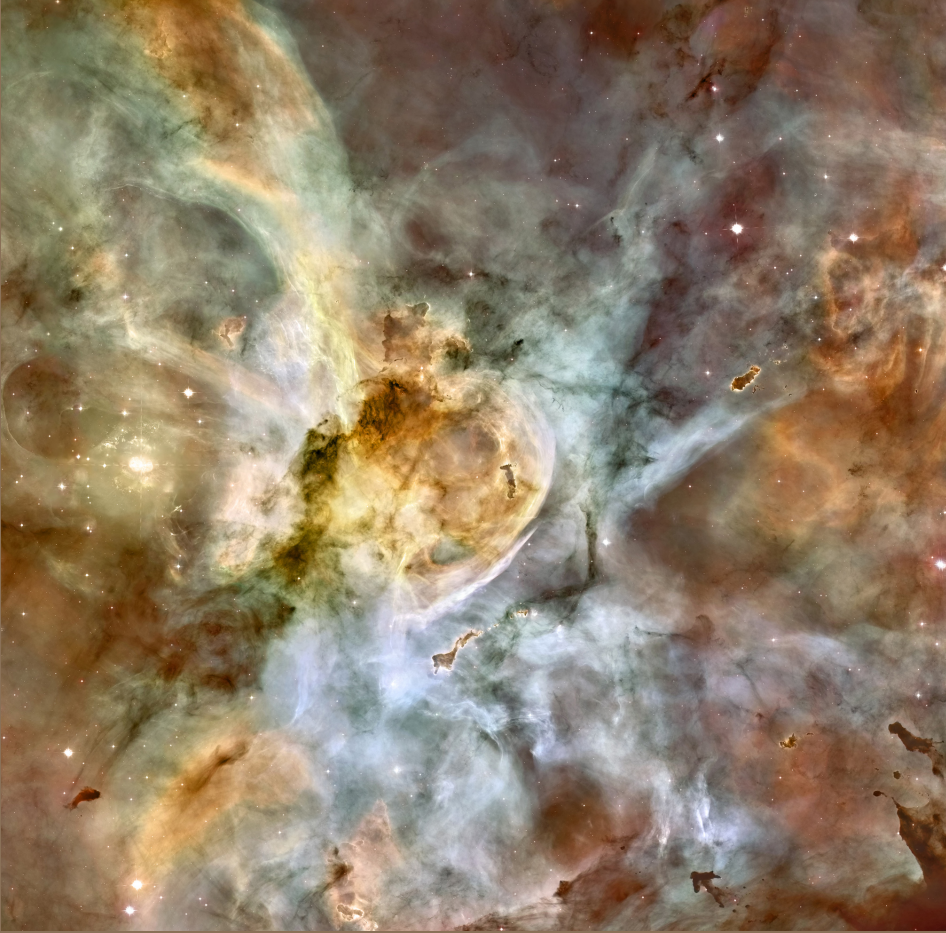


# OCCASIONALISM REVISITED

*New Essays from the Islamic and Western Traditions*

Second Edition

ASIPT Series in Islamic Philosophy and Theology - 2



Edited by  
Nazif Muhtaroglu

## OCCASIONALISM REVISITED

New Essays from the Islamic and Western Traditions



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*New Essays from the Islamic and Western Traditions*

Edited by  
Nazif Muhtaroglu  
Second Edition



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American Society of Islamic Philosophy and Theology

Islamic Philosophy and Theology Series, volume 2

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*There are two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle.*

Albert Einstein



## Preface

This book represents an expanded and updated edition of *Occasionalism Revisited*, originally published by Kalam Research and Media in 2017. This new edition is structured into three distinct sections: “Occasionalism in Islamic Intellectual History,” “Occasionalism in Modern European Philosophy,” and, notably, a new section on “Occasionalism in Contemporary Philosophy.”

This addition addresses a gap in the first edition, which included only a single paper on current philosophical discourse—specifically, “Divine Compositionism as Occasionalism.” In this revised edition, the aforementioned paper has been thoughtfully relocated to the third section and retitled “Physical Occasionalism is Divine Compositionism,” reflecting its enhanced analytical depth.

Additionally, we have included two significant new chapters: Alvin Plantinga’s “Law, Cause, and Occasionalism,” previously published but reprinted here within this new context, and “Occasionalism in a Contemporary Context” by Douglas Kutach and Özgür Koca.

