Peter of Palude and the Fiery Furnace[1]

ABSTRACT: According to most medieval thinkers, whenever something causally acts on another thing, God also acts with it. Durand of St.-Pourçain, an early fourteenth-century Dominican philosopher, disagrees. Instead, he maintains what has come to be called a 'mere conservationist' view, claiming that created causes alone are sufficient to bring about their effects. This paper is about a fourteenth-century objection to mere conservationism, which I will call the *Fiery Furnace objection*, as formulated by Durand's contemporary, Peter of Palude. In short, the Fiery Furnace objection shows that if we test our theories of divine concurrence against a case that involves a specific kind of miracles, then it turns out that mere conservationism is rather problematic. Although Peter of Palude is not usually regarded as an overwhelmingly original thinker, this paper calls attention to one of his more interesting controversies with his confriar, while also clarifies how some medieval thinkers understood the broadly speaking Aristotelian conviction that causes and effects must be necessarily related.

Keywords: causation, divine concurrence, medieval

Imagine Norah kindling a fire. She strikes a match, places it on a piece of tinder. The tinder and the logs burst into flames, and a few seconds later the fire is cracking in the fireplace. As you approach it, you can feel its warmth. As you throw your newspaper on it, the fire ignites the pages. Just like always; that's what fire does.

Now also imagine, as medieval Jewish, Christian, and Muslim philosophers believed, that there is a creator without whom the world would not exist. It's not just that the world

would not have come into being, but that it would not exist *right now*. Without this creator, there would be no heat of the fire. Indeed, there would be no fire to bring about the heat, no Norah to start the fire, and also no matches and tinder to start the fire with. If the creator wants Norah, the matches, the tinder, the fire, and the heat to exist, they exist; if the creator does not want them to exist, they do not. In this case, you might ask: who did really bring about the fire? Was it Norah, by kindling it? Or was it this creator, by willing it to exist? Or perhaps both?

This cluster of problems is usually called 'the problem of divine concurrence,' which can also be regarded as a thought experiment on the assumption that God exists and is the creator and sustainer of the universe.[2] If God causes the world to exist, is God also active in every causal operation in it? Is it meaningful to say in this case that the *fire* causes the heat? There are, roughly speaking, three ways to answer these questions. First, you might think that if there were such a God, then the fire indeed would not bring about anything, strictly speaking — and in this case, you would be an *occasionalist*, sharing a view with some medieval Islamic theologians (and later perhaps Malebranche). Second, on the contrary, you may opt to argue that if there were such a God who created such a world as we live in, then this God would not contribute to the causal operations of the created world — and in this case, you would be a *mere conservationist*, sharing a view with only a few medieval thinkers. And third, if you are unsatisfied with either of the previous options, and say that if there were such a God who created such a world as we live in, then both God and things in the world would be causally active — then you are a *concurrentist*, sharing the "standard" medieval view, that of Thomas Aquinas, John Duns Scotus, William Ockham, and many others.

This paper is about a fourteenth-century objection to mere conservationism, which I will call the *Fiery Furnace objection*. In short, the Fiery Furnace objection shows that if we test our theories of divine concurrence against a case that involves a specific kind of miracles (more about this later), then it turns out that mere conservationism is rather problematic. The objection was originally formulated against the mere conservationist view of Durand of St.-Pourçain (c. 1275—1334), a Dominican thinker at the University of Paris, who became mostly known for his sometimes ardent criticism of Aquinas, resulting in several investigations about the orthodoxy of his teachings.[3] In section 1, I provide some background to mere conservationism in general, and examine some motivations to endorse the view as it was put forward by Durand (Durand's Dilemma). In section 2, I show how the Fiery Furnace objection was originally formulated by Durand's contemporary, Peter of Palude (c. 1275—1342). Peter was also a Dominican, who was first noticed in the twentieth century precisely because of his close connection to Durand, even though he was also involved in the investigations against his confriar.[4] Peter often defends Aquinas's views against Durand's criticism, and the present case is no exception. I examine the premises of Peter's Fiery Furnace objection, and show why they may be regarded as plausible within the medieval framework. Finally, in section 3, I present Peter's solution to the problem of divine concurrence, and show why it is immune both to the Fiery Furnace objection and to Durand's Dilemma.[5] While Peter's treatment of the problem of concurrence is far from detailed, it contains, I show, one of his more interesting controversies with his contemporary. This controversy also sheds some light on the question of how some medieval thinkers understood the broadly speaking Aristotelian conviction that causes and effects must be necessarily related.

1. Durand's Dilemma

Before getting to the problem of divine concurrence in particular, some more general terminological remarks are in order. Most medieval theories of divine concurrence are formulated in an Aristotelian framework. By 'cause,' unless otherwise noted, I mean an efficient cause, that is, an agent that brings about an effect by a transeunt action (i.e., an action that originates from one thing and results in another). According to Aristotle and most medieval thinkers, causes act in virtue of their *causal powers*, which powers are strongly related to ("flow from") their essence. As will be seen later in more detail, Aristotelian accounts in general also maintain that there is some kind of a necessary connection between causes and effects; the fire can explain the heating of the pot placed on it only because fire always and necessarily heats in appropriate circumstances.[6]

Causes might be divided into partial and total causes; while a partial cause brings about only one part of the effect, a total cause brings the effect about in its entirety. Causes might be also divided into immediate and mediate causes; although the meaning of 'immediate cause' slightly varies from author to author, in general an immediate cause is something that does not produce its effect by means of anything else, while a mediate cause does. Finally, by 'secondary cause' our authors usually mean any created cause — that is, any cause except God.

