

Suarez on Metaphysical Inquiry, Efficient Causality, and Divine Action

This introductory essay has a more ambitious aim than might at first seem appropriate. My goal is to put the reader in a position not only to understand what Suarez is saying but also to appreciate the fact that his conception of metaphysical inquiry and his treatment of efficient causality are viable wholesale alternatives to what is currently dominant in Anglo-American philosophy. In other words, my intent is to help readers comprehend the systematic depth and power of Suarez's overall intellectual project, of his account of efficient causality in the *Disputationes Metaphysicae*, and of his more particular treatment of divine action in *Disputations 20–22*.

It is all too easy for an ostensibly sympathetic expositor to portray classical scholastic thinkers in a manner that is simultaneously patronizing to the scholastics and unduly flattering to contemporary philosophers. The temptation is to argue earnestly that many scholastic arguments and conclusions can, if detached from the intellectual context in which they were originally proposed, fit nicely into the more enlightened philosophical problematics that have emerged among mainstream philosophers. I will leave aside for now the observation that this 'hermeneutic of condescension' can easily lead to superficial or distorted interpretations of scholastic texts, and that at any rate the strategy it embodies does not seem to succeed very well in attracting philosophers – even philosophers of religion – to a careful and sustained study of the scholastics. For from my perspective the principal problem with this strategy is that it is not radical enough in its attempt to gain a hearing for the scholastics – and this because it is not rooted in the firm conviction that the scholastic conception of philosophical inquiry is in fact superior to its contemporary competitors and that the scholastics by and large came closer to the truth in metaphysics than either their classical predecessors or their modern and postmodern successors.

The beginning of the new millennium is an auspicious moment to press this point, despite the fact that many contemporary expositors of scholastic philosophy have shied away from the intricacies of Aristotelian-scholastic metaphysics and from scholastic treatments of the nature of intellectual inquiry – presumably because they have felt that scholastic views in these two areas are too far removed from contemporary assumptions to be entertained seriously. But times have changed. On the one hand, trenchant postmodern critiques of enlightenment models of inquiry have put into question the dogma that affective commitments of the sort the scholastics have to the Catholic Faith are inimical to genuine philosophical inquiry. On the other hand, in the last twenty years positions that can justifiably be described as Aristotelian have been proposed and defended across a wide range of philosophical disciplines.¹

¹ In ethics I have in mind, for example, the writings of Alasdair MacIntyre, beginning with *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981) and con-

Nowhere is this more evident than in those parts of metaphysics that deal with causality and causal explanation. Some recent proponents of scientific realism have argued that properly scientific explanations are those which specify the structures of unified systems or substances along with the causal processes or actions that connect those structures with their characteristic effects – a conception of explanation that is intimately related to the Aristotelian-scholastic notions of formal and efficient causality. Other realists have gone a step further by insisting that the key elements of scientific explanation – the ‘laws of nature’ (in at least one of the many uses of that locution) – are properly expressed by irreducible ascriptions of basic causal tendencies (or powers or capacities or propensities) to individual systems or substances. These basic causal tendencies are thought of as enduring or, to put it more frankly, essential features possessed by the relevant individuals in virtue of the natural kinds they exemplify – or, to use a less Platonist and more Aristotelian idiom, in virtue of the intrinsic substantial structures or ‘forms’ which constitute them as members of natural kinds.² Accordingly, the fundamental principles of explanation express *de re* metaphysical necessities by appeal to which causal modalities such as natural necessity and objective probability are to be analyzed.³

tinuing with his *Three Rival Versions of Moral Inquiry: Encyclopedia, Genealogy and Tradition* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990). The best example in the area of epistemology is Alvin Plantinga’s two-volume work *Warrant* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), in which a central role is played by the teleological notion of proper cognitive functioning. Notable contributions in the philosophy of mind are David Braine’s *The Human Person: Animal and Spirit* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993) and James Ross’ “The Fate of the Analysts: Aristotle’s Revenge,” *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 64 (1990): 51–74 and “Immaterial Aspects of Thought,” *Journal of Philosophy* 89 (1992): 136–150. Then, too, Peter van Inwagen’s *Material Beings* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990) has about it a distinctly Aristotelian aura. Of particular interest for the topics to be discussed here are Elizabeth Anscombe and Peter Geach, *Three Philosophers* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1961); Rom Harré and Edward Madden, *Causal Powers* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1975); Nancy Cartwright, *Nature’s Capacities and their Measurement* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1989); Wesley Salmon, *Scientific Explanation and the Causal Structure of the World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984); and Paul Humphreys, *The Chances of Explanation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989).

- 2 In saying this I am glossing over deep and interesting questions about the notion of a natural kind, the distinction between natural and artificial kinds, and the bearing of scientific realism on taxonomic issues. For an extensive treatment of these questions from a realist perspective, see Frederick Suppe, *The Semantic Conception of Theories and Scientific Realism* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1989), pp. 201–265.
- 3 In “The Necessity of Nature,” *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 11 (1986): 215–242, I attempted to give an account of natural necessity along these lines.

And so it is that ‘occult entities’, differing only in name from the substantial and accidental forms invoked by Aristotelian-scholastic philosophy of nature, have found their way back into discussions of causality, causal modality, and scientific explanation. To be sure, this trend has not gone unnoticed or unlamented by those of a more Humean bent who deplore any intimation of “pre-Kantian metaphysics as practiced after Kant,” as Bas van Fraassen has deprecatingly put it.⁴ Yet van Fraassen himself acknowledges that while “not everyone has joined this return to essentialism or neo-Aristotelian realism,... some eminent realists have publicly explored or advocated it.”⁵

It is with these developments in mind that I have devoted more than half (Parts 1–4) of this introductory essay to explaining the intellectual context of the *Disputationes Metaphysicae* and to showing that broadly Aristotelian-scholastic accounts of ontology and efficient causality are intellectually attractive alternatives to their contemporary competitors. More specifically, Part 1 lays out the project of the *Disputationes Metaphysicae*, clarifies Suarez’s conception of the relation between metaphysics and Catholic theology, and situates the six disputations on efficient causality (17–22) within what Suarez takes to be the correct order of pedagogy in metaphysics. Part 2 begins with an explanation of key technical notions in scholastic ontology – focusing especially on the types of ontological composition – and ends with brief replies to some common objections to the scholastic notion of substance. Part 3 presents the general account of efficient causality proposed by Suarez in Disputations 17 and 18, paying special attention to the nature of action, the communication of being (*esse*) by means of action, and the general types of efficient causes. Lastly, Part 4 compares the Aristotelian-scholastic account of efficient causality with the empiricist accounts dominant on the contemporary scene and indicates at least inchoately why someone might reasonably prefer the former to the latter.

I then turn, in Parts 5–7, to the disputations on divine action translated in this volume. My purpose here is to delineate the most important conclusions that Suarez reaches and to give some indication of the lines of reasoning that lead him to those conclusions. In particular, Part 5 deals with Disputation 20 on creation *ex nihilo*, Part 6 with Disputation 21 on divine conservation, and Part 7 with Disputation 22 on God’s general concurrence in the actions of created agents. (In Part 1.3 below I provide a brief overview of the contents of these disputations.)

1 The *Disputationes Metaphysicae*

My aim in this part of the introductory essay is to set forth the intellectual project of the *Disputationes Metaphysicae*, in its entirety and in its treatment of efficient causality, as Suarez himself understands it. In doing this, I do not mean to deter contemporary readers from using the text within their own intellectual contexts and for their own purposes, which might differ significantly from Suarez’s.

4 *Laws and Symmetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. viii.

5 *The Scientific Image* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), p. 155.



But I do mean to forestall the common distortions engendered by the assumption that problematics in scholastic metaphysics are easily assimilable to contemporary ones and can be readily extracted without loss from the faith-filled context within which the Catholic scholastics practiced philosophical inquiry.

1.1 The purpose of the Disputationes Metaphysicae

In the Preface to the reader at the very beginning of the *Disputationes Metaphysicae*, and again in the introduction to Disputation 1, Suarez tells us that, even at the cost of slowing the pace of his “more important” theological work, he has written the *Disputationes Metaphysicae* in order to provide his readers with certain conceptual tools and substantive truths required for the comprehensive and intellectually rigorous explication of Catholic wisdom aimed at by systematic theology:

Since no one can become an accomplished theologian without having previously laid down firm foundations in metaphysics, I had always thought that before I wrote my theological commentaries (parts of which have already been published and the rest of which I am working on so that they might, God willing, be finished as soon as possible), it would be worthwhile first to publish the present book, meticulously worked out, which I now offer to you, Christian reader. However, for good reasons I was unable to put off my work on the third part of St. Thomas’s *Summa Theologiae* and had to commit it to print before all else. Still, every day I saw more and more clearly the degree to which divine and supernatural theology needs and requires this human and natural theology – to such an extent that I did not hesitate to interrupt my unfinished work for a little while in order to give (or, better, restore) to this metaphysical doctrine its rightful place and standing, as it were. Even though I have taken longer to finish that other work than I had initially intended, and despite the insistent demands of many who desired the completion of my commentaries on the third part and indeed (if one can hope for such a thing) on the whole of St. Thomas’s *Summa Theologiae*, I could never regret having undertaken this present labor; and I trust that the reader, at least after having been induced by experience itself, will confirm this sentiment of mine.⁶

Even though divine and supernatural theology relies on the divine light and on principles revealed by God, still, because it is perfected by human discourse and reasoning, it is assisted as well by truths known by the natural light. And it uses those truths as aids and, so to speak, instruments in perfecting its own discourse and in illuminating divine truths. Now among all the natural sciences, the one that ranks first of all and goes by the name of First Philosophy is especially useful to sacred and

⁶ *Disputationes Metaphysicae* (hereafter: *DM*), Preface to the reader.

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supernatural theology. This is so, both because it comes the closest of all of them to the cognition of divine matters, and also because it explains and confirms those natural principles which apply to all things in general and which in some sense firm up and sustain every doctrine. For this reason, despite the fact that I have been engaged in working out and publishing more important commentaries and disputations in sacred theology, I have been forced to interrupt that work for a while (or, rather, slow it down) in order at least to review and embellish now at a later date what I had worked out and publicly taught in my more youthful years concerning this natural wisdom.⁷

In Disputation 1 Suarez argues that it is best to define metaphysics, or First Philosophy, as the science of “being insofar as it is real being.”⁸ Real being – to be distinguished from beings of reason such as negations, privations, and mind-dependent relations – thus serves as the ‘adequate object’ of metaphysics and is taken to include all substances (finite and infinite, material and immaterial) and their real accidents. So the aim of metaphysics is to explicate in an orderly and rigorous fashion the properties, principles, and causes of real being in general and the most important universal features of the main types of substances and accidents.

