather than autonomous causal laws (Rayan, 2004). As both a theological affirmation and a philosophical intervention, Ash'arite occasionalism became a cornerstone of Sunni orthodoxy, exerting a profound and enduring influence on Islamic intellectual history and shaping subsequent debates on reason, causality, and divine agency.

One of the main debates in Islamic theology since antiquity is the relationship between divine omnipotence and human moral responsibility (Nasir, 2016). A Qur'ān basis for this conflict is the ayah, "*Lahā mā kasabat wa 'alayhā mā iktasabat*" (Qur'ān 2:286) that puts forth both divine authority and human responsibility. In this complex intellectual milieu, Abu al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī articulated his doctrine of *kasb* (acquisition) as a theologically rich perspective aimed at reconciling these apparently antagonistic perspectives. His concept balances between Mu'tazilite libertarianism and Jabarite determinism. The doctrine of *kasb* (acquisition) is a central tenet of Sunni theology, through which he attempts to reconcile two central, yet seemingly contradictory components in the Islamic worldview. The absolute creative freedom of God and the genuine moral agency of human beings. To understand al-Ash'arī's approach towards synthesizing these orientations requires examining both theological orientations carefully and as well as the metaphysical account laying out *kasb* (McCarthy, 1953). The theological account of Abu al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī is one of the most sophisticated attempts in the history of Islamic thought, in reconciling the absolute freedom of the God of religion with the idea of human moral accountability. Al-Ash'arī's theology preserves divine

omnipotence while carefully providing an account that preserves authentic human agency such that it avoids the pitfalls of pure determinism, but also careful theological findings of complete human free will. This delicate balance of power is achieved mainly through the doctrine of *kasb* (acquisition), a theoretical innovation that had great importance for Sunni theological thought (Watt, 1948). At the center of al-Ash'arī's theological account is that all existence and events including human acts are wondered through God's production of acts. This reading is clearly supported in Qur'ānic verses like "Allāh created you and what you do" (Qur'ān 37:96), and from it al-Ash'arī reads that it confirms God's complete authorship of every aspect of creation. However, he argues that God's super-causal agency does not negate moral accountability. Rather, it establishes the metaphysical framework that human agency simply acts. The rap that *kasb* provides is the framework comprised of those three statements at the foundation of al-Ash'arī's conflicting statements. *Kasb* states that while God is the creator (*khāliq*) of every act, humans are held morally accountable for the act through acquisition. In this account humans are not the originators of the act in a sense; rather, they interact with God's acts through their will (*irāda*) and choice (*ikhtiyār*), and doing so enables them to have moral responsibility (Watt, 1948).

### **The Mechanics of Kasb: Divine and Human Will**

Al-Ash'arī's paradigm of human action encompasses a nuanced interaction between divine and human will. God produces not only the deeds themselves but also the human capacities, especially the ability for will and choice, that makes action feasible. When a person uses this God-given will at the exact moment an action happens, and when this will match up with the action being done, that person is said to have "acquired" the act (Al-Ghazali, 1980, trans. McCarthy). This procedure entails a significant differentiation between two modes of will:

- Divine will (*al-irāda al-ilāhiyya*): everlasting, all-encompassing, and the fundamental basis of all existence and events.

- Human will (*irādat al-'abd*): Created, contingent, and functioning within the limits set by God

The human will, while inferior to divine power, possesses actual efficacy in the moral realm. It functions as the centre of intention and choice that makes activities morally accountable to individuals, even while the ontological foundation of such actions is completely divine. Al-Ash'arī's formulation exemplifies a variant of religious compatibilism that foreshadows numerous contemporary philosophical discourses around free will. His approach posits that individuals can be authentic moral actors even under a context of total divine authority (Nasir, 2016). This is feasible because moral responsibility does not rely on ultimate free will (which would weaken divine oneness), but rather on the existence of intentionality and voluntary alignment with one's actions (Al-Sanusi, 1490 C.E. Trans. Ayman al-Akiti, 2023).