Given these preliminary distinctions, the problem of divine concurrence, to which mere conservationism is one possible answer, derives from three claims, which seem to be individually plausible and jointly inconsistent:

1. Created beings, such as stones, fire, etc., are immediate and total causes of things.

2. God is the immediate and total cause of every created being.

3. Things cannot have more than one immediate and total cause.

As was mentioned above, there are three main positions one can take to avoid the seemingly arising inconsistency, with remarkable variety within these views themselves. On the one end of the spectrum, occasionalism, denying (1) above.[7] On the other end of the spectrum, mere conservationism, denying (2), or at least some version of it. Mere conservationism thus agrees with its alternatives that God created and conserves the world; but denies that God is causally active in the world's operations. And in the middle, concurrentism, the "standard" view at least among medieval philosophers in the West, itself ranging over quite a wide spectrum, according to which both secondary causes and God are immediate causes of the secondary effects (thus denying [3], or at least some version of it).[8]

Mere conservationism, despite its seeming plausibility, was a minority view in the medieval period. Durand of St.-Pourçain was probably the most famous medieval mere conservationist, and the only one mentioned by name by many medieval, early modern, and contemporary scholars alike.[9] He works out the view in considerable detail, even though the majority of this discussion is targeting specific alternative positions (most notably those of Aquinas and Giles of Rome), which I will not consider in detail here.[10]

Durand's motivation to endorse mere conservationism is that he finds both of the alternative positions unsatisfactory. First, agreeing with most medieval thinkers in the Latin West, he thinks that occasionalism cannot account well for sense experience.[11] According to these thinkers, and arguably Aristotle, we do experience causal actions in the world — for instance, when we feel the warmth of the fire, we do so because the fire is causally acting on our senses.[12]

Second, Durand also thinks that the concurrentist view is untenable; let's call his argument for this claim *Durand's Dilemma*. Intuitively, Durand's dilemma highlights the metaphysical difficulty of maintaining that one effect had two, very different total causes, and also the fact that we call something a 'proper effect' of a cause precisely because it requires no additional input from another agent. More specifically, Durand's Dilemma considers the actions of God and the secondary agent in an instance of natural causation, for example when fire produces heat. According to the concurrentist, it is not just the fire that performs the productive action but God as well. But, asks Durand's Dilemma, are God's and the fire's action numerically identical, or are they numerically different? According to Durand's Dilemma, neither of these options is satisfactory, and hence concurrentism is false.

According to the first horn of Durand's Dilemma, God's concurring action would be identical with the fire's action, but this cannot be the case because they do not have numerically the same power. Durand offers some examples where two things cause a third one by the same action: it can either happen when one of them is only a mediate cause, or when they are causing the thing imperfectly, or, in the exceptional case of the Father and the Son producing ("spirating") the Holy Spirit, when they have numerically the same power. As Durand notes, however, we cannot easily imagine any scenarios where both causes are immediate and perfect causes of the effect by the same action, while having different powers — which is precisely how God and the fire are supposed to produce heat if the concurrentist has it right.[13]

According to the second horn of Durand's Dilemma, God and the fire would act with numerically different actions, but Durand shows that this is not plausible either. For whether these actions are simultaneous or successive, one of them would be superfluous.

Let's assume, for instance, that the fire produces the heat *before* God produces it. In this case, it seems that God does not really contribute anything, since the heat had already been produced by the time God started to act. A parallel reasoning would apply if God had produced the heat before the fire did. As Durand notes, however, the concurrentist is not better off if she thinks that God and the fire act at the same time. In that case, since the concurrentist would like to maintain that each is a total cause, she will have to maintain that each produces the whole heat -- which seems absurd since we are only interested in the production of one heat and not two.[14]

All in all, Durand's Dilemma is meant to establish that the concurrentist position, especially as understood by some of Durand's contemporaries, is false. And since Durand had already rejected occasionalism, he concludes that God is not immediately active in every action of a creature, but merely conserves these creatures and their powers.

Durand's position might seem plausible: it is theoretically more simple than any version of the concurrentist view, while, unlike occasionalism, preserves genuine causation in nature. Despite this, however, the mere conservationist view remained quite controversial in Durand's time.[15] I turn now to examine why this is the case, based on an objection formulated by his contemporary and confriar, Peter of Palude.

2. The Fiery Furnace

I do not aim to settle the issue of Peter's somewhat controversial reception here, mostly stemming from his abundant verbatim borrowings from Durand's work.[16] I will, instead, merely look at one of his arguments against Durand which, I argue, may lead us to a better understanding of the medieval resistance to mere conservationism in general.

The objection, call it the *Fiery Furnace objection*, is directed against mere conserva-tionism as such. It is worth citing in Peter's original formulation:

> In the furnace the young men [were thrown in], the fire was conserved in its be-
> ing and in its active power, but it did not act, because God did not act with it;
> therefore, fire with heat is not a sufficient cause of heating, because when it is
> posited the effect does not follow — and the same will be the case after the day of
> judgment. If you say that fire is a sufficient cause unless there is an impediment, I
> ask: in what way was the fire impeded? It was impeded either by the addition of
> an action or the subtraction of it. Not by addition, because there was nothing
> added to the fire, since it burned the soldiers and the cloths of the children ... and
> there was also nothing shielding them, such as some coldness.[17]

Thus, the Fiery Furnace objection asks us to consider a test-case when examining the-ories of divine concurrence. According to the objection, not all these theories can account well for this test-case, and thus if one wants to maintain that the test-case is at least meta-physically possible, then one has to be careful not to adopt a theory on which it would turn out to be impossible. More precisely, the Fiery Furnace objection seems to argue as follows:

(1) Miracles such as the three young men not burning in the fiery furnace are possi-ble;

(2) If mere conservationism were true, these miracles would not be possible;

∴ Therefore, mere conservationism is false.

The test-case referred to by the first premise of the Fiery Furnace objection is — not surprisingly — the story of the three young men (Shadrach, Mishach, and Abednego) not burning in Nebuchadnezzar's fiery furnace. The story is reported in the book of Daniel, and

is worth quoting in its entirety since it contains a few interesting details that play some part in Peter's argument.

[Nebuchadnezzar] ordered the furnace heated seven times more than it was usually heated. And he ordered some of the mighty men of his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace. Then these men were bound in their cloaks ... and they were thrown into the burning fiery furnace. ... The flame of the fire killed those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell bound into the burning fiery furnace. ... Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out from the fire ... the fire had not had any power over the bodies of those men. The hair of their heads was not singed, their cloaks were not harmed, and no smell of fire had come upon them.[18]

There are a few points to note about this story. First, according to the report, there was a natural substance, fire, having its characteristic causal powers. The causal powers of the fire were active and exercised, since the soldiers were burned by it — and so were, according to Peter's reconstruction, all the garments of the three young men except their cloaks. At the same time, however, the fire did not bring about its characteristic effect on the three young men, even though it seems that they were just as well disposed to receive this effect as the other objects present.