In distinguishing this “natural wisdom” or “natural theology” from revealed systematic theology, Suarez is acknowledging, in the manner of St. Thomas Aquinas and others among his scholastic predecessors, the achievements of the classical philosophical traditions, within which wisdom had been pursued merely by the “natural light” of reason and without the “divine light” of supernatural faith. St. Thomas held that, despite this grave epistemic handicap, the classical philosophical inquirers had as a group established – or at least come close to establishing – many important metaphysical and moral truths that are in fact contained in Christian revelation. Such truths he labeled *preambles* of the faith in order to distinguish them from those revealed truths (*mysteries* of the faith) which, though necessary for genuine human fulfillment and for the highest wisdom attainable in this life, cannot even in principle be discovered without the aid of divine revelation. Furthermore, even though the dim natural light of reason pales by comparison with the radiant light of faith, and even though the certitude attainable by reason in the absence of revelation is markedly inferior, absolutely speaking, to the certitude of faith, St. Thomas claimed nonetheless that the demanding intellectual activity by which fundamental metaphysical and moral truths are rendered progressively more evident by ‘unaided’ reason is perfective of the human mind as such and hence valuable to the Catholic philosophical

⁷ *DM* 1, Introduction.

⁸ *DM* 1.1.26. (In this and similar citations of the *DM*, the first numeral designates a disputation, the second designates a section of that disputation, and the third designates a numbered subsection of that section.)



inquirer in itself and not just for its usefulness in apologetics and systematic theology.⁹ These were among the factors that led him to distinguish philosophy (in a narrow sense) from revealed theology and to attribute a limited autonomy to those ‘philosophical disciplines’ that had been developed by the classical philosophers without the assistance of special Christian revelation.¹⁰

Yet within the Catholic intellectual tradition the elaboration of a science of metaphysics is taken to have great instrumental as well as intrinsic value. This is because revealed doctrines – for example, the Trinity of Persons in one God, the Incarnation of the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, the healing and elevation of human nature through the grace merited by Christ, the supernatural efficacy of the sacraments, the real and substantial presence of Christ in the Sacrament of the Altar, and so on – are taken by the Church with what we might call metaphysical seriousness and not as mere uplifting metaphors. Because of this, an important goal of Catholic philosophical inquiry is to clarify the metaphysical dimensions of revealed doctrines and in this way to defend those doctrines against the charge that they are incoherent or ‘contrary to reason’, that is, contrary to what can be made evident by the natural light of reason. Thus, as Suarez notes, it is inevitable that metaphysical concepts and theories should play a crucial role in the systematic explication of the Catholic claim to wisdom within revealed theology. And this is why, in the late thirteenth century and again in the scholastic revival of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the close study of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* became a standard part of the education of Catholic theologians.

Still, Suarez expresses dissatisfaction with the prevailing methodology, according to which theological writers explicitly treat metaphysical issues only in piecemeal fashion as they happen to arise in the investigation of particular mysteries of the faith:

When in the discussion of the divine mysteries these metaphysical doctrines would come up – doctrines which are such that without a knowledge and understanding of them it is hardly, if at all, possible to treat those higher mysteries in a suitable manner – I was often forced to mix in less sublime questions with divine and supernatural ones (something my readers find unwelcome and not very helpful), or else, in order to avoid this, I was forced to propose my own opinion on these questions summarily and to demand from my readers sheer faith, as it were, in that

9 See especially *Summa Contra Gentiles* 1, chaps. 1–2.

10 I develop the claims set forth in this paragraph at some length in two other papers: “Faith and Reason,” in Paul V. Spade, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Ockham* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); and “Two Roles for Catholic Philosophers,” in Thomas Hibbs and John O’Callaghan, eds., *Recovering Nature: Essays in Natural Philosophy, Ethics, and Metaphysics in Honor of Ralph McInerny* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999).

opinion (which was disturbing to me and could have justifiably seemed inappropriate to them as well). For these metaphysical principles and truths fit together with theological conclusions and arguments in such a way that if one takes away knowledge and complete understanding of the former, then knowledge of the latter must likewise be greatly undermined.¹¹

To be sure, the intended readers of Suarez's theological tracts would have studied Aristotle's *Metaphysics* as part of their theological training and so would not be wholly unversed in the subject matter of the unwelcome digressions. But once again Suarez voices his discontent, this time with the disorderly nature of the *Metaphysics* itself and of the standard commentaries on it, which simply follow the order of the text and are thus limited in pedagogical value:

Since I have always believed that a tremendous power to grasp and penetrate things resides in examining and judging them by an appropriate method – a power that I could scarcely preserve if, in the manner of the commentators, I discussed all the questions in the accidental and, as it were, random order in which they occur in the Philosopher's text – I decided that it would be more expedient and helpful if I preserved the order of teaching in inquiring into and putting before the eyes of the reader all the topics that could be investigated and examined with regard to the object of this wisdom as a whole.¹²

Suarez's preferred "order of teaching" metaphysics is as follows: After an initial discussion of the nature of metaphysics (Disputation 1), he investigates (a) being in general and its transcendental properties, that is, *one, true, and good* (Disputations 2–11), (b) the causes of being (Disputations 12–27), (c) the division of being into finite and infinite, along with the existence and nature of infinite being (Disputations 28–31), (d) the division of finite being into substance and accident, along with the general properties of material and immaterial substances (Disputations 32–38), (e) the division of accidents into the nine accidental categories, along with the main properties of each type of accident (Disputations 39–53) and, finally, (f) the 'extra-metaphysical' distinction between real beings and beings of reason (Disputation 54).¹³

Just as the first twenty-three volumes of Suarez's collected works were meant to be an extensive and creative commentary on St. Thomas's *Summa Theologiae*, so the *Disputationes Metaphysicae*, which occupy the last two volumes (25 and 26), are best viewed as Suarez's own well-ordered, extensive, and creative commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*.¹⁴ One salient piece of evidence

11 *DM* 1, Introduction.

12 *MD*, Preface to the reader.

13 See the Appendix to this introductory essay for a more detailed outline of the *Disputationes Metaphysicae*.

14 Below I will suggest the *Disputationes Metaphysicae* can be seen as the counterpart

for this claim is that Suarez interposes between the Preface and Disputation 1 a comprehensive analytical table of contents, indicating for each chapter of the first twelve books of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, where the corresponding discussion is to be found in the *Disputationes Metaphysicae*. To be sure, Suarez's magisterial 'commentary' is laid out in a more coherent and rigorous fashion than the standard commentaries and includes detailed expositions, as well as resolutions, of the scores of disputes on particular metaphysical issues that had punctuated the work of his scholastic and non-scholastic forebears. In this sense the *Disputationes Metaphysicae* is indeed remarkably innovative and stunningly encyclopedic. But Suarez gives the unmistakable impression that in the *Disputationes Metaphysicae* he wants to provide prospective theologians with what the study of the *Metaphysics* was supposed to be providing them with, but was not in fact doing so in his estimation.

1.2 *Metaphysics and theology*

These reflections provide an occasion for asking whether we have any good reason for holding, as some do, that Suarez's conception of the relation between metaphysics and theology differs in significant ways from that of his scholastic predecessors, especially St. Thomas. More specifically, we can ask whether Suarez's systematic re-ordering and separate treatment of metaphysics signal a distinctively 'modern' or 'un-medieval' partitioning of metaphysics (or even philosophy as a whole) from theology.

We have already seen enough to undermine any doubt that Suarez's ultimate aim in writing the *Disputationes Metaphysicae* is theological. Metaphysics is important to him chiefly because it is an indispensable instrument for – or, perhaps better, an integral element of – the rigorous and comprehensive articulation of Christian wisdom which is undertaken in systematic revealed theology and which mainstream Catholic thinkers have since Patristic times thought of as the culmination and perfection of classical non-Christian philosophical inquiry.

What's more, Suarez makes it clear from the beginning that the light of Christian faith has not only prescribed the goal of his metaphysical project but governed its execution as well:

In the present work I am doing philosophy in such a way as to keep always in mind that our philosophy should be Christian and a servant to divine theology. I have kept this aim in view, not only in discussing the questions but all the more in choosing my views or opinions, inclining toward those which seem to comport better with piety and revealed doctrine.¹⁵

of the combination of St. Thomas's commentary on the *Metaphysics* and the metaphysical sections of the first three books of the *Summa Contra Gentiles*. Another late medieval work that comes readily to mind in this connection is Blessed John Duns Scotus's *De Primo Principio*.

15 *MD*, Preface to the reader. It is also worth noting that after cautioning the reader that the *Metaphysicae Disputationes* is one book despite its having been published in two

Yet even while acknowledging that Suarez “is indeed a medieval scholastic” and that he “fits squarely within the medieval scholastic view in which philosophy is seen as an instrument of theology,” Jorge Gracia, who has done as much as anyone to bring the *Disputationes Metaphysicae* to the attention of contemporary Anglo-American philosophers, detects in the Preface “indications of a different attitude at work as well,” an attitude that sets Suarez apart from the high medieval scholastics and is at least redolent of modern secular philosophy.¹⁶

What are these indications, according to Gracia? First of all, Suarez tells us that he has interrupted work on his theological commentaries “in order to give (or, better, restore) to this metaphysical doctrine its rightful place and standing”¹⁷ – a place and standing that Suarez understands to be, in Gracia’s words, “separate from and anterior to theology.”¹⁸ Second, in the passage cited just above, Suarez makes it clear, says Gracia, that “his role as author of the *Disputationes* is not that of the theologian, but of the philosopher.”¹⁹ Third, later in the Preface Suarez “apologizes,” according to Gracia, for the many theological digressions found in the *Disputationes Metaphysicae*. (I will quote the relevant passage below.)

On the basis of this evidence Gracia makes his case for the discontinuity between Suarez and his predecessors:

All this points to Suarez’s very clear and rigorous idea of the distinction between metaphysics and theology and of his roles as philosopher and theologian. The fact that he calls himself a philosopher, and the fact that he apologizes for dealing with theological matters in a work of philosophy should be sufficient to make the point. No great medieval scholastic called himself a philosopher, and even though some of them distinguished between theology and philosophy, none of them would have apologized for the introduction of theological matter in a philosophical context. Indeed, it was standard for medieval authors to use both faith and reason to argue for their views, whether philosophical or theological. But that procedure is abandoned in Suarez’s *Disputationes*. Occasionally he does bring up a theological point, as noted, but in such

volumes, Suarez concludes the Preface with these words: “May both parts, along with the rest of our endeavors, accrue to the greater glory of God, the Highest Good, and to the benefit of the Catholic Church.” Suarez clearly takes his intellectual work to be in the service of the broader ecclesial community that sustains it and gives it the first principles which intellectual inquiry is called upon to articulate with insight and to defend – just as Socrates argues in the *Republic* that the philosophical life will prosper only when it serves, and is nurtured by, a morally upright community.