This viewpoint is corroborated by the Qur'ānic focus on both divine omnipotence and human responsibility. Many verses say that God is in charge of everything that happens (for example, "No calamity befalls except by Allah's permission" - Qur'ān 64:11) and that people are responsible for their actions (for example, "Whoever does an atom's weight of good will see it, and whoever does an atom's weight of evil will see it" - Qur'ān 99:7-8). Al-Ash'arī's *kasb* theory offers the conceptual framework that makes these simultaneous claims coherent.

### **The Limits Ash'arites occasionalism and Leibniz's Critique on Miracles**

The doctrine of occasionalism encountered much criticism, the doctrine that posits that God is the sole true cause of all events and that created substances i.e human, and everything in the universe lack an intrinsic causal power, raises numerous questions most importantly the question of human responsibility in regards to divine omnipotence, a central concern in Islamic thought and broader philosophical discourse on free will and predestination (Taskin, 2023). The occasionalism rejects the notion of necessary causal

connections in nature, asserting instead what appears as cause and effect is a habitual sequence established by God's will. The doctrine thus emphasizes divine omnipotence and continuous creation, with God's will (*al-irāda*) as the decisive attribute actualizing all possibilities (Masrukhin, 2021).

Philosophically al-Ash'ari justifies the denial of intrinsic causal powers in created substances by adopting an occasionalist framework. Causal efficacy is denied to created powers and attributed solely to God, making the relation between created power and acquisition conditional rather than causal. This stance contrasts with earlier Islamic and rationalist views the Mu'tazilite, who held that goodness and causality have intrinsic or rational qualities independent of divine intervention and that if humans do not genuinely originate their activities, then assigning moral responsibility to them becomes intellectually indefensible and this breaks the Mu'tazilite's position of God's absolute justice since man is condemned responsible towards activities which they were determined and has no room for choice. (Frank, 1992).

Subsequently, al-Ash'ari's view of causal are habitual customs (*hukm al-'adah*) rather than necessary connections has significant epistemological implications. Causality is not an inherent logical necessity but a product of repeated observation and psychological expectation, this stance allows for the possibility of miracles and divine acts while sustaining practical knowledge of nature (Rayan, 2004). Scientific regularities are understood as based on observation and custom, not on discovering necessary causal laws, which opens space for scepticism about causal necessity but maintains practical knowledge for prediction. Theologically, al-Ash'ari occasionalism conceptualizes God's ongoing creation of all events, excluding secondary causation. Natural causes serve merely as occasions for God's creative action, which is conditional rather than causal in the created realm. The doctrine of continuous creation emphasizes God's immediate and ongoing creative act as the sole source of all natural phenomena, rejecting the notion of independent causal powers in nature (Moad, 2018).

Furthermore, the doctrine of continuous creation affects the understanding of natural laws and the possibility of miracles. Natural laws are seen as God's decrees rather than autonomous causal agents, meaning miracles are not violations of natural laws but direct divine intervention consistent with continuous creation (Griffel, 2009). Philosophical critiques, such as those by Leibniz, argue that occasionalism risks portraying natural laws as mere regularities without causal powers, leading to the problem of perpetual miracles (Woolhouse, 1988). Furthermore, this makes God a perpetual miracle worker that is God would be constantly interfering in the world, even for the smallest event such as a leaf falling and the occurrence of thought (Robert, 2025). By doing so, this exposes the weakness in God, and the idea of wise and efficient God may be dismissed. Whereas a perfect God Leibniz argues would create a world so well designed that it runs according to natural law without the need for constant intervention (Nicolas, 2021).

Leibniz believed that:

“God has made the machine of the universe so perfect that it needs no tuning”

(Leibniz's theory of pre-established harmony (Leibniz, 1714, Trans. Ariew & Garber, 1989).

Leibniz's engagement with occasionalism marks a decisive moment in the history of metaphysics and the philosophy of mind (Woolhouse, 1988). Emerging from medieval Islamic theology and transformed within seventeenth-century Cartesian philosophy, occasionalism offered a primary account of causation in which God alone is the true cause of all events. This article examines the historical development of occasionalism, its Cartesian reformulation, and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz's systematic critique. Focusing on Leibniz's metaphysical objections especially the denial of intrinsic causal powers, the Principle of Sufficient Reason, and the Objection from Perpetual Miracles the paper argues that Leibniz's alternative framework of monadology and pre-established harmony preserves both divine sovereignty and the autonomy of created substances.