Second, this miracle belongs to a host of others of the same kind, the kind that is usually called miracles *contra naturam*, that is, miracles against nature. In miracles *contra naturam*, "nature retains a disposition contrary to the effect produced by God,"[19] that is, there

is an object that keeps its nature with its causal powers, nevertheless God produces something that is the opposite of the usual effect of these same powers. For instance, when Joshua stopped the Jordan river (Josh. 3.), the river did not flow even though it kept its weight as was manifest when it flooded the surrounding lands. Peter's objection suggests that this is what Durand cannot consistently account for, while he himself can.

Finally, it should be emphasized that the Fiery Furnace objection, as Peter formulates it, does not require that such miracles have ever actually taken place but only that they are at least metaphysically possible. For according to most classical accounts of divine omnipotence, God's power is limited by the law of non-contradiction; hence, if the story of Nebuchadnezzar's fire does involve a contradiction, then not even God has the power to bring it about even in principle.[20]

Why does Peter think that Durand cannot account for the logical possibility of such miracles? Unfortunately, Peter says nothing more. But perhaps what he might have said is connected to another important feature of broadly speaking Aristotelian accounts of causation: that causes and their effects are necessarily related. Although Aristotle himself rarely expounds on the necessary connection between causes and effects,[21] it is usually agreed that Aristotelians do require some form of it. For instance, when Al-Ghazali, an eleventh-century Islamic thinker usually associated with occasionalism, argues against Avicennean necessitism (which in turn originates from Aristotle), he titles the discussion as "Refutation of Their Belief in the Impossibility of a Departure from the Natural Course of Events," and shows that "the connection between what are believed to be the cause and the effect is not necessary."[22]

This commitment to necessary connection is even more explicit in some Neo-Aristotelian accounts of causation. A telling example is Edward Madden's now classical formulation of it:

If a man falls into a fiery furnace, is it necessary that he be incinerated? ... It certainly seems so. ... *To deny the heat while keeping the other properties plus the nature of fire that helps explain them all is to land oneself in a straightforward self-inconsistency.*[23]

Madden's claim is that *if* it were possible that the fire exercised its causal power and yet no heat was produced in a well-disposed recipient, that would mean that the fire had no nature of fire and was not really fire, after all.

Thus, according to this view, the connection between an object and the manifestation of its powers in appropriate circumstances is necessary (this necessity being of the metaphysical sort); without this necessity our scientific explanations and causal explanations in general would not make sense. Causal powers are explanatory *precisely* because they necessitate their effects. As Madden suggests, without this necessity there would be just no explaining in causal explanations.[24]

Most medieval Aristotelians also adhered to some form of such powers-necessitism; but as is easy to see from the above, the theistic context presented a special problem. According to the Fiery Furnace objection, mere conservationism cannot avoid this problem, that is, cannot maintain, on the one hand, a necessary connection between cause and effect and also maintain, on the other hand, the metaphysical possibility of *contra naturam* miracles. The reason for this is the mere conservationist's claim that "fire is a sufficient cause of heat," from which it follows that if there is a fire, it is sufficient to bring about the burning.

That the mere conservationist cannot reconcile the necessary connection requirement with the possibility of *contra naturam* miracles can be seen by positing one of the two requirements and arriving at a denial of the other. First, imagine that the story of Nebuchadnezzar's fiery furnace could possibly be true. Since according to the mere conservationist, fire and some properly disposed patients are the only relevant causes of heat, and since the fire and the properly disposed patients are the same in a normal fire and in the fiery furnace, the only difference between the two is that the former brings about the heat while the latter does not, which means that we need to deny the necessary connection between fire and burning.

Second, suppose that causes necessarily bring about their effects; whenever there is fire, there is also heat, just as Madden described above. But Madden's above-quoted example about the fiery furnace is provocative precisely because he claims that in a power-based account of causation, a fiery furnace without burning is *in principle* impossible, which means that we need to deny the metaphysical possibility of miracles *contra naturam*.

None of these options were satisfactory for most medieval thinkers, however, who had independent reasons to endorse both Aristotle's notion of causal powers requiring some necessary connection, and the possibility of miracles against nature where this connection seems to have been violated. And as Peter concludes, these considerations should lead one to reject Durand's position.

At this point, a friend of Durand may object. For it seems that the case of the Fiery Furnace is indeed easy to solve if we maintain that there was no real fire there to start with.[25] According to this view (call it the *Easy solution*), it was not the non-burning of the three young men that was miraculous, but rather the burning of the soldiers and cloaks, which

nevertheless God could have achieved by some direct, special divine action. In this way, nothing endangers the necessary connection between fire and burning, and at the same time nothing pushes one to say that God is causally active in every interaction between created things.

While it is true that the Easy solution can account for some version of the Fiery furnace story (albeit the biblical version is explicit that the fire was present), it is in some way *too* easy. First, as Durand and Peter could remark, such a description of the story is somewhat *ad hoc* and more complicated than necessary. The fire did not just appear out of nowhere; it was built by the soldiers. Thus, the Easy solution requires at least three divine actions: the first one to prevent the successful building of the fire; the second one to maintain the *appearance* of the fire; and the third one to produce the burning on the soldiers and cloaks. While this may not be a decisive argument against the Easy solution, it will likely make it less credible. But a more important problem is that while the Easy solution can save the particular phenomena in the Fiery Furnace story, it cannot be applied to every miracle *contra naturam*, and it arguably negates the possibility of *contra naturam* miracles altogether. For while it can maintain that an *appearance* of a thing is compossible with the lack of its usual effect, it does not seem to be able to maintain that the thing itself (fire, in this case) is so compossible. Whereas this may not be an unbitable bullet for the modern reader, it would have been for most medieval ones.[26]

Durand, however, may retort with another proposal, which, in fact, is reflected in Peter's text: "the angel of the Lord turned the middle of the furnace into something like a wind, a blowing of moisture."[27] Call this proposal the *Mask solution*. According to the Mask solution, since even according to the Aristotelian, a cause fails to produce its effect if there