All chapters in this book except the one authored by Plantinga are original contributions, many of which were initially presented at the conference “Occasionalism East and West,” which I had the pleasure of organizing at Harvard University in May 2013. This edition aims to further illuminate the vibrant and evolving discourse on occasionalism, bridging past insights with contemporary philosophical inquiry.

Finally, this book is also designed to guide scholars who may want to outline courses on occasionalism. For this reason, a list of selected readings on occasionalism in English is added as an appendix. Both considerable primary and secondary sources can be found within it. A timeline for occasionalism is included as well, which covers all significant dates relevant to occasionalism.



## Acknowledgement

I am deeply grateful to Aaron Spevack and Michaela Spampinato for their invaluable assistance in preparing this new edition. I also extend my gratitude to the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations at Harvard University and the Philosophy Department at Yale University for supporting my research fellowship during this period.

I wish to reiterate my appreciation for the generous research funding provided by the John Templeton Foundation, Kalam Research and Media Foundation, and TUBITAK (Bidep 2232-Program) for the first edition.

Many of the chapters in this book were first presented at the conference “Occasionalism East and West,” which I had the honor of organizing at Harvard University in May 2013, as well as the subsequent conference “Occasionalism and Theories of Causality” held at Boğaziçi University in June 2015. Special thanks go to Ahmad Ragab, Khaled El-Rouayheb, Jeffrey McDonough, Chryssi Sidiropoulou, and Himmet Taşkömür for their pivotal roles in organizing these conferences. Their collaboration and support were instrumental in bringing together the diverse perspectives and insightful discussions that have enriched this edition.





## Notes on Contributors

**Fred Ablondi** is Professor of Philosophy at Hendrix College. He received his Ph.D. from Marquette University. In addition to numerous articles in modern philosophy, Professor Ablondi authored *Gerauld de Cordemoy: Atomist, Occasionalist, Cartesian* (2005).

**Marc A. Hight** is Elliott Professor of Philosophy at Hampden Sydney College. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Syracuse. Professor Hight is mainly interested in history of philosophy (especially early modern philosophy), philosophy of religion and philosophy of social sciences. Apart from many articles (mainly on Berkeley's ideas), he published the following monographs: *The Idea and Ontology: An Essay in Early Modern Metaphysics of Ideas* (2008) and *Correspondence of George Berkeley* (2013).

**Özgür Koca** is Associate Professor of Islamic Studies at Bayan Islamic Graduate School. He earned his Ph.D. from the Claremont Graduate School. Dr. Koca is mainly interested in the history of the Islamic intellectual tradition and the relationship between science and religion. He authored *Islam, Causality and Freedom: From Medieval to the Modern Era* (2020).

**Douglas Kutach** is an independent scholar. He received his Ph.D. from Rutgers University. He authored *Causation* (Key Concepts in Philosophy, 2014) and *Causation and Its Basis in Fundamental Physics* (Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Science, 2013).

**Edward Omar Moad** is Professor of Philosophy at Qatar University. He earned his Ph.D. in philosophy from the University of Missouri-Columbia. His research interests cover in Islamic philosophy, metaphysics, philosophy of religion, meta-ethics, and comparative philosophy. Moad published numerous articles concerning these areas and authored *Coherence of the Incoherence* (2023).

**Nazif Muhtaroglu** is currently an associate research scholar in the philosophy department at Yale University. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Kentucky with a dissertation on the Islamic and Cartesian roots of occasionalism. He is primarily interested in historical and theoretical links between Islamic and Western philosophies, the metaphysical and

ethical issues surrounding causality. Muhtaroglu is co-editor with Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka *Classic Issues in Islamic Philosophy and Theology Today* (2010), with Tymieniecka and Detlev Quintern *The Logos of Life and Cultural Interlacing* (2014).

**Walter Ott** is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Virginia. He also earned his Ph.D. from the University of Virginia. Ott's primary publications concern early modern philosophy. Some of them are *Locke's Philosophy of Language* (2004) and *Causation and the Laws of Nature in Early Modern Philosophy* (2009).

**Andrew Platt** is Visiting Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Villanova University. He earned his Ph.D. degree from the UMASS-Amherst with a dissertation on the rise of Cartesian occasionalism. Platt published several articles that concern early modern philosophy in journals such as the *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*. He authored *One True Cause: Causal Powers, Divine Concurrence, and the Seventeenth-Century Revival of Occasionalism* (2020).