16 “Francisco Suárez: The Man in History,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 65 (1991), pp. 262–263.

17 MD, Preface to the reader.

18 “Francisco Suárez: The Man in History,” p. 263.

19 “Francisco Suárez: The Man in History,” p. 263.



cases, as he tells us in the Preface, the aim is to show the reader how to apply metaphysical principles to theology rather than to use theology to prove philosophy. The sense one gets in reading the *Disputationes* is that one is reading a metaphysical rather than a theological work. This metaphysical emphasis both sets Suarez apart from his medieval predecessors and situates him at the beginning of the modern tradition.²⁰

In the end Gracia concludes that Suarez “cannot be considered exclusively a medieval scholastic or a modern thinker,” but “should be seen both as a medieval theologian and a modern philosopher.”²¹

Despite Gracia’s arguments, it seems to me quite clear that Suarez is, and takes himself to be, a full-fledged member of the medieval scholastic guild, ‘non-modern’ though it be, and that nothing he says in the Preface is in any way marked by a more ‘modern’ spirit. More specifically, each of the differences that Gracia claims to find between Suarez and the high medieval scholastics is either non-essential or non-existent.

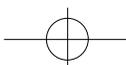
First of all, the fact that Suarez distinguishes metaphysics or First Philosophy from revealed theology is hardly surprising. Like St. Thomas and the others, he realizes full well that the classical philosophical inquirers, especially Plato and Aristotle along with their most important non-Christian commentators, attempted to fashion a science of “being insofar as it is real being” despite the fact that they lacked Christian revelation and were thus not engaged in the project of revealed systematic theology. Indeed, it was precisely an admiration for their accomplishments that led St. Thomas to write a ‘philosophical’ commentary on the *Metaphysics* and to spend the first three books of the *Summa Contra Gentiles* trying to show that certain first principles of Christian theology are either conclusions that the classical philosophers, both pagans and non-Christian theists, had themselves already arrived at by their own standards of successful intellectual inquiry or conclusions that they would have arrived at had they done better by those very same standards. In these works, St. Thomas self-consciously proceeded by the ‘natural light of reason’, not because he believed that the fullness of philosophical wisdom is attainable by reason unilluminated by faith, but because he believed that it is an intellectual perfection for anyone, Christians included, to render metaphysical truths as evident as possible.²² And he hoped that by proceeding in this way, he might be able to show that classical philosophical inquirers could by their own lights come to recognize Christian theology as a plausible candidate for the wisdom they themselves were seeking.²³

20 “Francisco Suárez: The Man in History,” pp. 263–264.

21 “Francisco Suárez: The Man in History,” p. 263 and 264.

22 One unresolved question here is just what degree of evidentness – and evidentness to whom – is required to sustain the claim that a given thesis has been proved or established by the natural light of reason.

23 In “Faith and Reason” I argue at some length for this interpretation of the *Summa Contra Gentiles*. A useful pedagogical device is to imagine this work as emanating



As far as I can tell, Suarez parts not a whit from this Thomistic understanding of the relation between metaphysics, the pinnacle of classical philosophical inquiry, and systematic theology, the pinnacle of Catholic philosophical inquiry. I have already noted that the *Disputationes Metaphysicae* serve in effect as Suarez's own creative commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, embellished by elaborate investigations of the various metaphysical disagreements that had arisen within the Aristotelian tradition from the time of the first important Hellenistic commentaries right into sixteenth-century scholasticism. In fact, if we compare the works of Suarez with those of St. Thomas, we can plausibly think of the *Disputationes Metaphysicae* as the exact counterpart of a combination of St. Thomas's commentary on the *Metaphysics* with the metaphysical (as opposed to ethical) chapters of *Summa Contra Gentiles* 1–3.

What of Gracia's claim that Suarez differs from his predecessors in thinking of metaphysics as "separate from and anterior to theology"? As I have just conceded, Suarez clearly thinks that revealed theology is *distinct from* metaphysics. But, to reiterate, in this he does not differ at all from other mainstream scholastics.

Perhaps, though, Gracia means something stronger by "separate from". Perhaps he is suggesting that Suarez parts company with the others by thinking of metaphysics (and even philosophy in general) as wholly independent of theology and fully autonomous with respect to it – in the way that, say, most contemporary intellectuals think of the natural and social sciences as wholly autonomous with respect to theology or even with respect to metaphysics, for that matter. However, this suggestion is impossible to square with Suarez's own repeated insistence on the intimate connection between metaphysics and theology. It might be going too far to say that on Suarez's view metaphysics as a science is a proper part of revealed systematic theology, but he certainly does believe that the metaphysical articulation of the Christian mysteries within systematic theology is the fulfillment of the classical philosophical desire for the most comprehensive and rigorous systematization of metaphysical knowledge available to us in this life. That is, he believes that a Catholic philosophical inquirer should think of the science of metaphysics as being ordered toward – and, indeed, as being an element of or, at least, intimately bound up with – the complete articulation of wisdom that is found only within Christian systematic theology.²⁴

This leads us to the issue of priority. In what way is metaphysics "anterior to" theology according to Suarez? The very nature of the *Disputationes*

from a dialogue between St. Thomas and his non-Christian predecessors that takes place in the first circle of Dante's *Inferno*.

24 In conversation David Gallagher has helpfully suggested that the mainstream Thomistic (and, I would add, Suarezian) conception of the relation between doing metaphysics and doing theology might be fruitfully compared to the relation between swimming (doing metaphysics) and playing water polo (doing theology). I find this a very fruitful analogy, but will not try to develop it in any detail here.

Metaphysicae embodies his conviction that aspiring systematic theologians should undertake the detailed study of metaphysics as a distinct discipline prior to – or, at any rate, in the very early stages of – their theological training. So in this sense metaphysics is indeed prior to *theology* according to Suarez. Still, it does not follow that Suarez believes metaphysics to be prior to *faith* for the Catholic philosophical inquirer. We have already seen him declare explicitly in the Preface that the positions he adopts in the *Disputationes Metaphysicae* have been determined in part by his assent to the doctrines of the Catholic Faith. This is especially evident in Disputations 20–22, where we often find him first invoking the teachings of the Church, the witness of Sacred Scripture, and the writings of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church in order to establish the truth of a given thesis,²⁵ and then going on to ask whether the thesis in question can be effectively proved by the natural light of reason as well. Sometimes the answer is definitely yes, sometimes definitely no, and sometimes ambivalent. It is clear, then, that Suarez most certainly does not believe that the light of faith in any way ‘contaminates’ metaphysical inquiry with something foreign to it; to the contrary, faith, at least as understood within the Catholic tradition, opens up new intellectual vistas and raises new questions.

An example might be useful here. In Section 2 of Disputation 20 Suarez asks whether the power to create *ex nihilo* must be infinite, that is, wholly unlimited, in both its mode of acting and its range of possible objects. In other words, could there be a creature which, though finite in power, was nonetheless able, as a principal secondary cause, to create at least some entities or types of entities *ex nihilo*? In resolving this question, which is prompted by faith, Suarez first points out that if we begin with the revealed doctrine that God has created all things other than himself and hence that no creature has ever in fact created anything *ex nihilo*, then we can, by employing further premises about God’s nature, argue compellingly for the thesis that no creature can have the power to create *ex nihilo*. He then goes on to ask, “as is proper to our present task,”²⁶ whether this thesis can also be proved by natural reason without invoking Catholic doctrine. In the end, he concludes that even though there are plausible ‘natural’ arguments for the thesis in question, no one has as yet formulated an invincible natural argument for it.

As this example makes clear, one task that Suarez sets for metaphysics is to determine just which of the principles and conclusions of theology can be established by the natural light of reason and, most especially, to resolve those difficult cases in which some writers in the tradition have affirmed, while others have denied, that a given theological doctrine can be so proved. As I adumbrated

25 Since I am not sure exactly what Gracia means by “using theology to prove philosophy,” I cannot say with certainty whether Suarez is doing it. But the example in the next paragraph will at least provide a glimpse of the way that Suarez does in fact proceed.

26 *DM* 20.2.3

above, the natural light of reason has traditionally functioned as a regulative ideal for Catholic philosophical inquiry, in the sense that an intrinsic goal of such inquiry is to render Catholic wisdom as evident as possible by the natural light of reason and, in particular, to establish the preambles of the faith with a high degree of evidential certitude.²⁷ To repeat, this project has been deemed important both because it leads to intellectual perfection for Catholic philosophers themselves and also because it is useful for apologetics and systematic theology. But within the Catholic philosophical tradition there has been significant disagreement about the material content of this normative ideal; that is to say, Catholic thinkers have differed over just how extensive in principle the range of the preambles of the faith is and over just how evident in principle these preambles can be rendered. St. Thomas, deeply impressed by the success of his non-Christian philosophical ancestors, was a cautious optimist on this score, as have been most important Catholic thinkers since his time. By contrast, other Catholic thinkers – for example, William of Ockham – have been more pessimistic. In the *Disputationes Metaphysicae* Suarez is adding his own contribution to this project. But, once again, this hardly sets him apart from the earlier scholastics; to the contrary, his aim is redolent of St. Thomas's in *Summa Contra Gentiles* 1–3.

Gracia seems, then, to make too much of the fact that Suarez describes himself as “doing philosophy” in the *Disputationes Metaphysicae*. To be sure, insofar as Suarez is explicitly concerned with the degree of evidential certitude various truths of the Catholic faith can be shown to have by the standard of natural reason, he is self-consciously engaging in the project of the classical philosophers and is careful to distinguish the mysteries of the faith from the preambles. Still, it hardly follows that he thinks of metaphysical inquiry as something Catholics should engage in oblivious to the fact they have the supernatural light of faith to guide them “not only in discussing the questions but all the more in choosing [their] views and opinions,” so that they might “incline toward those which seem to comport better with piety and revealed doctrine” – as Suarez puts it immediately after having described himself as “doing philosophy.”