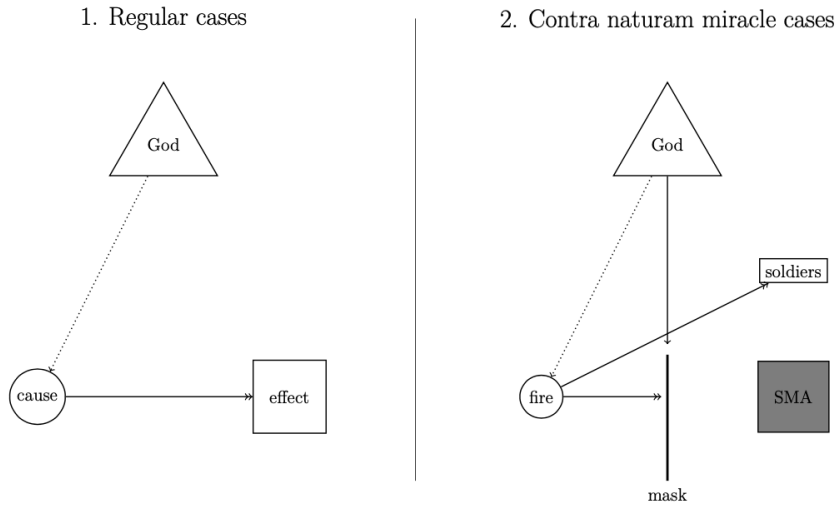1. Regular cases   2. Contra naturam miracle cases

FIGURE 1. Durand and the fiery furnace

is a mask blocking its action, to save Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego from burning, it is enough to say that some mask blocked the fire's heat. Even though it was impossible for God to merely *will* efficaciously that the fire did not produce its heat, God could have placed some kind of a shield (an invisible asbestos suit?) between the fire and the three young men, blocking the manifestation of the fire's power (see figure 1).[28]

Given that Peter himself alludes to such a solution on behalf of the mere conservationist, why does he think that it ultimately fails? Unfortunately Peter does not spell out what he sees problematic, apart from noting that the Bible only refers to such a mask as a metaphor. But perhaps Peter's response can be strengthened by referring to some aspects of divine omnipotence as it had been understood since the early medieval period. There is a more general and a more specific problem arising from the Mask solution as combined with this understanding.

Concerning the general problem, according to the Mask solution, God counteracts the action of the fire in the fiery furnace, which fire and action God also keeps in existence. But

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according to many classical theists, including some medieval theologians, this picture is misleading or even contradictory. Blocking a power that God also keeps in existence would mean that God acts with two contrary actions at the same time on the same creature, which seems to entail a practical contradiction and thus surpasses even divine power.[29] Or, as Alfred Freddoso has once summarized, "God does not have to counteract His creatures from without in order to make them do His bidding; He does not have to vie with them in order to exercise control over them. Rather, He controls them from within as their sovereign creator and governor."[30] Thus, as some theists would insist, there is at least a *prima facie* tension between saying that God created the world *ex nihilo*, keeps it in existence, and yet also maintaining that the world has such autonomous powers independent from God that God needs to counteract their exercise. Peter may think then that the mere conservationist, when employing the Mask solution, cannot maintain that God is a sovereign governor of creatures.

There is also a more specific although not independent problem with the Mask solution. According to most medieval thinkers, God's omnipotence means that God can bring about anything that does not imply a contradiction, and consequently, "whatever God can effect by the mediation of an efficient cause, God can also effect by himself immediately."[31] Call this principle the *Principle of Omnipotence*. The Principle of Omnipotence, if true, should also be applicable in the case of the fiery furnace and the Mask solution. That is, if God can block the heat of the fiery furnace from the three young men by the mediation of an asbestos suit, then according to the Principle of Omnipotence, God must also be able to block it without such a mediation, immediately. Which is to say that if the mask solution works, then it is not needed.

(Durand could maintain that God can annihilate the fire's action directly because it has independent ontological status, which would guarantee that it can be annihilated while everything else is being kept intact. Durand, however, does not adhere to such a robust view of actions but instead holds that actions are nothing over and above the change of quality in the agent and the patient.[32])

All in all, in the present reconstruction, one might summarize Peter of Palude's Fiery Furnace objection as follows:

1. Miracles *contra naturam* are possible. [Assumption]

2. The Principle of Omnipotence is true: if God can do something by the mediation of secondary causes, God can do the same without their mediation. [Assumption]

3. If mere conservationism is true, then *if* miracles against nature are possible, then God can bring them about by the mediation of a mask but not without their mediation. [Premise; justified by the necessary connection requirement]

4. If mere conservationism is true, then *if* miracles against nature are possible, then the Principle of Omnipotence is false. [from 2 and 3]

5. If mere conservationism is true, then either miracles against nature are not possible, or the Principle of Omnipotence is false.

6. Therefore, mere conservationism is false. [from 1, 2, 5]

Whether one finds this argument convincing will, of course, turn on two things: whether one finds the assumptions plausible, and whether one thinks that there is any alternative to mere conservationism that could avoid the difficulty raised by the Fiery Furnace objection. Peter of Palude does not argue for the possibility of miracles *contra naturam*, that is, that they do provide a test-case that we should pay attention to. Nor does he

argue for the Principle of Omnipotence or for the necessary connection requirement. Indeed, he takes these claims for granted, or as part of the "standard" theistic Aristotelian framework. Now I turn to this standard medieval account of divine concurrence that Peter endorses, and examine how it fares in light of the Fiery Furnace and Durand's Dilemma.

3. Peter of Palude and the Fiery Furnace

Peter of Palude, in contrast to Durand, agrees with Aquinas that "God effects everything immediately, and that particular things have proper operations by which they are the proximate causes of things."[33] This space will not allow me to present Peter's view in its entirety; instead, first, I provide some motivation why someone would endorse such a seemingly complicated position (independently of the motivation we already have, namely that one of the alternatives does not work). Second, I examine whether Peter's position fares any better than its alternative with respect to the Fiery Furnace objection. Finally, as I started this paper with Durand's Dilemma against the concurrentist position, I must say something about how Peter might answer it.