The enduring relevance of these debates for contemporary philosophy of mind and theories of causation is also explored.

occasionalism represents one of the most audacious but brilliant attempts in the history of philosophy and theology to reconcile divine omnipotence with a coherent account of causation. By denying that created substances possess genuine causal efficacy, occasionalists noble mission was to safeguard God's absolute sovereignty while responding to metaphysical challenges posed by both Aristotelian naturalism and early modern mechanistic science (Harding, 1993). Leibniz's sustained engagement with occasionalism both as a critic and as a constructive metaphysician illuminates the deep tensions between theology, science, and metaphysics in the early modern period.

Further discussions illustrate Leibniz's critique within a broader historical arc that begins in medieval Islamic theology, passes through Cartesian philosophy, and culminates in Leibniz's mature metaphysical system. In doing so, it highlights how debates over causation and divine action shaped enduring problems concerning agency, intelligibility, and the mind-body relation. The earliest systematic formulations of occasionalism arose in ninth- and tenth-century Islamic theology (*kalām*) (Wensick, 1932), where philosophers and theologians confronted Greek metaphysics, especially Aristotelian theories of causation and substance. Central to these debates were questions about atoms, accidents, and divine conservation. In response, Islamic theologians developed three broad intellectual orientations which are strict textualism, rationalist defense of Islamic doctrine, and a middle position that subordinated reason to revelation (Watt, 1948).

In the seventeenth century, occasionalism was revived and transformed within the framework of Cartesian metaphysics. René Descartes's dualism between mind and body, coupled with a mechanistic conception of matter as extension devoid of inherent powers, posited a profound causal problem which how can immaterially minds and inert bodies interact? (Pullan 1988). Several Cartesian philosophers answered this question by radicalizing Descartes's own metaphysical commitments.

Thinkers such as Geulincx, Cordemoy, La Forge, and most notably Nicolas Malebranche, argued that only God can be a true cause. Created substances merely provide the “occasions” for divine action (Robert, 2025).

Malebranche’s system represents the most sophisticated form of Cartesian occasionalism. According to him, causal efficacy requires necessary connection, which finite creatures cannot provide. Only God’s will establish the lawful regularities we observe in nature. Occasionalism thus emerged not merely as a solution to the mind–body problem, but as a comprehensive metaphysical doctrine grounded in a theory of causation, substance, and divine governance (Nicolas, 2021). A crucial distinction in early modern debates is that between occasionalism and divine concurrence. Occasionalism denies intrinsic causal powers to created substances, attributing all causation directly to God. Divine concurrence, by contrast, holds that God cooperates with created causes, which nonetheless retain genuine causal efficacy (Taskin,2023).

Descartes is often best interpreted as a concurrentist, since he allows finite substances a derivative but real causal role sustained by God. Malebranche, by contrast, is a strict occasionalist (Moad, 2018). This distinction became central to debates about the autonomy of nature, the intelligibility of scientific laws, and the proper scope of divine action debates in which Leibniz would intervene decisively. Leibniz’s rejection of occasionalism is rooted in his commitment to the autonomy of created substances and the intelligibility of nature. His objections are both metaphysical and methodological. Leibniz famously charges occasionalism with entailing perpetual miracles. If God must intervene at every causal “occasion,” then natural laws become mere descriptions of divine habits rather than expressions of the natures of things. This jeopardize the very notion of a law-governed nature and collapses the distinction between ordinary events and miracles (Nicolas, 2021).