What's more, Gracia is just mistaken in claiming that in the Preface Suarez “apologizes for dealing with theological matters in a work of philosophy.” The relevant paragraph reads as follows:

I occasionally interrupt a philosophical discussion and turn to certain theological matters, not so much in order to take the time to examine and explain them in detail (which would fall outside the subject matter I am dealing with here) as in order to indicate explicitly to the reader the way in which the principles of metaphysics should be invoked and adapted in

27 ‘Evidential certitude’, which is a natural intellectual perfection for us, must be distinguished from the ‘certitude of adherence’, which is a perfection of the will insofar as it commands assents, under the influence of grace, to the objects of the theological virtue of faith. See St. Thomas, *Summa Theologiae* 2–2, ques. 4, art. 8, and *De Veritate*, ques. 14, art. 2, ad 7.



confirming theological truths. I admit that in treating those divine perfections that are called attributes I have gone on at greater length than, it might seem to some, my present purpose demands. But I was forced to do this, first of all, by the sublimity and profundity of the subject matter and, secondly, by the fact that it never seemed to me that I was going beyond the limits of natural reason or, consequently, of metaphysics.²⁸

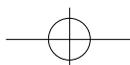
Far from being an expression of regret, this is simply a straightforward description of the methodology dictated by the very purpose for which Suarez is writing the *Disputationes Metaphysicae*. On the one hand, his proper “subject matter” consists of metaphysical questions that are, or at least might appear to be, resolvable by the natural light of reason. On the other hand, his guiding intention induces him to point out, as he does repeatedly, both the theological consequences of adopting one or another disputed metaphysical view and the metaphysical ramifications of embracing one or another disputed theological view. Further, he is well aware that theological examples will sometimes help to clarify metaphysical issues in ways that other examples cannot – both because of the nature of the examples themselves, which often use classical metaphysical concepts and theories in strikingly innovative ways, and also because of the interests and educational background of his intended audience.²⁹

Does it follow, then, that Suarez is not a modern philosopher? The notion of a ‘modern philosopher’ does not wear its meaning on its sleeve, but from what Gracia says we can surmise that he has in mind a thinker who, at the very least, takes philosophical inquiry as such to be ideally independent of affective commitments to any authoritative intellectual or moral tradition and who takes ‘pure reason’ and/or ‘pure experience’ to be the only suitable sources of philosophical wisdom or arbiters of philosophical disagreements. Given that systematic theology includes the mysteries of the Christian faith among its starting points, a modern thinker so defined would consider theology to be extra-philosophical or even non-philosophical, despite the fact that it makes extensive use of ‘properly philosophical’ concepts and theories, and despite the historical fact that mainstream Catholic intellectuals have typically seen revealed theology as the fulfillment and culmination of classical philosophical inquiry.

It is certain, I submit, that Suarez is not a modern philosopher in this sense; nor would he want to be, given that he is just as unapologetic as any high scholastic ever was about his commitment to the Catholic ecclesial community and to its first principles, and given that fidelity to the teachings of the Church functions as a central intellectual commitment for him, even in his metaphysical writings. In short, on his view theology and metaphysics stand in a reciprocal relation in which the one illuminates and guides the other.

28 *MD*, Preface to the reader.

29 In a moment I will show how Suarez invokes the doctrine of the Trinity in order to argue that the notion of a principle, even taken in a narrow sense, is distinct from the notion of a cause.



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Of course, it is worth pointing out in passing that to be ‘non-modern’ or ‘anti-modern’ in this sense is hardly an embarrassment or cause for shame even by contemporary standards. The modernist dogma that philosophy (as well as the natural and social sciences, for that matter) must ideally abstract from *a priori* faith-commitments has recently come in for severe and trenchant criticism at the hands of leading Christian thinkers such as Alasdair MacIntyre, Alvin Plantinga, and John Milbank, not to mention postmodern secular thinkers inspired by the likes of Nietzsche.³⁰ Perhaps in the heyday of modernism some enthusiastic students of scholasticism might have been understandably tempted to portray Suarez and other scholastics as ‘modern’ or ‘quasi-modern’ thinkers in order to make their works more palatable to academic philosophers. Yet despite the fact that anti-religious prejudices still run deep in many philosophical circles, the influence of modernism seems clearly to be waning. So even if there was at one time some semblance of a justification for the attempt to turn Suarez into something he was not and cannot be accurately portrayed as having been, this is no longer the case.

1.3 Efficient causality in the *Disputationes Metaphysicae*: context and overview

I will now provide an overview of Suarez’s treatment of efficient causality in Disputations 17–22. My intent is to give the reader some initial idea of the range of questions Suarez deals with and in this way to set a context within which to situate my later discussions of scholastic metaphysics and of the disputations on divine action. I will introduce a few technical terms here, but will defer an explanation of them to Parts 2 and 3 of this introductory essay.

The treatment of efficient causality falls into the first half of the *Disputationes Metaphysicae* (Disputations 1–27), which treats of being in general prior to its division into infinite being and finite being and, *a fortiori*, prior to the further division of finite being into substance and accident. After the initial investigations into the nature of metaphysics in Disputation 1 and into the essential notion of being in Disputation 2, Suarez turns in Disputation 3 to a general discussion of the transcendental properties (*passiones*) of being, which he identifies as *one* (being as undivided in itself), *true* (being as an object of cognition) and *good* (being as an object of love and desire). Disputations 4–7 deal with oneness or unity, focusing on individual unity (or individuality), formal unity (or universality), and the various types of distinctions among beings. Disputations 8–9 deal with truth and falsity and Disputations 10–11 with good and evil.

It is at this juncture, in Disputation 12, that Suarez begins his treatment of the causes of being. Since metaphysical inquiry is often said to aim at a knowledge of the principles of being, he first discusses the notion of a principle and its

30 See especially MacIntyre’s *Three Rival Versions of Moral Inquiry: Encyclopedia, Genealogy and Tradition*, Plantinga’s *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming), and Milbank’s *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1993).

relation to the notion of a cause. The term ‘principle’, he tells us, can be used in a wide sense to designate the first element in any sort of ordering, real or merely conceptual, and in this sense it is obviously more inclusive than the term ‘cause’. However, ‘principle’ is used most properly in a narrower metaphysical sense to designate “that which truly and directly communicates (*influens*) some sort of being (*esse*) to that of which it is the principle,” or, in other words, that on which a real entity depends in some way for its existence.³¹ Suarez is careful to point out, however, that even on this narrower reading the notion of a principle is still broader than the notion of a cause, since within the Blessed Trinity there is a communication of being without causality. For the Father is a true principle eternally ‘generating’ the Son, and the Father and Son together are true principles eternally ‘spirating’ the Holy Spirit, despite the fact that these intra-Trinitarian ‘relations of origin’ involve no causality, strictly speaking. The reason for this, Suarez explains, is that in these relations the principle’s own being is in no way distinct from the being of which it is the source; that is, the being (or nature) which the Son receives from the Father is the Father’s very own being and nothing else, and the being (or nature) which the Holy Spirit receives from the Father and the Son is their very own being and nothing else.³²

A cause, on the other hand, is a principle that communicates being or *esse* distinct from its own being to that of which it is a cause.³³ And a cause’s causality is just “that influence or concurrence by which a cause, within its own genus, actually gives being to the effect.”³⁴

These definitions are meant to apply to every Aristotelian genus of cause – material, formal, efficient, and final.³⁵ Material and formal causes are called ‘intrinsic’ causes because they do in a sense communicate their own being to the composite which they constitute by their union; however, they satisfy the notion of a cause because the being or *esse* of the composite substance which results from their union is distinct from the being of either the matter or the form. Efficient and final causes, by contrast, are wholly extrinsic to the entities to which they communicate being.³⁶

31 See *DM* 12.1.25.

32 See especially *DM* 12.2.6-10. In a moment I will contrast this intra-Trinitarian communication of being with that of the ‘intrinsic’ causes of creatures.

33 *DM* 12.2.4–7.

34 *DM* 12.2.13.

35 Suarez also asks whether exemplar causes – that is, the ideas that serve as paradigms for intellectual agents and specify their actions – constitute a separate genus of cause. He treats this matter at length in Disputation 25, which is devoted exclusively to exemplar causality. There he identifies the exemplar cause as a certain antecedent condition of efficient causality that precedes the actions of intelligent agents.

36 In Disputation 23 Suarez argues for the claim that, despite their peculiarities, final causes fully satisfy the definition of a cause.

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It is within this general framework that Suarez situates his tract on efficient causality, the longest and most meticulous such tract in the history of scholasticism. Of the six disputations dealing with efficient causality, the first triad (17–19) is concerned mainly with efficient causality as exercised by creatures,³⁷ while the second triad (20–22), contained in the present volume, focuses on the three modes of divine efficient causality that can be investigated by the natural light of reason, viz., creation, conservation, and general concurrence. I will now give brief descriptions of each of these six disputations, bearing in mind that in Parts 5–7 below I will be giving a more detailed analysis of the three disputations on divine action (20–22).

Disputation 17, entitled “On the efficient cause in general,” provides a broad characterization of efficient causality and its various modes. In Section 1 Suarez expounds and modifies Aristotle’s definition of an efficient or agent cause as that “whence there is a first beginning of change or rest,” carefully distinguishing the efficient cause from the other three Aristotelian causes. An efficient cause, he concludes, is an extrinsic *per se* principle that communicates *esse* or being of some sort to an effect by means of an action. In Section 2 he lays out the main divisions of efficient causes, namely, (a) *per se* (immediate) vs. *per accidens* (mediate) causes, (b) physical vs. moral causes, (c) principal vs. instrumental causes, (d) univocal vs. equivocal causes, and (e) primary or first cause vs. secondary causes, where this last distinction is equivalent to the distinction between God as an agent and creatures as agents. Along the way he also makes some illuminating remarks about the important distinction between an agent cause or efficient principle, properly speaking, and the *sine qua non* conditions that are prerequisites for an agent’s exercising its causal power.

Disputation 18, entitled “On the proximate efficient cause, and on its causality, and on all the things which it requires in order to cause,” deals with the metaphysics of creaturely causality in general and especially with the efficient causality proper to material substances and their accidents. Section 1 contains Suarez’s reply to occasionalism and other theories that either deny that material substances are efficient causes or else put severe *a priori* limitations on the range of effects that can be produced by them. Sections 2–6 treat certain metaphysical issues concerning the efficient principles involved in the production of new substances and accidents. Then in Sections 7–9 Suarez discusses in detail the three prerequisites for efficient causality that stand in most need of careful unpacking, namely, (a) the condition that the thing acting (agent) be distinct from the thing acted upon (patient), (b) the condition that the agent be spatially proximate to the patient, and (c) the condition that the agent be initially dissimilar to the patient. Having completed his treatment of the principles and prerequisites of efficient causality, he next (Section 10) takes up the ontological question of what it is that

37 An English translation of these three disputations is available in Francisco Suarez, *On Efficient Causality: Metaphysical Disputations 17–19*, translated by Alfred J. Freddoso (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994).

formally constitutes a substance or accident as an actually acting efficient cause. Finally, in Section 11 he propounds the metaphysics of destructive or corruptive efficient causality.