Since the aim of Peter's treatise in this part of his *Sentences* commentary seems to be to defend Aquinas's view of divine concurrence, we might see a motivation to endorse a form of concurrentism by looking at one of Aquinas's arguments for it.[34] Aquinas's argument relies on the distinction between principal and instrumental causes, a standard distinction in medieval accounts of causation. For Aquinas (and Aristotle as well), for every cause there is a proportionate effect of which the cause is a proper, principal cause. In cases, however, where the effect is higher (more excellent, more actual) than the cause's ability would enable it to be, the cause must operate as an instrument of a higher principal

cause. For instance, a marker is perfectly capable of bringing about some blue ink marks, but in order for it to cause a meaningful sentence, it must operate as an instrument of a higher cause — a person writing.

Some concurrentists, including Aquinas and Peter, think that we can understand creaturely and divine action in terms of instrumental and principal causes, respectively. Since every effect surpasses the ability of created causes, all created causes require a higher, uncreated cause, of which the secondary causes are mere instruments. Effects surpass the ability of created causes because they are new beings (whether substantial or accidental), where there was no being before, and thus require a cause that can create. But creating or bringing a new being into existence requires an agent that surpasses every species (since its effect surpasses every species as well), and the only agent that meets this requirement is God.[35]

Consequently, Aquinas and Peter endorse a form of concurrentism according to which secondary causes require God as a principal cause in the same way as the marker requires me when writing a sentence. When Norah is kindling the fire, God (1) creates Norah (or directly contributes to Norah's creation) and her active powers, together with the active powers of the match and all required instruments; (2) maintains Norah and the match in existence during the kindling; (3) applies the lighting power of the match, that is, brings about that these powers become activated; and (4) acts as a principal cause of the fire's generation, since bringing about the fire, a new substance, exceeds the power of created causes.

Again, there are many details to work out in such an account. Some might doubt whether it leaves enough space for creaturely causation (not to mention free will), and it

should also be noted that not everyone spells out divine concurrence in terms of instrumental and principal causes.[36] One might also object by denying the minor premise of the argument for concurrentism, saying namely that the match *is* a sufficient cause of fire; but again, that is precisely what Durand would say, and as was seen above, Durand's account is difficult to maintain due to the Fiery Furnace objection. I show now how Peter's view might escape these difficulties.

According to Peter's view, in every instance of natural causation, God acts *both* on the secondary agent and on the secondary effect: when fire produces some heat, God contributes both to the fire's action (by activating its power), and to the coming to be of the heat (by giving it existence in general).[37] But if this is the case, it is easy to see how Peter might reconcile the necessary connection requirement with *contra naturam* miracle cases, without violating the Principle of Omnipotence.
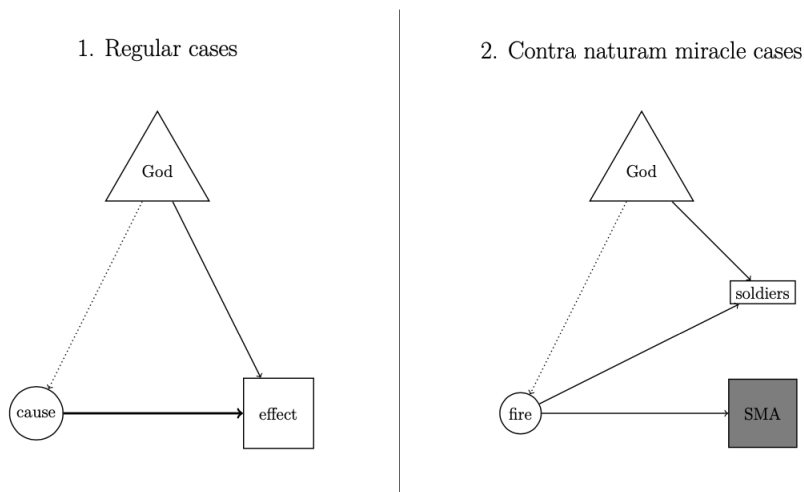

FIGURE 2. Peter and the fiery furnace

To avoid the contradiction faced by Durand, Peter can maintain that in the case of the fiery furnace and the three young men, God exercised the concurring action on the fire and on the soldiers, and by this divine concurrence together with the fire's causal power the soldiers got incinerated. At the same time, however, God suspended the concurring action on the three young men, and consequently the three young men could not exercise their passive powers that would have been necessary to receive the fire's heat — whence the fire did not affect them (see figure 2).

What can Peter say about the necessary connection between causes and effects? Peter's account implies that it is a conditional one: *provided* God's general concurrence, the connection between cause and effect *is* metaphysically necessary. It is not absolutely so, since God can bring about, by suspending divine concurrence, that the effect does not occur even though the cause had its causal power and the right circumstances for its exercise. Whenever the fire is active, *and* God is concurring, then the burning necessarily follows; if one of these is missing, then it does not.

One might object here that this would hardly satisfy Madden's criterion for scientific explanation: since we can have no knowledge of whether God will concur in a certain situation or suspend concurrence, Peter's view will lead us to no more certainty of scientific predictions than in a case where there is no necessary connection between causes and effects at all. To such a skeptic, however, Peter could point out that the skeptic is misunderstanding the main concern here. In normal cases, we can safely assume, and we should, that God does concur in every natural causal operation. Our scientific explanations will still be explanatorily meaningful; if we lit up some gasoline, then by the molecular structure of the gasoline and by the active power of the fire (God concurring) it will quite certainly explode.

As this shows, Peter's view is in a better position than Durand's with regard to the Fiery Furnace objection. But whether the position is tenable will also depend on whether it can answer Durand's Dilemma as presented toward the beginning of this paper.