Leibniz extends this critique beyond occasionalism to aspects of Newtonian physics, particularly gravitation, which he argues relies on an occult or miraculous conception of action at a distance (Robert, 2025). For Leibniz, a satisfactory science requires that laws be grounded in the

intrinsic powers of substances. Central to Leibniz's philosophy is the Principle of sufficient reason which are nothing happens without a reason why it is so and not otherwise. According to Leibniz, occasionalism by attributing all causation to God's will, fails to provide sufficient reasons within the created order itself. Events become intelligible only by appeal to divine choice, thereby diminishing the volition of reason and the explanatory aims of science. Fairly speaking, Leibniz argument operates within a specific scientific discipline while the occasionalist of the Ash'arite had been functioned in a broader spectrum since theology according to Al-Ghazali is considered as Universal science (Al-Ghazali, 1106 C.E, Trans. McCarthy, 1999). Against the occasionalist denial of secondary causation, Leibniz maintains that created substances possess intrinsic causal powers. These powers are not conceived in terms of transitive efficient causation between substances, but as internal principles of activity. Substances act from within, unfolding their states according to their own natures. This method eventhough is plausible it still begs numerous questions. For instance, if human possess an intrinsic causal powers, then they are the master of their own actions, where would God fit into the process and would there be any use of Him? That being said detaching himself from every second in our lives would weaken his omnipotence and the that would make the title unfitted to Him which is absurd (Shihadeh, 2005).

Leibniz's alternative to occasionalism is his metaphysics of monads and pre-established harmony (Woolhouse, 1988). Monads are simple, immaterial substances endowed with perception and appetition centers of force and activity rather than passive occasions. Each monad develops according to its own internal law, yet all are harmonized by God from the moment of creation. Pre-established harmony resolves the mind-body problem without invoking continuous divine intervention. Mental and physical states correspond not because they causally interact, but because their internal developments are synchronized by divine wisdom. In this way, Leibniz preserves both divine sovereignty and the genuine activity of created substances. Occasionalism exerted influence beyond the Cartesian

tradition, especially in German philosophy, where figures such as Weigel, Sturm, Wolff, and Ploucquet incorporated occasionalist themes into debates on metaphysics, psychology, and natural philosophy (Nicolas, 2021). Leibniz's engagement with these currents reflects the broader intellectual milieu in which questions of causation, science, and theology were deeply interacted.

Today, Leibniz's critique of occasionalism continues to inform contemporary debates on causation, agency, and the philosophy of mind. His insistence on intrinsic causal powers challenges reductionist models, while his law-based conception of nature anticipates modern concerns with explanation and intelligibility.

On the other hand, Al-Ghazali's method may find an answer to Leibniz's argument by expanding Al-Ash'ari occasionalism through the introduction to the theory of divine customs. Here rejected the necessity between cause and effect and argues that what appears as causal connections are habitual actions established by God rather than necessary links (Yazdani, 2021). Al-Ghazali's approach was not merely theological but also epistemological, aiming to secure rational authority while avoiding subordination of scriptural authority to human reason (Savluk & Hacak, 2024). For Al-Ghazali, the regularity of nature does not arise from intrinsic causal powers but from God's habitual willing (Rayan, 2004). Fire does not *cause* cotton to burn; rather, God creates the burning whenever fire and cotton are conjoined. This view entailed three core theses which are Immediacy of divine causation i.e God directly causes every natural event, the rejection of secondary causation where the created entities lack autonomous causal efficacy and lastly continuous divine activity which posits that God's action is not occasional but constant recreation (Griffel, 2009). These ideas formed a metaphysical framework that emphasized divine omnipotence at the cost of natural causal autonomy. Although developed in a distinct theological context, Islamic occasionalism provided conceptual resources that later resurfaced in European philosophy (Adamson, 2016). In the Ash'arite tradition, Al-Ghazali is considered the bane of philosophers due to his work *Tahafut al-Falasifa*, who notoriously

changed the trajectory of theology and philosophy in the Islamic world (Al-Ghazali, 1111 C.E, Trans. Marmura, 2000). In this brilliant work of his, he strongly rejected Aristotelian natural causality and adhered to doctrine of occasionalism, although his other views differ from the al-Ash'ari.(Yazdani, 2021).