Disputation 19, entitled “On causes that act necessarily and causes that act freely or contingently, and also on fate, fortune, and chance,” turns to issues concerning causal necessity and contingency. In Sections 1–3 Suarez gives a precise characterization of the distinction between agents that act by a necessity of nature and agents that act without necessity; in addition, he takes up the disputed question of whether there could still be causal contingency in the created world if, contrary to fact, God acted only by a necessity of nature. Sections 4–9 go into great depth about the nature of free choice and include an exhaustive treatment of scholastic debates over the relation between intellect and will in free action. Finally, Sections 10–12 take up a series of questions concerning fate, fortune, and chance.

Disputation 20, entitled “On the First Efficient Cause and on his first action, which is creation,” begins in Section 1 by asking whether natural reason can prove that creation *ex nihilo* is possible. Here Suarez argues that (a) there is no incoherence either in the concept of creation itself or in the concept of the power to create, and that (b) if we assume the existence of God, we can prove that such a power in fact exists and has been exercised. Along the way he tries to show, against the ancient philosophers, that matter is created, and he ends with an interesting discussion of whether Aristotle himself believed in creation *ex nihilo*. Section 2 takes up the disputed question of whether creation requires an absolutely unlimited power, or whether instead some creature could have the limited power to create at least some entities as a principal cause; and in Section 3 Suarez tries to answer the related, but distinct, question of whether any creature could act as an instrumental cause in God’s creative action. Section 4 investigates the ontological status of the action of creation, an issue that will become clearer when I talk about the ontology of action in Part 3 of this introductory essay. Finally, Section 5 asks whether creation presupposes the prior non-existence of the thing created, or whether instead it is possible that some entities should have been created from eternity without any beginning.

Disputation 21, entitled “On the First Efficient Cause and on his second action, which is conservation,” begins in Section 1 by investigating whether natural reason can prove that created beings depend for their existence on the continual actual influence of the First Cause. Section 2 explicates the relation between creation and conservation, while Section 3 asks whether conservation is a divine prerogative.

Disputation 22, entitled “On the First Cause, and on his third action, which is cooperation, or concurrence, with secondary causes,” begins in Section 1 by asking whether in order for a created agent to act, it is necessary that God, in addition to creating and conserving that agent along with its causal powers, should also cooperate with it in its very acting. After concluding that the answer is affirmative, Suarez asks in Section 2 whether this cooperation on God’s part

consists in his giving to the secondary cause itself some power or principle of action that it did not previously have on its own, or whether instead God's actual cooperation has its terminus just in the effect produced by that agent. Section 3 pursues this matter further by asking how God's concurrence is related to the secondary cause's action and to the subject of that action. Section 4 turns to the manner in which God concurs. Here Suarez tries to show that God's manner of granting concurrence to freely acting agents must differ from his manner of granting concurrence to naturally acting agents. Finally, in Section 5 Suarez argues that secondary agents do not depend essentially in their acting on any beings other than God.

With this brief overview in hand, we are now ready to look more closely at the ontological framework within which Suarez works out his account of efficient causality in general and God's causality in particular.

2 Ontological Preliminaries

In order to clarify Suarez's treatment of efficient causality in general and God's efficient causality in particular, we must begin with a basic general introduction to scholastic ontology and philosophy of nature. My aim here in Parts 2–4 is systematic as well as expository. That is, I want to bring scholastic metaphysics and, more particularly, scholastic treatments of efficient causality into dialogue with some significant recent work within mainstream Anglo-American philosophy on notions such as substance, property, action, causality, and scientific explanation. So along the way I will be comparing Suarez's views on these topics with certain important contemporary views. Even though these comparisons, and the polemic that accompanies them, will be brief and non-exhaustive, my hope is that they will enable contemporary philosophers to appreciate some of the striking virtues of Aristotelian-scholastic metaphysics.

2.1 The big picture

My presentation of scholastic ontology will focus on the notions of substance and accident and on the types of ontological composition commonly invoked by scholastic metaphysicians, along with the principal motivations for positing these types of composition. In order to set Suarez's own views in proper relief, I will also mention a few of the controversies on particular points that arose among the scholastics in the later medieval period, especially after the time of St. Thomas.

Like other Aristotelian scholastics, Suarez takes efficient causality to be a relation holding between agents and their effects at the very time at which the effects are produced.³⁸ In a typical case (leaving aside for the moment creation

38 Suarez distinguishes an efficient principle *ut quod*, that is, the substance which exercises a power and to which the resulting action is ultimately attributed, from an efficient principle *ut quo*, that is, the power or faculty by which such a substance operates. So one can also think of efficient causality as a relation between agents-*cum*-powers and their effects. I mention this in part because several of the questions con-

ex nihilo) one substance (the agent) acts upon another (the patient) in such a way as to produce or conserve an effect, where the effect is itself either a substance or an intrinsic determination or modification of a substance, that is, an accident.³⁹ More technically, the agent's action on the patient is simultaneously (a) the exercise of an active causal power on the part of the agent and (b) the actualization within the patient of a formal determination for which the patient, given its intrinsic constitution at the time of the action, has a proximate antecedent potentiality or passive power. Accordingly, we can distinguish active from passive causal powers. A substance's active causal powers delimit the range of effects it is capable of directly producing or conserving when it acts upon suitably disposed patients in appropriate circumstances, whereas its passive causal powers delimit the range of effects that might be produced or conserved when it is acted upon by suitably situated agents in appropriate circumstances.

This general portrait of efficient causality, which I will flesh out in Part 3, has two noteworthy ontological corollaries. The first is that, contrary to one influential opinion in contemporary metaphysics, it is substances and accidents, rather than events, that serve as the relata of the basic causal relation. Though it does not follow forthwith that from an Aristotelian perspective talk of so-called 'event causation' is utterly wrongheaded, it does follow that all instances of event causation are reducible to the actions of power-laden agents on appropriately susceptible patients.⁴⁰ Indeed, the Aristotelian scholastics, sensibly to my mind, conceive of the whole natural world, inanimate as well as animate, as a dynamic system of interrelated and interacting entities endowed by nature with causal

cerning efficient causality that Suarez deals with in Disputations 17–19 center around the principle *ut quo*, and it is important to understand from the beginning that Suarez takes the principle *ut quo* to fall under his general characterization of an efficient causal principle.

- 39 Below I will invoke Suarez's distinction between an agent's 'formal effect' or 'formal terminus *ad quem*', which is the substantial or accidental form produced by the agent, and what we might call its 'complex effect', which is the form-*cum*-matter composite in the case of unqualified (or substantial) change and the substance-*cum*-accident composite in the case of qualified (or accidental) change. We can draw a similar distinction between the formal terminus *a quo* of a change, which is the privation of the form taken by itself, and the complex terminus *a quo*, which is the subject (or matter) of the change along with the privation. The complex effect is something like a state of affairs, and so in this sense states of affairs might be thought of as the terminus of an exercise of efficient causality. However, all such states of affairs supervene on the basic communication of being to substances and accidents.
- 40 For an extended critique of the claim that events are the basic relata of the causal relation, see Dorothy Emmet, *The Effectiveness of Causes* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1985), pp. 6–41. Though Emmet stands squarely within the Aristotelian tradition on this issue, she does express reservations, to be noted shortly, about the Aristotelian notion of substance and its concomitant essentialism.

tendencies and susceptibilities and always poised to produce their proper effects in the appropriate circumstances. It follows that ‘agent causation’ is not limited just to substances endowed with sentience or intelligence, and that the free agency of intellectual substances is simply a higher-order manifestation of a feature that pervades the physical universe as a whole.

The second corollary is that some type of a substance/accident ontology is fundamentally correct. A substance is conceived of as a ‘this-such’, that is, a basic unified entity with an essential nature constituting it as a member of some lowest-level natural kind. (Artifacts that incorporate such basic entities into a unified system may be thought of as substances in an improper and extended sense.) Since from an Aristotelian perspective the paradigmatic examples of substances are complex living organisms, the version of substance/accident ontology employed by Suarez and other scholastics is anti-reductionistic. That is, a formal or structural principle (called the ‘substantial form’) may subsume substances of a lower order (called the ‘proximate matter’) into a higher-order unity with its own distinctive substantial being or *esse* and with distinctive properties that are irreducible to the properties of the individual substantial components or of a mere coincidental aggregation thereof. In such a case the lower-order entities lose their independent status as substances and, at least for the time being, assume the status of ‘virtual parts’ of the new substance through the active and passive causal powers with which they endow that substance.⁴¹

A substance functions as the ultimate metaphysical subject or substratum of its accidents, where an accident is an intrinsic formal perfection (or determination or modification) that is ontologically distinct from the substance it modifies, an individual entity in its own right with its own ‘accidental’ (as opposed to ‘substantial’) being or *esse*. In general, an accidental entity (in technical terminology, an ‘accidental form’) is apt by its nature to bear the transcendental dependence-relation of *inherence* to a substance that has substantial being of a sort consonant with its serving as the subject of such an accident.⁴² Some of a substance’s

41 St. Thomas deals with the constitution of material substances out of elemental substances in two short works that are now available together in English translation, accompanied by an illuminating commentary. See Joseph Bobik, *Aquinas on Matter and Form and the Elements: A Translation and Interpretation of the De Principiis Naturae and the De Mixtione Elementorum of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998).

42 The reason why an accident’s inherence in a substance is a *transcendental* or *transcategorical* relation rather than a *categorical* relation – that is, a relation that falls under the Aristotelian category of relation – is that categorical relations *presuppose* that the related substances have a full complement of accidents, whereas the relations of inherence that a given substance’s accidents bear to it *logically precede* and *result in* the substance’s having a full complement of accidents. For analogous reasons, the relation of *union* between the form and matter that constitute a given substance is a transcendental relation.

accidents, including its basic active and passive causal powers, are ‘inseparable’ accidents that flow directly from the substance’s nature or essence as definitive of its natural kind, while others are ‘separable’ accidents that are consonant with its nature but not endemic to it.⁴³

I should note here that even within the confines of a substance/accident ontology disagreements have arisen historically over the exact ontological status of accidents. Suarez himself, for instance, distinguishes among more and less dependent types of accidental entities. Whereas he treats sensible qualities, habits, causal powers, and three-dimensional quantity as ‘full-fledged’ accidents that are *really distinct* or *separable* from substances and can thus, albeit only by God’s power, exist without a subject of inherence, he regards motion, position, acting, and being acted upon as mere ‘modes’, incapable in principle of existing independently of a subject and thus only *modally distinct* from the things in which they inhere.⁴⁴ What’s more, he holds that relations, though they are real and not merely conceptual entities, do not constitute a separate and irreducible category of real beings at all.⁴⁵ Yet each of these claims is contested in whole or in part by others within Suarez’s intellectual tradition. I raise this issue only to intimate the range of possible substance/accident ontologies, and I will not pursue it any further here except to mention that an indispensable element of Suarez’s own account of efficient causality is the claim that every proper effect of an efficient cause is an individual entity that has real being (*esse*) of some sort or other; that is, every proper and direct (*per se*) effect of an efficient cause must be either a substance or a full-fledged accident or at least a mode.