**Walter J. Schultz** is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Northwestern. He earned his doctorate in philosophy at the University of Minnesota with specializations in mathematical logic and economic theory. He studied under Leonid Hurwicz who later won the Nobel Prize in Economics in 2007. For the past 15 years he has concentrated on theological metaphysics having been influenced by the ideas of the 18<sup>th</sup> century theologian/ philosopher, Jonathan Edwards, God and creation. Dr. Schultz has published extensively on philosophical theology in journals such as *Jonathan Edwards Studies* and *Philosophia Christi*.

**J. Aaron Simmons** is Professor of Philosophy at Furman University. He received his Ph.D. from Vanderbilt University. His publications mainly concern philosophy of religion in continental philosophy and some of them are as follows: *God and the Other: Ethics and Politics After the Theological Turn* (2011), *Reexamining Deconstruction and Determinate Religion: Toward a Religion with Religion* (co-edited with Stephen Minister, 2012).

**Rev. Dr. Lisanne D'Andrea-Winslow** is an Affiliate Professor at the Evangelical Theological Faculty in Leuven, Belgium, and formerly served for over two decades as a full-professor at the University of Northwestern–St. Paul. She holds two doctoral degrees, a Ph.D. in Cell Biology and Biochemistry and a Ph.D. in Systematic Theology, and was a Visiting Fellow at Yale Divinity School. An ordained minister in the Congregational Church, she has served

in pastoral ministry alongside her academic career. As a marine biologist, theologian, poet, and pastor, her scholarship and creative work engage contemporary research in ecotheology and ecospirituality, divine action theory, and Jonathan Edwards studies.

**Aladdin M. Yaqub** is William Wilson Selfridge Professor of Philosophy at Lehigh University. He received his Ph.D. in philosophy from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Dr. Yaqub's primary areas of research are logic, truth theory, philosophy of mathematics, metaphysics, and Islamic Philosophy. He authored *The Liar Speaks the Truth* (1993) and *An Introduction to Logical Theory* (2013) and currently translated al-Ghazālī's *Moderation in Belief* (2013).

## Appendix

### Selected Readings on Occasionalism in English

Another edited volume of essays on Occasionalism:

Camposampiero, Matteo Favaretti, Mariangela Priarolo, Emanuela Scribano (ed.s).  
*Occasionalism: From Metaphysics to Science (Age of Descartes)*. Brepols Publisher, 2019.

### St. Augustine

Augustine. *The City of God Against Pagans (De Civitate Dei)*, edited and translated by R. W. Dyson. Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2006.

For Augustine's ordering of created beings hierarchically and his view on their causal efficacy,  
 see Book V.9, Book IX.9, Book XIII.2

For his view on human will see Book XII.6-7

For his account of seminal reasons see Book 7.30

For his consideration of everything to be miraculous see Book X.12, Book XXI.7

Whether Augustine embraced occasionalism is subject to various interpretations:

Stephen Menn presents him as a limited occasionalist:

Menn, Stephen. *Descartes and Augustine*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Richard Sorabji argues that Augustine is not an occasionalist in any sense: Sorabji, Richard.  
*Time, Creation and the Continuum: Theories in the Antiquity and Early Middle Ages*. London:  
 Duckworth, 1983.

### The Ash'arite School

The best available primary source on al-Ash'arī's ideas is Richard McCarthy's edition and translation of al-Ash'arī's several works: Al-Ash'arī. *The Theology of al-Ash'arī*, edited and translated by Richard J. McCarthy. Beyrouth: Imprimerie Catholique, 1953.

Al-Ash'arī's account of human will and action is subject to different interpretations:

For a non-occasionalist interpretation see Frank, Richard M. "The Structure of Created Causality according to al-Ash'arī, An Analysis of *Kitāb al-Luma'* pars. 82-164." *Studia Islamica* 25 (1966): 13-75.

## Occasionalism Revisited

For an occasionalist interpretation see Abrahamov, Binyamin. "A Re-examination of al-Ash'arī's Theory of *kasb* according to *Kitāb al-Luma'*." *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 2 (1989): 210-221.

Introductory surveys of atomism and metaphysics of the Ash'arites and Mu'tazilites:

Fakhry, Majid. *Islamic Occasionalism and its Critique by Avorres and Aquinas*. London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd. 1958.