Ash'arite theologians formulated various lines of defence. They stressed that the Qur'anic perspective of the world demands both divine sovereignty and human responsibility. They argued that while all human acts are created by God, humans acquire these acts through created power, establishing a real correlation between the human and the act without attributing causal efficacy to the human power itself. This conditional relation preserves human moral responsibility without compromising God's sole causality (Taskin, 2023). This leads to the discussion between two essential elements which are human voluntariness and moral accountability. Human voluntariness is crucial for reconciling divine causation with moral accountability (Thiele, 2016). While God is the ultimate cause of all actions, humans possess form of acquired capacity or choice that makes them responsible for their actions. Al-Ghazali and Ash'arite theologians reject causal necessity between cause and effect, proposing instead that God's will determines events through divine custom, which allows for human voluntary action to coexist with divine causation. This approach contrast with other Islamic theological views that asserts intrinsic moral qualities independent of divine will, highlighting Al-Ash'ari emphasis on divine law as the sole determinant of moral goodness and evil (Yazdani, 2021). Subsequently, the relation between the created power and the acquisition theory of *al-kasb* is best understood as a conditional relation, where human voluntary intention conditions the divine creation of the act, allowing for genuine human responsibility without compromising God's sole causality (Rayan, 2004).

### Averroes and Aquinas's philosophical critiques

Averroes and Aquinas challenge al-Ash'ari occasionalism's denial of causal necessity. Averroes defends natural causality and causal necessity, arguing that causes in the world have genuine causal powers rather than merely serving as occasions for divine intervention (Averroes, 1195 C.E, Trans. Ibrahim, 2014). Aquinas on the other hand, advocates for concurrentism, where God cooperates with created causes rather than being the sole immediate cause, thereby affirming the real causal efficacy or created agents alongside divine causation (Aquinas, 1274 C.E, Trans, Maurer, 1987). Both argue that denying causal necessity leads to problematic theological and epistemological consequences, such as reducing knowledge based on causality (Fakhry, 1958). However, both of them are working under premises known to the theologians and perhaps Averroes as a philosopher, subscribe to Aristotelian corpus had his reason to advocate such claim and Aquinas being a Christian and belief in the doctrine of incarnation had shaped their thoughts on the matter.

One of Al-Ash'ari's most important books that touches on themes that are important to occasionalism is *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn wa Ikhtilāf al-Muṣallīn*, which means "The Doctrines of the Islamic Groups and the Differences Among the Worshipers" (Bennet, 2024). This literature contains a complete collection of the different religious beliefs held by early Islamic groups, and it is written in a descriptive way. In this work, Al-Ash'ari classifies and analyses many perspectives on causality, divine power, and the genesis of human deeds. Although the text does not present a comprehensive theory of occasionalism, it subtly challenges rationalist theological currents, particularly those of the Mu'tazilites, which advocated for a more autonomous role of human will and natural causality. By cataloguing and examining various perspectives, Al-Ash'ari indicates his preference for a theological framework whereby God is the solitary agent of all happenings in the cosmos. *Kitāb al-Luma' fī al-Radd 'alā Ahl al-Zaygh wa al-Bida'* "The Book of Radiances in Refutation of the People of Deviation and Heresies" (McCarthy, 1953) provides a more direct expression of Al-Ash'ari's theological position on divine agency and

causality. In this argumentative essay, Al-Ash‘arī offers a vigorous defence of Sunni tradition against what he perceives as the doctrinal aberrations of heretical groups. Al-Ash‘arī’s argues that all actions, whether morally good or evil, are ultimately created by God is pertinent to the idea of occasionalism (Al-Ghazali, 1111 C.E, Trans. McCarthy, 1980). People don’t make their own actions; instead, they "acquire" them through a process called *kasb* (acquisition) according to Al-Ash‘ari (Watt, 1948). Furthermore, Al-Ash‘arī argues that natural causes possess no genuine efficacy, they do not independently produce results. Instead, all causal effectiveness is solely ascribed to God, who alone instigates every occurrence and transformation inside the universe. This fundamental rejection of intrinsic natural causality roughly corresponds with the notions that would subsequently be formalized as occasionalism (Taskin, 2023). Al-Ash‘arī’s *Risālat Istihsān al-Khawḍ fī ‘Ilm al-Kalām*, "A Treatise in Defense of the Use of Kalām" , is another major but less direct addition to this line of theology. This short piece is mostly an apology for the validity and importance of doing speculative theology (kalām), but it also shows the methodological approach that Al-Ash‘arī’s theological goal is based on. By making it okay to utilize logical investigation to defend revealed doctrine, Al-Ash‘arī makes it possible for later Ash‘arite theologians to come up with more organized arguments about divine agency, causation, and the nature of temporal events (Winter, 2008). The treatise does not examine causation or divine activity extensively; however, it illustrates Al-Ash‘arī’s dedication to a rational justification of theological principles based on the supremacy of divine will and omnipotence (Wensinck, 1932).

