

Causation, Dispositions, and Divine Action

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ABSTRACT

This paper provides a conceptualization of *causation* and *dispositions* on the grounds of a new view of divine action, which we call *Divine Compositionism*. Even though theistic philosophers and metaphysically-interested theistic scientists agree that God created, sustains, and providentially governs the world, they remain divided over how to understand divine *sustaining* action in relation to causation. At least since the 13th century the major competing theories among Christian theologians and philosophers have been (and remain) *concurrentism* and *occasionalism*. *Concurrentism* adopts Aristotle's distinction between *primary* and *secondary causation*, holding that God (the primary cause) somehow co-operates with secondary causes. *Occasionalism* holds that the only real causes are God's immediate, existence-conferring volitions, holding that apparent causes are really 'occasions' for God to bring about effects. The secondary aim of this paper is to advance the debate by providing an alternative.

We first briefly describe the five-category ontology *Divine Compositionism* presupposes. Taking cues from recent work asserting the dispositional nature of phenomena at the quantum level, we then describe in a concept of an *event* and a necessitarian view of *causation* consistent with scientific practice and with *Divine Compositionism*. Then we show how a dispositional property can be analyzed in terms of God's compositional, existence-conferring action according to his will or plan. Our view of divine action is a version of occasionalism regarding physical causation only. Fourth, we show how *occasional causation* can be understood as the relation constituting a dispositional property. Finally, we summarize how *Divine Compositionism* satisfies other widely-recognized demands upon a theory of divine action and respond to two objections