2.2 Types of Composition

Scholastic ontology in general, and Suarez’s ontology in particular, is in a broad sense a form of ‘component’ ontology. By this I mean that it aims at a general characterization of substance in terms of various types of components (entities or

43 What I have just said should serve to caution contemporary readers against assuming that substances have all their accidents contingently rather than by their nature. According to the scholastics, a substance’s inseparable accidents are such that the substance cannot exist without them – or, at the very least, cannot exist without them *naturally* or in the absence of some extraordinary impediment. The scholastics thus use the term ‘accident’ in a way different from that in which the term ‘accidental property’ is normally used by contemporary metaphysicians, where an accidental property of a substance is one which does not belong to a substance by its nature.

44 For a brief explanation of the types of distinction according to Suarez, see note 5 to DM 20.1 below. Also, see Barry Brown, *Accidental Being: A Study in the Metaphysics of St. Thomas Aquinas* (New York: University Press of America, 1985) for a revealing look at the internal dispute among Thomists over the status of accidental being in St. Thomas’s metaphysics.

45 See DM 47.2 for Suarez’s discussion of the ontological status of relations and of the various positions of his predecessors on this issue. For a good treatment of the high medieval dispute over relations, see Mark Henninger, S.J., *Relations: Medieval Theories 1250–1325* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989)

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virtual entities) which are in some straightforward sense intrinsic to a substance and yet compatible with its status as a unified whole.

Any plausible ontology of material substances must of course acknowledge that such substances are wholes having ‘integral’ or ‘quantitative’ parts and that they can thus be characterized as ‘composite’ in that sense. However, scholastic ontology goes beyond this sort of obvious material composition by invoking four further types of composition. I will first identify them and then briefly explain the motivations for positing them.

As intimated above, each material substance is conceived of as an individual nature (or essence) that by virtue of its nature or essence is constituted as a member of a given natural kind. A material substance can itself be thought of as composite in either of two ways.

First, a material substance is composed of its ‘essential’ parts or components, namely, substantial form and matter, including both primary matter (pure potentiality) and the more elemental types of matter, describable at different levels, that are subsumed by the form of the whole substance.⁴⁶ These parts, which are expressed in the substance’s ‘natural’ or ‘physical’ definition, constitute the most basic level of physical composition.

Second, a material substance is composed of its ‘metaphysical’ or ‘logical’ parts, namely, genus and specific difference. These parts are expressed in the substance’s ‘real’ or ‘metaphysical’ definition.

This brings us to the third type of composition. Whereas the essential and metaphysical parts of a substance in some sense constitute it as an individual nature or substance, the accidents of a substance – both those that emanate directly from the essence and those that are had (or may be had) just by some of the substances within a given natural kind – are the realization or actualization of various potentialities had by the substance as so constituted. Thus the scholastics also speak of a ‘physical composition’ of substance and accidents that presupposes the physical composition of matter and form.⁴⁷

46 Within Aristotelian science one can describe the so-called proximate matter of a substance at either the level of the four elements (water, air, fire, earth) or the level of minerals, which are substantial entities constituted by differing proportions of the four elements. Within modern physical theories the levels are different and more numerous (for example, cell, molecule, atom, proton, quark, and so on), but the basic philosophical point remains the same. See Joseph Bobik, *Aquinas on Matter and Form and the Elements*, for a thorough discussion of this issue.

47 Immaterial substances are conceived of by analogy to material substances. So, according to the dominant scholastic view, they have only form (and not matter) as a physical component. However, they still have substance/accident composition, because their accidental acts of intellect and will are perfections they have only potentially by their natures. Interestingly, the traditional hierarchy of angels is accounted for along these lines. The natural perfection of angels is measured by how much intellectual perfection (or knowledge) they have by their essence and how much is acquired as the accidental actualization of natural potentialities. The more angels know by their nature or essence (and not via accidental acts of intellect), the

Finally, in order to capture the difference between a being that is wholly independent of any other being for its existence (God) and beings that depend on another for their own proper existence and the existence of each of their components, the latter are further said to be composed ‘physically’ of being (*esse*) and essence (*essentia*), where in this usage the term ‘essence’ is taken broadly to include a substance’s nature (‘essence’ in the narrower sense) along with all its accidents and parts.

Before I explain the principal motivations for positing these four modes of composition, I want to make two clarificatory points.

First, I do not mean to give the impression that there was unanimity among the scholastics about how to think of the various entities or types of composition just listed. For instance, most scholastics – Duns Scotus, as we shall see, is a notable exception – take the composition of genus and difference to be a conceptual (as opposed to real) composition with a real foundation in the essential parts of the relevant substance. A similar disagreement infects the distinction between *esse* and *essentia*, though here it is crucial to point out that the very meaning of the concepts ‘real composition’ and ‘conceptual composition’, along with their correlatives ‘real distinction’ and ‘conceptual distinction’, are themselves the subject of lively debates.⁴⁸ And I have already alluded to the debates about the ontological status of accidental entities.

Second, it is important to understand the radical difference between component and non-component ontologies. In particular, we should note carefully the contrast between Aristotelian scholastic ontologies and the Platonist ontologies currently popular in some philosophical circles, especially among Anglo-American philosophers of religion. According to the latter, substances are constituted by their relation to abstract entities (properties and essences) which (a) have their being and reality independently of those substances, (b) are in some obvious way extrinsic to them, and (c) are linked to them by the relation of *exemplification*. On such ontologies material substances seem to lack intrinsic composition of any sort other than, where applicable, the composition of quantitative parts. For unlike inherence, exemplification is not a relation among components intrinsic to a substance.

The friends of non-component ontologies find themselves in a difficult position when they try to assess scholastic theses that depend directly on composition ontology for their intelligibility. This is well illustrated by the contemporary literature on scholastic treatments of the doctrine of divine simplicity.⁴⁹ The

more they resemble God in intellectual perfection and the higher up they are in the hierarchy of immaterial substances.

48 Suarez, for instance, devotes all of Disputation 6 to clarifying, in his own particular way, the different kinds of identity and distinction.

49 This doctrine is *de fide* for Catholics, having been explicitly affirmed both by the Fourth Lateran Council and the First Vatican Council. See H. Denzinger and A. Schönmetzer, *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, 32nd ed. (Freiburg: Herder, 1963), #800 and #3001 (new numbering).

scholastics were able to fashion a substantive and metaphysically interesting account of the metaphysical gulf between finite creatures and their transcendent God by characterizing God as uniquely simple – that is, as wholly lacking in every type of composition found among created substances. Specifically, they claimed that in God there is no composition of quantitative parts, of form and matter, of genus and difference, of substance and accident, or of *esse* and *essentia*, and that this absence of composition is extensionally equivalent to absolute perfection.⁵⁰ More positively, they asserted that because God is imperfectible and thus has no accidents that might perfect his essence, he is identical in essence with his attributes and likewise identical in essence with his act of intellect and act of will. However, each of these claims, if transformed straightforwardly into the framework of a Platonist non-component ontology, leads to patent absurdities – for example, that God has no accidental properties as these are conceived of within a Platonist ontology or that God just is the Platonic property, say, of his being wise or of his willing to create the world.⁵¹ In short, it seems impossible for many key scholastic claims about God to be stated accurately or even coherently within the framework of a non-component ontology. To my mind, this in itself counts as an argument against the use of non-component ontologies in any philosophical theology that claims to be expounding the metaphysical dimensions of Christian doctrines.

I turn now to the motivations for the four types of composition peculiar to mainline Aristotelian scholastic ontology.

2.2.1. *Physical composition: matter/form, substance/accident, and esse/essentia*

The claim that there is physical composition stems from the analysis of genuine change.⁵² Aristotle posited three principles of genuine change: privation, form, and matter. The matter of a given change is the subject that perdures through the change and is modified by the agent of the change, whereas the form (or composite of the relevant matter and form) is the terminus *ad quem* of the change and

50 This is the core of the negative theology characteristic of the best scholastic thinkers. See especially St. Thomas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* 1, chaps. 14–28. In “The ‘Openness’ of God: A Reply to William Hasker,” *Christian Scholar’s Review* 28 (1998): 124–133, I have tried to explain clearly the strategic importance of this negative theology within the framework of St. Thomas’s natural theology.

51 For a similar analysis of the recent literature on this topic, see Nicholas Wolterstorff, “Divine Simplicity,” *Philosophical Perspectives* 5 (1991): 531–552.

52 Genuine change is here distinguished from the mere applicability over time of contrary predicates to the same substance, since the latter, sometimes called ‘Cambridge’ change in the philosophical literature, can occur either solely because of the mere passage of time or solely because of genuine changes in substances other than the one in question. On a component ontology an entity genuinely changes if and only if it acquires a new form. Platonist ontologies have no similarly ready way of giving a general characterization of the distinction between genuine change and mere Cambridge change.

the privation (or composite of the relevant matter and privation) is the terminus *a quo*.⁵³

In the case of ‘qualified’ or ‘accidental’ change, this analysis requires that there be a composition of substance and accident, where the substance is the perduring ‘matter’ or subject of the change and the accident that comes to modify the substance as a result of the change is the ‘form’. This accident or accidental form is a characteristic which the substance in question lacked before the change but for which it had a proximate antecedent potentiality. To complete the picture, the prior absence of the form for which the substance had a proximate antecedent potentiality is the ‘privation’.

Accidents are assumed to fall into categories along the lines suggested by Aristotle, though, as noted above, among the later scholastics there were lively debates about the precise identity and ontological status of the entities signified by various types of accidental predicates.⁵⁴ Still, it is generally agreed that all such predicates signify entities of some sort, at least modes in Suarez’s sense. And the three basic types of accidental change are (a) *alteration* (change with respect to quality), (b) *augmentation* and *diminution* (change with respect to quantity), and (c) *local motion* (change with respect to place). All accidental changes with respect to the other Aristotelian categories are held to be reducible to or parasitic on these three.