If we pile together all Al-Ash‘arī’s theological writings, you can see that he was a thinker who strongly believed in the idea that God is all-powerful and is the only cause of all events. Although he does not employ the term occasionalism, his repudiation of naturalistic explanations of causation and his argument that God continuously recreates the world, and its occurrences are fundamental to what other theologians would define as the occasionalist view (Thiele, 2016). According to Al-Ash‘arī’s metaphysical perspective, atoms and accidents lack intrinsic permanence;

they require a constant re-creation by God. Consequently, no entity inside creation has independent capacity to create change or generate results. Human will and action are recognized as genuine and consequential; nonetheless, they lack inherent efficacy, as God alone is the originator of both humans will and the subsequent actions (Pullman, 1988). Another significant and compelling dimension on the discourse of atomic theory is that some critics have suggested that Al-Ash'arī's theory of atomism was not fully original, but rather a derivative framework taken from Aristotelian atomistic thought. However, a more careful look at this claim shows that the two school is not connected and there are massive disparities between the two systems (Griffel, 2009). Aristotelian atomism, which developed within the Greek philosophical tradition, perceives matter as continuous, active, and intrinsically subject to change. In this framework, atoms are not discrete or inert entities; rather, they are integrated into a cosmos defined by constant motion and changes, regulated by natural laws. Al-Ash'arī's atomistic theory however, formulated within the kalām tradition of Islamic theology, presents a fundamentally distinct metaphysical framework. Al-Ash'arī posits that atoms are separate, indivisible entities that are inherently inert and devoid of life. These atoms lack any inherent capacity to move, alter, or interact absent an external impetus. These atoms are only alive and able to stay alive because of God's direct, and constant will and power (Al-Faruqi, 1986). Consequently, movement, causality, and all observable events in the world do not transpire naturally or autonomously; rather, they are the consequence of divine intervention at every moment. The claim that Al-Ash'arī adopted his atomistic model from Aristotle is totally incoherent, essentially Al-Ash'ari heavily contradicts Aristotle and as a matter of fact it would mostly go against Aristotle's tenets (Pullman, 1988). Aristotle's framework corresponds with a naturalistic interpretation of the universe, whereas Al-Ash'arī's atomism is distinctly theocentric, intended to validate God's supreme sovereignty and active involvement in the preservation of creation. His atomism used as a theological instrument to bolster the thesis of occasionalism, which posits that God is the exclusive cause of all events, hence refuting any concept of intrinsic causation within the created realm.

Consequently, rather than being a borrowed philosophical term, Al-Ash'arī's atomism should be seen as a distinct theological construct produced in response to both philosophical problems and the demands of Islamic doctrinal consistency (Al-Faruqi, 1986). The logical development of occasionalism attains its fully developed expression in the writings of subsequent Ash'arite theologians. Al-Bāqillānī and al-Juwaynī provided more organized explanations of the doctrine, which made the idea that all causality is divine stronger (Shiojiri, 2007). Nonetheless, the most compelling and logically sound justification of occasionalism may be found in the writings of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, particularly in his major work, *Tahāfut al-Falāsifah* (The Incoherence of the Philosophers) (Al-Ghazali, 1111 C.E, Trans, Marmura, 2000). Al-Ghazālī famously refutes the idea that fire causes burning or that any natural object can produce effects independently; rather, he argues that such sequences are merely habitual (Rayan 2004), created by God in a consistent manner to allow for humans.