Recall that according to Durand's Dilemma, the concurrentist maintains either that God and the secondary agent act by the same action, which is impossible since they do not possess the same power; or that their actions numerically differ, in which case one of them is superfluous. This argument is noteworthy because it is at least controversial what position Aquinas took regarding the numerical identity or difference of the concurring actions. For instance, Alfred Freddoso claims that Aquinas and the concurrentist in general should take the first horn of Durand's Dilemma, that is, maintain that God and the secondary cause act by numerically the same action,[38] while Peter claims that they act by "formally different and materially identical" actions.[39]

To understand Peter's claim and how it is supposed to help answering Durand's Dilemma, it is worth briefly looking at Aquinas's stance on the question, which Peter is summarizing. Unfortunately, at first sight it seems that Aquinas says different things about the matter in different places. For instance, when responding to an objection in the *Summa*, he notes that "one action does not proceed from two agents of the same order, but nothing prevents that one and the same action proceed from a first and second agent."[40] However, when he characterizes instrumental causality in the case of the master acting through a servant, he notes that "the action of the master and of the servant are different in number."[41]

How many actions are there then in an act of causation with concurrence? Aquinas's response is that it depends on how we count them:

It should be known that we can divide efficient causes in two ways. One way, based on the effect. ... Another way, based on the cause — the principal and the instrumental agent. For the principal agent is the first mover, while the instrumental cause is the moved mover. But a twofold action belongs to the instrument: one that it has from its nature, and the other it has insofar as it is moved by the first agent, just as the fire, which is said to be the instrument of the nutritive power ... by its nature dissolving, consuming, and such effects; but insofar as it is an instrument of the vegetative soul, it generates flesh.[42]

While Aquinas's example may be less than perfectly illuminating for the modern reader, according to this passage, the instrumental cause in a given series has a double action: one that is proper to it by its nature, and the other that it performs merely in virtue of being moved by the principal agent — even if these two actions materially constitute the same process. Consequently, we can count actions in different ways, depending on whether we distinguish them based on their terminus, or based on their principles. Regarding the former, according to the rather common medieval adage, "the action is in the patient"[43], and thus, if two actions have the same terminus, they must be the same. Regarding the latter, if we count the actions based on their principles or powers that produced them, then if two actions are produced by numerically different powers, they must be numerically different.

This also applies to Aquinas's and Peter's theory of divine concurrence. Just as we might regard the marks on the paper either as colored strokes or as a meaningful sentence, we might similarly regard heat either as an existing accident or as an accident of a certain kind (warmth). And just as the pen brings about the former in virtue of its own nature

while bringing about the latter in virtue of being my instrument, the fire similarly brings about the former in virtue of having the nature of fire while bringing about the latter in virtue of being God's instrument. In this way, the secondary agent's action *considered as* bringing about some existence is identical with God's action, even though its action *considered as* bringing about something existing *in some way* is not identical with God's action. This interpretation seems to do justice to the passages seen above where Aquinas claimed that the action of instrumental causes are numerically distinct, to the *Summa* passage that seems to suggest the opposite, and to Peter of Palude's interpretation of Aquinas's position.[44] If this is correct, then Peter can maintain that Durand's Dilemma rests on a false dichotomy and is not, therefore, a decisive argument against the concurrentist position.

Conclusion

I examined in this paper an objection against mere conservationism, as it was originally formulated by a fourteenth-century thinker, Peter of Palude. According to the Fiery Furnace objection, we should look at the test-case of miracles against nature when evaluating theories of divine concurrence; in particular, the test-case shows that the thesis that God created the world but is not causally active in every operation of nature is problematic since it cannot maintain that causes and effects are necessarily related yet miracles against nature are possible. Peter's objection relies on several assumptions; nevertheless, since these assumptions are also quite widely maintained in broadly speaking theistic Aristotelian circles, this argument might provide some motivation to pursue the details of the various concurrentist views further.

Although Peter of Palude is not a particularly well known author even among medievalist scholars, I showed that he gives an interesting case study of medieval reactions against Durand of St.-Pourçain's views, and of why, despite its seeming plausibility, most medieval thinkers did not think that mere conservationism was such a good idea, after all. While the argument presented here was not the only one put forward against mere conservationism even in the medieval period, it highlights a general problem about the theory.[45]

I also argued that Peter of Palude's own account of divine concurrence can avoid the Fiery Furnace objection, and account for *contra naturam* miracles in the Arisototelian framework, even though the necessary connection between these powers and their effects must be understood in a special way to include general divine concurrence. Although most, broadly speaking Aristotelian accounts take for granted some form of necessary connection between cause and effects, and most interpreters today regard it as part of any Aristotelian power-based metaphysics of causation, it is rarely discussed what this necessary connection amounts to, or how strongly it should be taken. As was seen above, if one subscribes to Aquinas's and Peter's theory of divine concurrence, one will say that in normal cases, the passion in the recipient is the result of the agent's action, together with God's concurring action. Provided God's general concurrence, the connection between cause and effect is metaphysically necessary, even though it is not absolutely so, since God can suspend the concurring activity.

I showed that this version of concurrentism is at least not *prima facie* inconsistent, and is not subject to Durand's Dilemma that was developed against Aquinas's similar position. (Just as before, however, it should be noted that Durand's argument against concurrentism is not the only one ever brought up against the view.[46])

More generally, the debate on divine concurrence provides an interesting example of the medieval understanding of causal powers, and of how this understanding differs from some Neo-Aristotelian ones today. It also shows that although there has been some tendency recently to untangle some parts of medieval philosophy from its theological context, if it can be done at all, it has to be done with great care. Even the precise meaning of such seemingly purely metaphysical concepts as causal powers is partly determined by such purely theological ones as divine omnipotence and miracles. If this context is taken into account, however, the medieval views of causation and causal powers might provide a fruitful source even for some contemporary debates on the same.

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[2] For some general introduction to the problem, see, e.g., Alfred J Freddoso, "God's General Concurrence with Secondary Causes: Pitfalls and Prospects," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 68, no. 2 (1994): 131–56, and the Introduction in Tad M Schmaltz, *Descartes on Causation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). For the problem in specific medieval authors, see, e.g., Gloria Frost, "John Duns Scotus on God's Knowledge of Sins: A Test-case for God's Knowledge of Contingents," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 48, no. 1 (2010): 15–34; Gloria Frost, "Peter Olivi's Rejection of God's Concurrence with Created Causes," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 22, no. 4 (October 2014): 655–79; and Petr Dvořák, "The Concurrentism of Thomas Aquinas: Divine Causation and Human Freedom," *Philosophia* 41, no. 3 (August 2013): 617–34. For some systematic treatments, see, e.g., Timothy D Miller, "Continuous Creation and Secondary Causation: The Threat of Occasionalism," *Religious Studies* 47 (2011): 3–22; William Vallicella, "God, Causation and Occasionalism,"

Religious Studies 35, no. 1 (1999): 3–18; and Hugh J McCann and Jonathan L Kvanvig, "The Occasionalist Proselytizer: A Modified Catechism," *Philosophical Perspectives* 5 (1991): 587–615.