Certain entities (immaterial beings, celestial bodies on a strict Aristotelian cosmology, classical atoms if there are any, primary matter) are subject at most to accidental change and hence are both ingenerable and incorruptible. However, in keeping with common sense but contrary to the received wisdom of his philosophical predecessors (Parmenides, Empedocles, Anaxagoras, and the atomists), Aristotle held that at least some ultimate realities or substances could themselves come into and pass out of existence through genuine change – more specifically, through ‘generation’ and ‘corruption’. If such unqualified or substantial change is possible, there must be within generated substances an essential composition of matter and form, so that the same matter can successively enter into the constitution of numerically distinct substances and even of different natural kinds of substances. In order to safeguard the unity of generable and corruptible substances – especially living substances such as plants and animals – the scholastics held that in unqualified change a substantial form is united with ‘primary’ matter (or pure potentiality) to form an individual nature or substance. One reason for this claim is the conviction that *all* the matter of a generated substance,

53 The parenthetic descriptions are in fact the most complete and correspond to the complex terminus *ad quem* and complex terminus *a quo* described in note 39 above.

The unparenthesized descriptions, in contrast, correspond to the formal terminus *ad quem* (the form taken by itself) and the formal terminus *a quo* (the privation taken by itself).

54 Just for the record, the nine accidental categories are quality, quantity, relation, time, place, action, passion, position, and ‘having’.

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at whatever level of description – from primary matter to elemental matter right through to the so-called ‘proximate matter’ of the change – is structured by and subordinated to the form of the whole substance. Conversely, in corruptive action this formal unity is lost and the matter of the corrupted substance comes to exist ‘under’ the forms of the substance’s previously ‘virtual’ parts. So whereas qualified change demands a composition of substance and accident, unqualified change demands a composition of substantial form and primary matter.

The composition of substantial form and primary matter, on the one hand, and the composition of substance and accident, on the other, are best seen as specifications of the more generic Aristotelian composition between ‘act’ (or actuality) and ‘passive potency’ (or potentiality). For in each case of genuine change a determinable or perfectible ‘matter’ (the principle of potentiality) is made determinate or brought to completion in some relevant way by a ‘form’ (the principle of actuality) which is communicated by an agent or agents. This form, be it substantial or accidental, is called the ‘formal terminus’ of the change in order to distinguish it from the whole resulting composite of matter and form (in substantial change) or of substance and accident (in accidental change). And it is precisely the complementarity of a given actuality, on the one hand, and a potentiality with respect to that actuality, on the other, which ensures that compositions of substantial form and primary matter and of substance and accident are unities rather than mere aggregations of disparate parts. For as Aristotle puts it, “The potential and the actual are somehow one.”⁵⁵

The distinction between *esse* and *essentia*, which I will discuss at more length in Part 3, is yet another specification of this general distinction between act and potency and is meant in part to accommodate the possibility of an exercise of efficient causality that is not a modification of a prior substance or a prior matter, but is instead the production *ex nihilo* of a substance with all its accidents and parts (*essentia* in the broad sense). Here the notion of a principle of potentiality (*essentia*) is stretched to its limit, since the essence in this broad sense does not exist with real potentiality prior to the relevant exercise of efficient causality, and hence is not acted upon by the agent. This is why the creation *ex nihilo* of a substance with its accidents is not, strictly speaking, a genuine change. Nonetheless, given that a substance and all of its components stand in radical dependence on the First Cause for their existence, we can think of the essence in this broad sense as ‘receiving’ *esse* in a way analogous to the way in which primary matter receives substantial form and to the way in which a substance receives accidental perfections. What’s more, given this view of creation, it follows directly that annihilation, unlike corruption, cannot involve action on a patient but can be effected only by the suspension or cessation of an action that confers *esse* simultaneously on the substance and on all its accidents and parts.⁵⁶

55 *Metaphysics* 8.6, 1045b21.

56 This is a point emphasized by Suarez in *DM* 18.11. I will return to it in Part 6.3 below when I examine Suarez’s arguments for the doctrine of divine conservation.

On the basis of what has been said, we can map the three principal types of productive efficient causality onto the three major specifications of the actuality/potentiality distinction:

Type of Productive Efficient Causality	Actuality	(Passive) Potentiality
<i>Qualified change</i> : alteration, augmentation, local motion	accidental form	substance
<i>Unqualified change</i> : generation	substantial form	primary matter
Creation	<i>ex nihilo</i>	<i>esse essentia</i>

In each case the relevant type of act/potency composition is the complex terminus *ad quem* of the corresponding type of productive efficient causality and the complex terminus *a quo* of the corresponding type of destructive causality – that is, of corruption, which corresponds to generation, and of annihilation, which corresponds to creation *ex nihilo*.

2.2.2 Metaphysical composition: genus/specific difference

As we have seen, the postulation of the modes of physical composition arises from the analysis of genuine change. In contrast, the postulation of so-called ‘metaphysical’ composition arises from a broadly realist conception of scientific inquiry and scientific explanation. Given that inquiry begins with a taxonomy of natural kinds ordered according to genus and species (reminiscent of the logical structure of Aristotle’s category of substance), and that the goal of scientific inquiry is to attain systematic knowledge of the natures of individual substances, questions arise about the metaphysical presuppositions that undergird (a) the use of natural kind terms, (b) the formulation of tentative ‘real’ definitions of natural kinds in terms of genus and specific difference, and (c) the assertion of predications which have as their subjects natural kind terms and as their predicates various terms signifying dispositional qualities that have been discovered by inquiry to ‘emanate from’ the relevant natures or essences – as, for example, ‘Salt is soluble in water’. Such statements (‘laws’ in one acceptation of that term) are in some obvious sense about natural kinds rather than primarily about singular instances of those kinds, and they tie natural kinds with metaphysical necessity to structural features, active causal powers and tendencies, passive causal susceptibilities, and so on.

All the scholastics agree that each ‘secondary substance’ or natural kind has a composite real definition that is grounded in the real structure of the individuals belonging to that natural kind. The question then arises: Does the use of these ‘real’ definitions in scientific inquiry presuppose a distinctive metaphysical component of a substance corresponding to each element in the definition of its natural kind? To take a simple hackneyed example, is there within a human being a distinctive pair of ‘metaphysical’ components corresponding to the genus (*animal*) and specific difference (*rational*) expressed in the real definition of the natural kind *human being*?

Duns Scotus, for one, argues that there must be distinctive components of this sort (he called them ‘formalities’) if successful scientific inquiry is to be possible.⁵⁷ That is why he thinks of these formalities as ‘metaphysical’ components in a straightforward sense and holds that the distinction between the genus and specific difference is just one more specification of the distinction between potency (genus or common nature) and act (specific difference). He is then faced with the problem of relating these metaphysical components of a substance to the essential components (matter and form) of the same substance – no mean task, since each set of components is exhaustive and yet cannot be directly mapped onto the another.⁵⁸

However, most other scholastics, Suarez included, deny that substances have distinctive metaphysical components in addition to their essential components. On their view, the problem is to explain how the various *logical* or *conceptual* components of natural kind concepts and of their definitions are grounded in the physical components (matter and form) of the relevant substances. And so they think of the distinction between genus and specific difference as a merely analogical extension in the conceptual order of the distinction between potentiality and actuality.

2.3 On behalf of scholastic ontology

Of course, it is hardly necessary to point out that broadly Aristotelian component ontologies of the sort developed by the scholastics are viewed (if at all) with deep suspicion by many contemporary philosophers, including, ironically, some of the very thinkers whom I would on other grounds label neo-Aristotelians. So even though this is not the place to explore the relevant issues in any great depth, I do want to indicate briefly why certain standard objections to scholastic ontologies are not very impressive, especially when seen in the light of recent developments in Anglo-American metaphysics and epistemology.

Let’s look first at the Aristotelian conception of substance. An initial reservation has to do with the role of a substance as the subject or substratum of accidents. Dorothy Emmet, after having argued in a typically Aristotelian vein that it is ‘continuants’ rather than ‘occurrents’ that are efficient causes in the most basic sense, nonetheless refuses to identify continuants with substances:

[The distinction between ‘continuants’ and ‘occurrents’] answers to the traditional distinction between substances and events. The ‘continuant’, however, need not carry the metaphysical implications which sometimes were seen in ‘substance’, as being a substratum distinct from its quali-

57 See *Opus Oxoniense* 2, dist. 3.

58 In addition, Scotus claimed that among the metaphysical components or formalities of a given substance there must be an ‘individual difference’ (as opposed to ‘specific difference’) which ‘contracts’ the species that the substance shares with other members of the same natural kind and thus makes the substance distinct from those others.

ties. A continuant need only show a persistent character recognisable over time. ‘Occurrences’ are changes in a continuant, for example this particle as moving from *A* to *B* at time *t* When one continuant is seen as external to another and acting on it, this is *transeunt* causation. When there is a change of state within a single continuant, this is immanent causation. Changes within a system taken as a whole are cases of immanent causation. But a system may be seen as composed of parts which are subcontinuant, and where changes in the system can be explained as due to the action of these on each other, they can be seen as cases of *transeunt* causation.⁵⁹

Having already seen that the paradigmatic instance of an Aristotelian substance is a living organism, we might well wonder what distinguishes Emmet’s continuants from Aristotelian substances. To be sure, an Aristotelian substance is said to have qualities and other accidents that are ontologically distinct from it in one way or another. But Emmet herself acknowledges that a continuant may undergo qualitative and other sorts of change while remaining numerically the same continuant. Though it does not follow directly that qualities and other accidents must be individuals that are really distinct from the substances they characterize, the only plausible alternative, as far as I can tell, is to countenance something like ‘states’ of substances or continuants. And even if such states are not full-fledged accidents, they must nonetheless be assigned an ontological status distinct from that of the substances themselves. (Indeed, Suarez’s ‘modes’ might reasonably be construed as states that have a less robust sort of being than full-fledged accidents.) So while I myself doubt that all Aristotelian accidents could plausibly be conceived of as mere states or modes, my main contention here is simply that the issue raised by Emmet is really one that is internal to scholastic component ontologies and does nothing to undermine the viability of such ontologies in general.

Of course, if an Aristotelian substance were a Lockean ‘I know not what’ or, in modern parlance, a ‘bare particular’ that underlies its accidents without having any characteristics or formal determinations in and of itself, then it would indeed be ontologically suspect. But neither Suarez nor any other faithful Aristotelian thinks of a substance in this way. As emphasized above, an Aristotelian substance is a ‘this-such’— an oak tree or an aardvark or a hydrogen atom, for example – and not a bare ‘this’. The ‘such’ of ‘this-such’ points precisely to the inseparability of a substance from the formal determination (in technical terminology, the substantial form) that constitutes it as a member of a given natural kind. Thus, when a substance is said to ‘underlie’ or to ‘be the subject of’ its accidents, this way of talking represents little more than a generalization over ordinary accidental attributions such as ‘This oak tree is eighty feet tall’ or ‘Aardvarks have a tendency to seek out and devour insects’. In short, it is only

59 *The Effectiveness of Causes*, p. 77.

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individuals belonging to a natural kind that can serve as the ultimate subjects of accidents.