Wolfson, Harry A. *The Philosophy of Kalam*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976.

Dhanani, Alnoor. *The Physical Theory of Kalām: Atoms, Space, and Void in Basrian Mu'tazilī Cosmology*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994.

Frank, Richard M. *Early Islamic Theology: the Mu'tazilites and Al-Ash'arī: Texts and Studies on the Development and History of Kalam*, edited by Dimitri Gutas (Variorum Collected Studies Series). London: Ashgate, 2007.

Frank, Richard M. *Classical Islamic Theology: The Ash'arites*, edited by Dimitri Gutas (Variorum Collected Studies Series). London: Ashgate, 2008.

## The Māturīdī School

The primary source on al-Māturīdī's theological views:

Al-Māturīdī. *The Book of Monotheism (Kitāb al-Tawḥīd)*: Al-Māturīdī. *The Book of Monotheism (Kitāb al-Tawḥīd)* translated by Tahir Uluç, edited with annotations and introduction by Ramon Harvey. Istanbul: Ibn Haldun University Press, 2025.

Al-Māturīdī. *The Book of Monotheism (Kitāb al-Tawḥīd)*, translated by Sulaiman Ahmed with a commentary. Maturidi Institute, 2019.

For an introduction to al-Māturīdī's ideas see Ceric, Mustafa. *Roots of Synthetic Theology in Islam: A Study of The Theology of Abu Mansur Al-Maturidi*. Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 1995.

Nur al-Dīn al-Ṣābūnī. *An Introduction to Islamic Theology (al-Bidāyah fī Uṣūl al-Dīn)*. Translated and annotated by Faraz A. Khan. Foreword by Hamza Yusuf Hanson. Berkeley: Zaytuna College, 2020.

For an Ash'arite scholar's (Sa'd al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī) commentary on a Māturīdite scholar's (Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafi) view of Islamic creed see Sa'id al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī, *A Commentary on the Creed of Islam*, translated with Introduction and Notes by Earl Edgar Elder. New York: Columbia University Press, 1950.

## Al-Ghazālī

Al-Ghazālī. *The Incoherence of the Philosophers (Tahāfut al-falāsifah)*, a Parallel English-Arabic Text, edited and translated by M. E. Marmura. Provo (Utah): Brigham Young University Press, 1997.

The book is divided into 20 discussions in which al-Ghazālī explicates and criticizes twenty

propositions of the *falāsifa*.

17th Discussion is on the possibility of miracles and directly relevant to causality.

First five discussions are on the *falāsifa*'s view on the existence and nature of God and the eternity of the world. They also relate to causality and modality.

For al-Ghazālī's methodological stand in this book, see also its *Introduction*.

Al-Ghazālī. *Al-Ghazālī's Moderation in Belief* [*Al-Iqtisād fī al-I'tiqād*], translated by Aladdin M. Yaqub. University of Chicago Press, 2013.

This book is more relevant to occasionalism.

The first Treatise of the *Moderation in Belief* is divided into ten propositions about the existence and nature of God.

The first part of the second Treatise is about seven divine attributes. The attributes of power, knowledge, life and will are especially relevant to occasionalism.

Al-Ghazālī's view of causality is subject to various interpretations:

For a good summary see Griffel, Frank. *Al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009. (Especially Chapters 7-9). Griffel also introduces his own interpretations according to which al-Ghazālī's work reflect both occasionalist and non-occasionalist stands over his career and thus al-Ghazālī was not definitely made his mind between either alternative.

For a serious non-occasionalist interpretation of al-Ghazālī, see Frank, Richard. *Creation and the Cosmic System: Al-Ghazālī & Avicenna*, Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1992. Frank displays the Avicennan background of al-Ghazālī and argues for Avicenna's influence on al-Ghazālī concerning his cosmology.

See also the following article of Lenn Goodman: Goodman, Lenn. "Did Al-Ghazali deny Causality?" *Studia Islamica* 47 (1978): 83-120.

Yet the classical interpretation presents al-Ghazālī as an occasionalist. Accepting this view, Michael Marmura offers a serious critique of Richard Frank's interpretation: Marmura, Michael E. "Ghazālīan Causes and Intermediaries." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 115 (1995): 89-100.

See also Dallal, Ahmad. "Ghazali and the Perils of Interpretation." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 122, no. 4 (2002): 773-787.