[3] For a general overview of Durand's life and teachings, as well as his trials, see Isabel Iribarren, *Durandus of St. Pourcain: a Dominican Theologian in the Shadow of Aquinas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). For some specific issues, see especially *Durand of Saint-Pourçain and his Sentences Commentary: Historical, Philosophical, and Theological Issues,* ed. Andreas Speer, Fiorella Retucci, Thomas Jeschke, Guy Guldentops (Leuven: Peeters, 2014). See also note 10 below.

[4] Further details about Peter's life, views, and controversy with Durand can be found in Jean Dunbabin, *A Hound of God: Pierre de la Palud and the Fourteenth-century Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991); Peter of Palude, "A proposito di Pietro da Palude (In I Sent., d.43, q.1): La questione inedita 'Utrum Deum esse infinitum in perfectione et vigore possit efficaci ratione probari' di Erveo Natalis," ed. Prospero Tommaso Stella, *Salesianum* 22 (1960): 245–325; and Peter of Palude, "Peter of Palude and the Parisian Reaction to Durand of St Pourçain on Future Contingents," ed. Chris Schabel, Russell L Friedman, and Irene Balcoyiannopoulou, *Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum* 71 (2001): 183–300.

[5] Although any position regarding the problem of divine concurrence has serious implications concerning divine interaction with voluntary agents, in what follows I restrict my treatment to non-voluntary causes.

[6] For an overview of some of the metaphysical issues present in such a framework, see Gloria Frost, "Aquinas' Ontology of Transeunt Causal Activity," *Vivarium* 56 (2018): 47–82.

[7] For a detailed overview of medieval Arabic occasionalism and its Latin reception, see Dominik Perler and Ulrich Rudolph, *Occasionalismus: Theorien der Kausalität im arabisch-islamischen und im europaeischen Denken* (Göttingen: Vandenhöck; Rupercht, 2000). I do not mean to imply with my presentation here that the main motivation of endorsing an occasionalist position is the denial of claim (1). To understand the motivations behind the different positions, a fuller analysis of each claim would be in order; at present, however, a rough delineation of these positions will suffice.

[8] For some further details of the typology of these views, see Freddoso, "Medieval Aristotelianism and the Case against Secondary Causation in Nature"; and Alfred J Freddoso, "God's General Concurrence with Secondary Causes: Why Conservation is not Enough," *Philosophical Perspectives* 5 (1991): 553–85.

[9] See, e.g., Francisco Suárez, *On Creation, Conservation, and Concurrence: Metaphysical Disputations 20-22*, ed. Alfred J Freddoso (South Bend, IN: St Augustine Press, 2002), d. 22, q. 1, n. 6; Nicolas

Malebranche, *The Search after Truth*, ed. Paul J Olscamp and Thomas M Lennon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 680; and Freddoso, "Why Conservation is not Enough."

[10] His systematic treatment can be found in his *In Sent.* II, q. 1, a. 4; edited in Durand of St.-Pourçain, *Scriptum super IV libros Sententiarum: distinctiones 1–5 libri secundi*, ed. Fiorella Retucci (Leuven: Peeters, 2012). Brief discussions of Durand's views can be found in Johann Stufler, "Bemerkungen zur Konkurslehre des Durandus von St. Pourçain," *Beiträge Zur Geschichte Der Philosophie Und Theologie Des Mittelalters* Suppl. 3.2 (1935): 1080–90; Mariateresa Fumagalli, *Durando di S. Porziano: Elementi filosofici della terza redazione del Commento alle Sentenze*, Pubblicazioni Della Facoltà Di Lettere E Filosofia Dell'Università Di Milano (Firenze: La nuova Italia, 1969); Isabel Iribarren, *Durandus of St. Pourçain*; and most recently in Andreas Speer et al., eds., *Durand of Saint-Pourçain and his* Sentences *Commentary*.

[11] *In Sent.* II, d. 1, q. 4 (Retucci ed., 48). Unless otherwise noted, all translations from the Latin are mine.

[12] This is, of course, not going to convince the occasionalist, who may maintain that the *origin* of our sense experience is not part of its essence. This will indeed become a debated issue later, and by Autrecourt's time in the mid-fourteenth century, some assumptions of the anti-occasionalist argument will have become questioned. For some background on fourteenth-century origin-essentialism in general, see Rondo Keele, "Can God Make a Picasso? William Ockham and Walter Chatton on Divine Power and Real Relations," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 45(3) (2007): 395–411.

[13] *In Sent.* II, d. 1, q. 4 (Retucci ed., 54).

[14] *In Sent.* II, d. 1, q. 4 (Retucci ed., 55).

[15] So controversial, indeed, that Durand simply left out the relevant question from his later version of the *Sentences* commentary; see also Durand of St.-Pourçain, *Kleine Schriften*, ed. Josef Koch, vol. 2 (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1973), 53–72. In fact, the Parisian condemnation of 1277 already labeled such a position as erroneous (prop. 190 [16]).

[16]While according to Dunbabin, "Pierre's attempt to expose Durand's weaknesses was like a man trying to trap a rat by throwing a duvet at it" (Dunbabin, *A Hound of God*, 33–34.), Cyrill Vollert claims that Peter's work "approaches the best writing of modern authors in clarity and solidity" (Cyrill Vollert, *The Doctrine of Hervaeus Natalis on Primitive Justice and Original Sin* (Rome, 1947), 259–60).

[17] Peter of Palude, *In Sent.*, II, d. 1, q. 4 (Zita V Toth, "Peter of Palude on Divine Concurrence: An Edition of his *In II Sent.*, d.1, q.4," *Recherches de Théologie et Philosophie Médiévales* 83 (2016): 83.).

[18] Daniel 3:19–27; tr. from the NRSV.