### **Al-Ghazali's Argument on The Denial of Causation and why would God create such habit?**

The question on why God create habits and al-Ghazali's denial of causation can be explored through various theological and philosophical perspectives. This question gets to the very heart of Al-Ghazali's philosophical theology, particularly his critique of Neoplatonic philosophers in his famous work "*The Incoherence of The Philosopher*" (*Tahafut al-Falasifa*) (Marmura, 2000). Relatively, Al-Ghazali does not deny what we observe as cause and effect but rather he radically redefines its metaphysical basis. He argues that what we call "cause and effect" is not necessary, intrinsic connection but is merely "Habit" or "Custom established by God's will (Griffel, 2009). For instance, Al-Ghazali's popular thought experiment revolves around the observation of cotton touching a flame and burning. Naturally we may conclude that the flame caused the cotton to burn but Al-Ghazali argues you only observed two events conjoined in time, not that one necessitates the other. The real cause of the cotton burning is God's direct and immediate

act of creation. God simply creates the “burning” in the cotton at the moment it contacts the flame, out of His consistent Habit. Therefore, the connection is not logical or necessary but volitional and habitual. God could create the cotton remaining cool or the flame freezing water instead He chooses not to in order to maintain a stable and predictable world (Al-Ghazali, 1095 C.E, Trans, Khalid Williams, 2016).

Precedingly, this begs the question on why would God create such mechanic? Al-Ghazali provides 4 main theological and pragmatic reason for why a wise God would institute a universe run by habitual cause and effect. Firstly, the reason is to create a stable and knowable world (Zarkasyi, 2018) that is a world without regularity would be chaotic and incomprehensible. Human life, science and society depend on predictable outcome. We could not farm, build or medicine if consequences were random. This habit allows for God’s wisdom (hikmah) to be manifested in a coherent creation. Secondly, to facilitate human action and responsibility (Rayan, 2004) which if effects did not reliably follow causes, human agency would be meaningless. The concept of striving would collapse. How could one be rewarded for working hard or punished for a crime if actions had no reliable consequences? The habit makes moral and legal responsibility possible (Al-Ghazali, 1106 C.E, Trans. McCarthy, 1999). Thirdly is to guide humanity to acknowledging God. This is a crucial point which the reliability of nature is not a reason to forget God, but to recognize Him. For Al-Ghazali, the Habit is so seamless and consistent that it points to a single, sustaining Will behind it all. The true “Agent” is not the flame but God (Shihadeh, 2005). The Habit is a veil of regularity through which the discerning can see the constant activity of the Divine and finally the reason of the creation of habit is to allow for miracles to happen (Savluk & Hacak, 2024). By severing the doctrine of necessary connection, Al-Ghazali creates intellectual space for miracles. A miracle such as the prophet Abraham being thrown into the fire without being burned is not a suspension of natural law but rather God’s acting according to a different habit for a specific purpose of proof and guidance. It is a breaking of the customary sequence.

For Al-Ghazali, God created cause and effect as a Habit not because he is bound by it but as a manifestation of His mercy and wisdom, allowing for a stable world, meaningful action, and the possibility of miracles that a human mind can grasp within their intellect capability and reminding them of the true power that sustains every single moment. The universe, therefore, is not a machine running on autopilot like what was being asserts by Leibniz but a continuous, moment by minute act of divine creation that follows a consistent pattern by God's choice (Griffel, 2009)

Subsequent Ash'arite theologians, especially al-Bāqillānī, expanded on the metaphysical coherence of occasionalism by developing a systematic atomistic ontology to support this theological perspective. Al-Bāqillānī posits that the physical universe consists of distinct, indivisible pieces of matter, specifically atoms, which lack stability and continuity. These atoms are connected by accidents, temporary qualities like motion, color, and taste, which do not last beyond the moment they are created. It is important to note that neither atoms nor accidents have any inherent power to act or cause effects. Their seeming connections and continuities are only real because God is always creating them. Thus, the seeming stability and coherence of the natural universe does not stem from natural causality but from divine custom (Shiojiri, 2007). This atomistic framework was not put out as a scientific theory in the contemporary sense, but rather as a religious need aimed at preserving the principle of ongoing creation (*khalq jadīd*). The Ash'arite view of atomism is a metaphysical extension of their view of occasionalism. It makes sure that no aspect of creation can exist or support itself without God's will. In this manner, Ash'arite theology upholds a rigorous and unwavering focus on God's exclusive agency in all matters. While it is essential to take caution in making direct analogies, it is significant that this model has compelling parallels to certain interpretations of quantum physics, wherein particles demonstrate ostensibly discontinuous behaviour and possess indeterminate qualities independent of observation. Academics like Bernard Pullman, in writings such as *The Atom in the History of Human Thought*, have acknowledged the intellectual complexity of Ash'arite atomism, observing that it

