

Monte Cook (University of Oklahoma), “Cartesianism And Body-Body Occasionalism”

Time was when most Cartesians were thought to be occasionalists. Now, most Cartesians, whatever their views about other sorts of interactions, are still thought to be at least body-body occasionalists: they are taken to believe that one body cannot causally affect another body, it can only provide the occasion for God to cause a change in the other body.

I criticize an assumption at the heart of the discussions of the Cartesians and body-body occasionalism, the assumption that if a Cartesian believes that only God can cause motion (or perhaps that only God and finite spirits can do this), then that Cartesian believes that bodies cannot causally affect one another. Daniel Garber, Steven Nadler, Tad Schmaltz, and Michael Della Rocca all make this assumption in arguing that Descartes, Antoine Arnauld, Louis de la Forge, Géraud de Cordemoy, or Robert Desgabets were or were not body-body occasionalists. I show that this assumption, though natural, is wrong. It is natural, because Descartes seems clearly to say that any change in bodies is a change in motion. Still, this assumption is wrong, because for the Cartesians some changes in the material world are not changes in motion itself but changes in a feature of motion, its direction. Hence, even if one body cannot change the motion of another, that is, even if it cannot increase or decrease the other's motion, it can still affect the other by changing its direction.

I first explain the importance of the distinction between causing motion and causally affecting the direction of motion by discussing how various Cartesians use this distinction to show how mind to body causation is consistent with a principle of the conservation of motion in the physical world. Leibniz was right, if not about Descartes then at least about many of Descartes's followers, that they believed that the mind does not affect the quantity of motion in the physical world, only its direction. I then show how the Cartesians make this same distinction for body-body causation. Indeed, Desgabets, who like all the Cartesians draws on Descartes's discussion of motion in Part Two of the *Principles*, explicitly treats mind to body causation and body-body causation on a par: in both cases there is causation, but in neither case is there causation of motion. Arguing that for the Cartesians bodies cannot cause motion, then, is insufficient to establish that they believe that bodies cannot causally affect one another.

I want to stress that I am not primarily arguing for a position on whether Descartes and the others are body-body occasionalists. Rather, I am arguing that a faulty assumption permeates the discussion of whether they are and that any argument that a given Cartesian is a body-body occasionalist that rests on this assumption is faulty. Still, I do believe that Cordemoy is an occasionalist; and I show that Nadler, who agrees, misses a subtle distinction in Cordemoy's occasionalism because he fails to appreciate the importance for Cordemoy of the distinction between the quantity of motion in the universe and the direction of that motion. Cordemoy subscribes to the principle of the conservation of motion. But he does not try to use his occasionalism to avoid conflict with this principle. He thinks that an occasional cause of motion in the universe would be just as problematic as a real cause of motion. Instead, he seeks to avoid conflict with the principle of the conservation of motion by saying that occasional causes affect only the *direction* of motion. I also believe that Desgabets is *not* a body-body occasionalist, and I show how Schmaltz, who thinks that he is, misses how Desgabets thinks that one body can causally affect another without adding to or subtracting from its motion because he fails to appreciate the importance for Desgabets of the distinction between quantity of motion and direction of motion.