[19] Aquinas, *Quaestiones de potentia*, q. 6, a. 2, ad 3 (Pession ed., 163).

[20] For a classical formulation of such notion of omnipotence, see for instance Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I, q. 25, a. 3, or Ockham, *Quodlibeta Septem* VI.1. According to Peter, the same is going to happen after the Day of Judgment; for some background, see, e.g., Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200–1336* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995); and Thomas Jeschke, "Per virtutem divinam assistentem: Scotus and Durandus on the Impassibility of the Glorified Bodies — Aristotelian Philosophy Revisited?" *Philosophia* 1 (2012): 139–65.

[21] Some short remarks can be found e.g., in *Metaphysics* 1048a 6–8; see also *Physics* 201a9–20.

[22] Al-Ghazali, *Incoherence of the Philosophers*, trans. Sabih Ahmad Karoall (Lahore: Pakinstan Philosophical Congress, 1963), 185. For a brief history of the "no necessary connection" argument against Aristotelians from Al-Ghazali through Autrecourt and Malebranche to Hume, see Steven Nadler, "'No Necessary Connection:' The Medieval Roots of the Occasionalist Roots of Hume," *The Monist* 96 (1996): 448–68.

[23] Edward H Madden, "Hume and the Fiery Furnace," *Philosophy of Science* 38, no. 1 (1971): 68, emphasis added. Others (e.g., Stephen Mumford and Rani Lill Anjum, *Getting Causes from Powers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011)) maintain that this necessity has to be qualified to hold only when there is no mask present. Neil E Williams, "Puzzling Powers: The Problem of Fit," in *The Metaphysics of Powers: Their Grounding and Their Manifestations*, ed. Anna Marmodoro (London: Routledge, 2010), 84–105, and Walter Ott, "The Case Against Powers," in *Causal Powers in Science: Blending Historical and Conceptual Perspectives*, ed. Benjamin Hill, Henrik Lagerlund, and Stathis Psillos (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020) also take this necessity as a defining feature of powers accounts of causation.

[24] Imagine that you try to explain why a coin ended on tail by referring to the coin flip as its cause. As even a small child could point it out, you did not explain what you ought to have explained — indeed, you would have given the very same explanation if the coin had ended on head instead!

[25] I owe this point to one of the anonymous reviewers of the paper. While I labeled it the "Easy Solution," it is only so because of the present context, as will be explained below.

[26] The situation is all the *less* easy because of the point Peter mentions later: according to most medieval thinkers, while fire will be the same substance with the same causal powers after the present world ends, it will not be able to harm the resurrected bodies of the blessed. I explore this part of

Peter's argument in "Perfect Subjects, Shields, and Retractions: Three Models of Impassibility," *Vivarium* (forthcoming).

[27] Peter of Palude, *In Sent.* II, d. 1, q. 4 (Toth ed., 83). Cf. also Vulgate, Dan. 3:49–50.

[28] Finks, mimics, and masks have received quite some attention in various recent treatments of dispositions. More examples can be found in David Lewis, "Finkish Dispositions," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 47, no. 187 (1997): 143–58.

[29] For a modern presentation of such an argument, see Herbert McCabe, "On Evil and Omnipotence," in *Faith Within Reason*, ed. Brian Davies (Bloomsbury Academic, 2007), 67–93.

[30] Freddoso, "Why Conservation is not Enough," 575.

[31] Ockham, *Ordinatio*, prol., q. 1 (William Ockham, *Scriptum in librum primum Sententiarum (Ordinatio)*, ed. Gedeon Gál (St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 1967), 1:35). Ockham was not unique in endorsing this principle; the 1277 Parisian articles already condemned a proposition according to which "God cannot produce the effect of a secondary cause without the secondary cause itself" (Art. 69).

[32] See, e.g., *In Sent.* I, q. 30, a. 2 (first redaction); a. 3 (second redaction), where Durand argues that action is an extrinsic denomination. I owe this point to Susan Brower-Toland and Peter Hartman.

[33] Aquinas, *In Sent.* II, d. 1, q. 4 (Mandonnet ed., 25).

[34] Although the following is based on Aquinas's *De potentia*, he offers different arguments in different places which lead to slightly different accounts of divine concurrence. Cf. also his *Sentences* commentary, II, d.1, q. 4 and the parallel places in both *Summae*.

[35] Cf. Aquinas, *De potentia*, q. 7, a. 3.

[36] Scotus will, for instance, object on the ground that this instrumental causal model cannot preserve creaturely freedom. See, e.g., *Ordinatio*, dd. 34—37, q. 5.

[37] In the later, fifteenth-century debates, typically Jesuits argued that divine concurrence only affects the secondary effect and not the agent. But this is clearly not Aquinas's nor Peter's position.

[38] Freddoso, "Pitfalls and Prospects," 151–56; his interpretation is probably based on Suárez (*Disputationes Metaphysicae*, disp. 22).

[39] *In Sent.* II, d. 1, q. 4. For some history, see Dennis Des Chene, *Physiologia: Natural philosophy in late Aristotelian and Cartesian thought* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 319–24.

[40] *ST* I, q. 105, a. 5 (Leonine ed., 5:476).

[41] *In Sent.* II, d. 40, q. 4, a. 1, ad 4 (Mandonnet ed., 1021).

[42] *In Sent.* IV, d. 1, q. 1, a. 4 (Moos ed., 4:32).

[43] Jacqueline Hamesse, ed., *Les auctoritates Aristotelis: Un florilège médiéval* (Louvain: Publications Universitaires, 1974), 2, 101.

[44] For an analysis of a similar notion of identity without sameness, see Frost, "Aquinas' Ontology of Transeunt Causal Activity"; and Can Laurens Löwe, "John Duns Scotus Versus Thomas Aquinas on Action-Passion Identity," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 26 (2018): 1027–44.

[45] Another cluster of problems in which concurrentism was often discussed in the medieval period is connected to concurrence in the acts of human will. For an influential and detailed defense of concurrentism in this context, see Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio*, dd. 34—37, q. 5, who thinks that mere conservationism would lead to a denial of divine omnipotence as well as omniscience.

[46] For some other objections, see, e.g., Olivi, *In Sent.* II, q. 116. See also Frost, "Peter Olivi".