## Moses Maimonides

Maimonides, Moses. *The Guide for the Perplexed*, translated by M. Friedländer. New York: Dover Publications, 1956.

-In Part I, Chapter 73, Maimonides summarizes the atomism and occasionalism of the Ash'arites in twelve propositions, explains them briefly and offers some criticism.

## The Latin Scholastics

For Islamic occasionalism presented in the works of the Latin scholastics, see:

In Thomas Aquinas:

in *Summa Theologica* Book I. Q.105. A.5 See, Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae. Latin Text and English Translation*. (tr. & ed.) T. Gilby and T. C. O'Brien. 61 vols. (London: 1963)

## Occasionalism Revisited

in *De Potentia Dei* Q.3, A7c See Thomas Aquinas, *On the Power of God* [*Quaestiones disputatae de potentia Dei*], tr. by Lawrence Shapcote (Westminster, Md.: The Newman Press, 1952)

in *Summa Contra Gentiles* Book III, Part I, Chapters 65-69 See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Book III, Part I, tr. Vernon J. Bourke (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975)

In Gabriel Biel:

in *Collectorium circa quattuor libros sententiarum* vol. 4, pt. 1, q. 1, art. 1, not. 1 translated by A. Freddoso as "Whether the sacraments of the New Covenant are effective causes of grace," <http://www.nd.edu/%7Eafreddos/translat/biel.htm>

In Francisco Suárez:

in *Metaphysical Disputations* Disputation 18, Section 1 See Suárez, Francisco. *Metaphysical Disputations 17-19: On Efficient Causality*, translated by A. Freddoso. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994.

## The Cartesians

Good survey books on occasionalism among the Cartesians:

Nadler, Steven. *Occasionalism: Causation Among the Cartesians*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Platt, Andrew R. *One True Cause: Causal Powers, Divine Concurrence, and the Seventeenth-Century Revival of Occasionalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020.

Another valuable survey article:

Radner, Daisie. "Occasionalism." In *Routledge History of Philosophy IV: Renaissance and Seventeenth Century Rationalism*, edited by J. H. R. Parkinson, 349-384. New York: Routledge, 1993.

Descartes:

Descartes, Rene. *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. Vol: I & II, translated by John Cottingham and Robert Stoothoff and Dugald Murdoch. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Descartes, Rene. *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. Vol: III, translated by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch and Anthony Kenny. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Descartes's view of causality is subject diverse interpretations:

The view that ascribes a limited occasionalism to Descartes:

Nadler, Steven. "Descartes and Occasional Causation." In *Occasionalism: Causation Among*



*the Cartesians*, 29-47. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Garber, Daniel. "Descartes and Occasionalism." In *Descartes Embodied*, edited by Daniel Garber, 203-220. Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2001.

Menn, Stephen. *Descartes and Augustine*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Hatfield, Gary C. "Force (God) in Descartes' Physics." In *Descartes*, edited by John Cottingham, 281-310. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

The non-occasionalist interpretations of Descartes:

Schmaltz, Tad M. *Descartes on Causation*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Gabbey, Alan. "Force and Inertia in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, Descartes and Newton." In *Descartes: Philosophy, Mathematics and Physics*, edited by S. Gaukroger. Sussex: Harvester Press, 1980.

Louis de La Forge:

De la Forge, Louis. *Treatise on the Human Mind*, translated by Desmond M. Clarke. London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1997.

Arnold Geulincx:

Geulincx, Arnold. *Ethics*, with Samuel Beckett's notes; translated by Martin Wilson; edited by Han van Ruler, Anthony Uhlmann, Martin Wilson. Leiden: Brill, 2006.

For a monist interpretation of Geulincx see Cooney, Brian. *The Development of Cartesian Metaphysics: Descartes, Malebranche, Geulincx*. Unpublished Dissertation, University of McGill, 1972.

Gerauld Cordemoy:

Cordemoy, Gerauld de. *Six Discourses on the Distinction between the Body and the Soul & Treatises on Metaphysics*. Translated with an Introduction by Steven Nadler. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015.

A good introduction to Cordemoy's philosophy and occasionalism:

Ablondi, Fred. *Gerauld de Cordemoy: Atomist, Occasionalist, Cartesian*. Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2005.

Malebranche:

*Malebranche, Nicolas. The Search after Truth*. trans. T. M. Lennon and P. J. Olscamp. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980.