foreshadows subsequent philosophical and scientific discussions regarding the essence of matter and the boundaries of causal explanation (Pullman, 1988). The evolution of this unique theological atomism did not transpire in intellectual seclusion. It needs to be put in the rich and changing setting of the Abbasid Caliphate, especially during its cultural peak from the seventh to the twelfth centuries. The translation movement, which was based in places like Bayt al-Ḥikmah in Baghdad, was one of the most important ways that people shared ideas at this time (Williams, 1985). Key patrons, like the Barāmika (Barmakids), helped this movement by bringing Greek, Persian, and Indian philosophical and scientific books into conversation with Islamic philosophy. The Barmakids, a famous Persian family with historical ties to the Buddhist academic traditions of Balkh, were very important in making these cross-cultural meetings happen. Through their support, a diverse intellectual environment developed, allowing the Ash‘arites' new ideas about theology and metaphysics to thrive. Scholars often theorize about potential parallels between Ash‘arite occasionalism and Buddhist metaphysical teachings, especially the concepts of impermanence (*anicca*) and dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*). There is still not much direct textual evidence that links Ash‘arite kalām to Buddhist philosophy, but the themes are very similar. Both faiths adhere to the notion that perceived causal links in the world are fundamentally insubstantial and ephemeral. These conceptual parallels imply that the intellectual dynamism of the Abbasid era may have encompassed nuanced yet significant interactions between Islamic and Buddhist metaphysical concepts (Kazemi, 2010). The legacy of Ash‘arite occasionalism has been extremely complex and sophisticated. Although the doctrine encountered substantial critique from philosophers like Averroes (Ibn Rushd), who advocated for the Aristotelian notion of natural causation as vital for scientific investigation, it still preserved its pre-eminence within Sunni theological discourse. In *Tahāfut al-Falāsifah*, we can observe that Al-Ghazālī pushed the idea of Ash‘arite occasionalism forward by writing a long criticism of Avicenna and Aristotelian on necessity while theologically and philosophically brilliant (Adamson, 2016) this argument

is not invincible and face a potent challenge from Ibn Rush's who wrote *Tahafut at-Tahafut* as a respond to Al-Ghazali and the Ash'arites. While both Al-Ghazali's and Ibn Rushd's framework present vulnerabilities, the very persistence of this debate is a testament to its significance. Rather than seeking definitive victor, scholarly value lies in examining the respective strength and limitations of each system. A dialectical engagement with both positions offers a more nuanced understanding of the problem than committing to any single school of thought could provide.

Alongside its theological impact, Ash'arite occasionalism has resonated in the annals of Western philosophy (Griffel, 2009), especially within the voluntarist traditions of enlightenment philosophers like Leibniz which we have highlighted previously alongside Descartes and Malebranche, who similarly mentioned divine agency and scrutinized the independence of natural causes. Moreover, although Ash'arite philosophy lacked empirical foundations, its denial of material continuity and natural causation parallels many contemporary advancements in quantum physics (Pullman, 1988).

Subsequently, the Ash'arite idea of occasionalism and western philosophy is a great mix of religious devotion and philosophical rigor. These concepts arose in a vibrant intellectual context influenced by cross-cultural interactions and articulated a vision of the universe that affirmed God's absolute sovereignty while offering a complex metaphysical framework. Although their denial of intrinsic causality imposed specific constraints on the advancement of empirical knowledge, the lasting intellectual heritage of Ash'arite occasionalism continues to influence modern discourse in theology, philosophy, and the history of science (Bakar, 1991). Its contributions highlight the profundity and uniqueness of traditional Islamic thinking and its enduring significance to overarching philosophical inquiries like agency, causality, and the essence of reality (Harding, 1993).

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