In Book VI, Part II, Chapter III—entitled as "the most dangerous error of the philosophy of the ancients"—Malebranche presents two arguments for occasionalism (the no necessary connection argument and epistemic argument).

In the 15<sup>th</sup> Elucidation, Malebranche defends occasionalism and criticizes the scholastic views of causality.

## Occasionalism Revisited

In Book I.I, Book VI.II. III, and in Elucidation I, Malebranche introduces his occasionalist account of human will and discusses in what sense human beings are free and morally responsible.

Malebranche, Nicolas. *Dialogues on Metaphysics and on Religion*, translated by N. Jolley and D. Scott. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

In the 7<sup>th</sup> Dialogue, Malebranche presents his argument for occasionalism that is based on the real identity of creation and conservation.

A good essay on Malebranche's view of causality:

Adams, Robert Merrihew. "Malebranche's Causal Concepts." In *The Divine Order, the Human Order, and the Order of Nature: Historical Perspectives*, edited by Eric Watkins, 67-105. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

For more on Malebranche's arguments for occasionalism see:

Lee, Sukjae. "Necessary Connections and Continuous Creation: Malebranche's Two Arguments for Occasionalism." *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 46/4 (2008): 539-566.

Lee, Sukjae. "Passive Natures and No Representations: Malebranche's Two Local Arguments for Occasionalism." *The Harvard Review of Philosophy* 15/1 (2007): 72-91.

## British Philosophy and Colonial America

A good survey on Malebranche's reception among the British and American philosophers:

McCracken, Charles J. *Malebranche and British Philosophy*. New York: Clarendon Press-Oxford, 1983.

the second part of the book examines the reception of Malebranche's ideas among the following British philosophers: Locke, John Norris, Thomas Taylor, Arthur Collier, Berkeley, Hume, and Thomas Reid.

The appendix of the book examines Malebranche's reception in Colonial America, among the following philosophers: Cotton Mather, Samuel Johnson, and Jonathan Edwards.

Berkeley:

Berkeley, George. *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, edited by Jonathan Dancy. Oxford: New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Berkeley, George. *Philosophical writings*, edited by Desmond M. Clarke. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008. (The part entitled "An Essay on Motion" is more relevant to occasionalism.)

John Norris:

Mander, W. J. *The philosophy of John Norris*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.

## Jonathan Edwards:

See the works of Jonathan Edwards online <http://edwards.yale.edu>

(Jonathan Edwards Center at Yale University)

Especially relevant to occasionalism: "Notes on Natural Science," Corollaries, 9, 12, 15, 16 (in *Notebooks*, 16-19).

Crisp, Oliver D. "How 'Occasional' was Jonathan Edwards's Occasionalism?" In *Jonathan Edwards: Philosophical Theologian*, edited by Paul Helm and Oliver D. Crisp, 61-78. Burlington: Ashgate, 2003.

19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries

A significant attempt by Ali Sedad to relate Ash'arite atomism to thermodynamics and atomistic theories in nineteenth-century Europe:

Nazif Muhtaroglu, "Ali Sedad Bey's (d.1900) *Kavâidü't-Taḥavvülât fî Ḥarekâtî'z-Zerrât* (*Principles of Transformation in the Motion of Particles*)" in *Oxford Handbook of Islamic Philosophy*, eds. Khaled El-Rouayheb & Sabine Schmidke, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 586-606.

One of the most significant occasionalists from the late Ottoman and early Turkish Republican era is Said Nursi. The following works are especially relevant to various aspects of his occasionalism:

Nursi, Said. *The Words*. Translated by Şükran Vahide. Istanbul: Sözlere Neşriyat, 2008.

20<sup>th</sup> Word: In this chapter, Nursi discusses the meaning of miracles in relation to scientific and technological advances from an occasionalist point of view.

24<sup>th</sup> Word: Nursi's evaluation of the relationship between Divine Names.

26<sup>th</sup> Word: In this chapter, Nursi analyses the problem of free will and offers his occasionalist solution to it.

30<sup>th</sup> Word: In the first part of this chapter, Nursi analyses the human ego, and in the second part the motion of atomic particles from an occasionalist point of view.

32<sup>nd</sup> Word: Nursi offers arguments for the existence of God and proposes his interpretation of sciences to be practiced under the guidance of Divine Names.

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