Admittedly, the claim that an observable material substance underlies its *sensible* or *perceptible* accidents carries with it the implication that such a substance possesses a metaphysical depth that goes beyond what is immediately evident from ordinary sense perception. But it is hard to fathom why anyone antecedently sympathetic to scientific realism should be bothered by this. Moreover, just as on Emmet's view continuants have parts (subcontinuants) that act on one another, so too on the standard Aristotelian picture complex natural substances have 'virtual' or 'powerful' parts that serve as instruments in producing and conserving effects within the substance itself as well as outside it. Still, one implication of Aristotelian anti-reductionism is that such action must be attributed ultimately to the substance as a unified whole whose principle of organization (substantial form) directs and modifies the operations of its parts. Otherwise, complex substances such as living organisms (or, for that matter, hydrogen atoms when they exist in isolation) would be mere coincidental aggregations of substances rather than individual substances in their own right.

A second reservation about the Aristotelian conception of substance centers around its unabashed commitment to essentialism. In expressing her disapproval of the theory of causal powers set forth by Rom Harré and Edward Madden, Emmet has this to say:

[I should not] want to talk about continuants as having 'intrinsic natures, shown in causal powers'. This seems to me to savour of a hankering after Aristotelian real definitions, which are then made effective as formal causes; it does not allow enough for radical changes in continuants. Rather than talking about 'natures' I should prefer to think of a thing having, in Locke's phrase, a 'real internal constitution', maintained dynamically, partly through internal homeostatic 'feedbacks', in which an aberration at one stage may be corrected at the next This carrying forward of a pattern, perhaps in a rhythmic reiterative form, may go both for fundamental particles, the distribution of whose activities is given in the mathematics of wave mechanics, and also for organisms, and for whatever other natural units there may be in between.⁶⁰

Once again, I fail to discern a significant difference between Emmet's continuants and Aristotelian substances. After all, even on the Aristotelian conception accidental changes can be quite dramatic, and any account of substances or continuants will have to accommodate the fact that some changes are so radical that the original continuants do not survive them. In addition, an Aristotelian substantial form, at least in the case of a wholly material substance, just is – or, perhaps better, immediately results in – a "real internal constitution," assuming, once again, that the sort of constitution Emmet has in mind goes beyond that of a mere coincidental aggregation of independently acting substances. But her

60 *The Effectiveness of Causes*, pp. 84–85.

invocation of ‘homeostatic feedback’ and ‘dynamic maintenance’ points clearly to a more stringent sort of unity on the part of her continuants.

Beyond this, it is worth noting that one of the most striking features of recent Anglo-American philosophy has been the resurrection of metaphysical essentialism.⁶¹ Talk of natures and essential properties abounds in places where only a few years ago it would have been deemed wholly archaic and out of step with the modern (empiricist) mind. Of course, this development is not, taken just by itself, an argument in favor of essentialism; however, it is clear at least that the friends of scholastic component ontologies are not nowadays in the position of having to shoulder by themselves the burden of defending essentialism.

A third reservation about the Aristotelian conception of substance is epistemological in nature: If material substances ‘underlie’ their sensible or perceptible accidents, how can they be said to be observable? Are they not instead unobservable in principle? An Aristotelian might be tempted to reply glibly that substances are in principle unobservable only if oak trees and aardvarks are. Yet curt though it be, this response reflects an attitude that has become almost commonplace in current Anglo-American epistemology. Rejecting the concession phenomenalists had made to skepticism regarding external objects, most contemporary epistemologists hold that it is perfectly proper for us to repose without further argument in our basic pre-theoretical conviction that we have sensory cognition of substances themselves as well as of their sensible characteristics. To be sure, epistemological realists of this sort must draw a distinction between the way in which substances are available to the senses and the way in which sensible characteristics like colors, shapes, sounds, and smells are. According to St. Thomas, for example, sensible accidents are the *per se* objects of the sensory powers and of their acts of sensing, whereas substances, along with easily identifiable efficient causes, are *per accidens* or concomitant objects of sensation. The idea is that material substances and efficient causes are sensed *in* and *through* the sensing of their sensible accidents and effects.⁶² Far from calling into question the observability of substances, this is meant to be an explication of what it is for a substance to be observable.

A related consideration is that according to the Aristotelian scholastics our initial conceptual grasp of a sensible substance – by means of what Suarez and other scholastics call a ‘quidditative’ concept and what contemporary philosophers call a ‘natural kind’ concept – provides us only with a starting point for inquiry into the nature of that substance, regardless of whether that inquiry is of the unsystematic sort typical of ordinary life with its overriding practical concerns or of the systematic sort peculiar to the theoretical natural sciences. In both

61 Pioneers in this area include, among others, Saul Kripke, “Naming and Necessity,” pp. 252–355 in Donald Davidson and Gilbert Harman, eds., *The Semantics of Natural Language* (Dordrecht: Reidel Publishing Co., 1972); Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974); and Roderick Chisholm, *Person and Object* (La Salle, IL: Open Court Publishing Co., 1976).

62 See, for example, *Summa Theologiae* 1, q. 17, art. 2, resp. In Part 4.2.1 below I will take up the issue of the observability of causality.

cases it is only through further experience and experiment (both expressed by the Latin term *experimentum*) that we can learn about the characteristic effects of such substances and on that basis come to a knowledge of their powers and of the natures from which those powers emanate. This point is intimately connected with the doctrine of ‘real definition’ impugned by Emmet in the last passage quoted above. The traditional empiricist resistance to an Aristotelian account of real (as opposed to merely nominal) definitions seems to have been founded at least in part on the fear that such definitions are meant to serve as the basis of an *a priori* science that simply deduces the properties of substances from their definitions alone, without any further appeal to experience.⁶³ However, within an Aristotelian logic of discovery the role of real definition is in fact limited to establishing a preliminary taxonomy of substances which might order and guide further inquiry; and, even then, any taxonomy thus arrived at is able to be expanded and (at least partially) revised in light of future experience and experiment.

A final word should be said about the Aristotelian-scholastic conception of accidents. As I mentioned above, Suarez’s account of efficient causality presupposes that accidents – whether full-fledged accidents or mere modes – are dependent individuals that inhere in the substances that are determined or perfected by them, and, accordingly, his substance/accident ontology differs from the more Platonist substance/property ontologies popular among contemporary essentialists, where properties are thought of as abstract entities that concrete substances exemplify. Interestingly, however, Suarez is willing to countenance ‘properties’ of this sort as long as they are identified with ideas in the mind of God and as long as exemplification (or participation) is thought of as a relation that substances bear to those ideas by virtue of God’s creative activity. This gives him the ability to formulate without loss many characteristic claims made by Platonist essentialists – especially claims about modalities such as alethic necessity and possibility. On the other hand, we have already seen that Platonist ontologies are unable to express some of the key claims characteristic of Aristotelian-scholastic ontologies. Here is yet another argument for the superiority of the latter to the former.

3 Efficient Causality

We are now ready to delve deeper into the general account of efficient causality that Suarez lays out in Disputations 17 and 18. Even though this account is meant to cover all actions, I will focus here on *transeunt* action, which has effects outside the acting power, rather than immanent action, in which the effect is a mod-

63 St. Thomas, in arguing that it is reasonable to believe that some truths about God are in principle inaccessible to natural reason, points to the fact that we are not even very successful in coming to knowledge of those things to which our minds are proportioned: “The same thing is clear from the defects we experience daily in our cognition of things. For we are ignorant of many of the properties of sensible things, and in most cases we are unable to uncover completely the principles of those properties that we apprehend by the senses” (*Summa Contra Gentiles* 1, chap. 3). This hardly sounds like a ringing endorsement of armchair science.

ification of the acting power or faculty itself. Immanent actions in the strict sense are acts of intellect and will and are dealt with in Disputation 19, where Suarez examines the nature of free choice. I will have more to say about immanent action and free action in Part 7 when I discuss God's general concurrence with secondary causes.

3.1 A gloss on Aristotle's definition

Disputation 17 begins with an extended reflection on and reconstruction of Aristotle's definition of an efficient cause as "that whence there is a first beginning of change or rest." Though Suarez expresses his own revised definition in a number of alternate ways, the following explication captures all the essentials:

x is an **efficient cause** of *y* if and only if *x* is an extrinsic principle from which *y* emanates by the mediation of an action.

I will comment briefly on each element of this formula. An efficient cause is a metaphysical *principle*, where, as noted above, a metaphysical principle is that on which something else depends in one way or another for its being. Suarez argues that each of the four Aristotelian causes is a principle in this broad sense. In particular, the material cause of a substance is the subject of the formal determination that makes that substance the sort of being it is,⁶⁴ whereas the material cause of an accident is the substance perfected by that accident. Again, the formal constituting cause of a substance is the substantial form that makes a given matter to be the matter of a particular kind of substance, whereas the formal cause of some perfected state of an already constituted substance is an accidental form of the relevant sort.

The material and formal causes of a substance are called *intrinsic* principles because, as Suarez puts it, they "cause their effect by giving to it their own proper being (*entitas*)."⁶⁵ By contrast, an efficient cause communicates being (*entitas* or *esse*) wholly distinct from its own and for this reason is called an *extrinsic* principle. Thus Suarez:

The efficient cause is an extrinsic cause, that is, a cause that does not communicate its own proper and (as I will put it) individual *esse* to the

64 This is what Suarez calls the *permanent* "matter out of which" (*materia ex qua*) a substance is constituted. The *transient* "matter out of which" is the matter from which a material substance is generated – or, alternatively, the complex terminus *quo* of the change through which that substance comes into existence. See *DM* 12.1.2. A material substance that is created directly *ex nihilo* has a *permanent* "matter out of which" that serves as one of its essential parts, but it has no *transient* "matter out of which," because creation is not an action on a patient.

65 *DM* 17.1.6. As noted above, however, the being of the composite substance is distinct from both the being of the form and the being of the matter. We might say, then, that the matter and form are intrinsic causes because their being is, as it were, taken up into the being of the composite substance.

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effect, but instead communicates to it a different *esse* which really flows forth and emanates from such a cause by means of an action.⁶⁶

The *mediation of action* distinguishes efficient causes not only from formal and material causes but also from final causes. Suarez had previously replaced Aristotle's reference to change with a reference to action at least in part to accommodate the metaphysical possibility of creation *ex nihilo*, which, unlike mundane efficient causality, does not presuppose the antecedent existence of a patient or subject to be acted upon and thus changed. If creation *ex nihilo* is possible, Suarez tells us, then it is an action or instance of efficient causality that has effects, even though it is not a change in the strict sense.⁶⁷ (I will return to this point below.)

The notion of action also grounds the metaphysical distinction between proper efficient causes on the one hand and mere background conditions – or what Suarez calls *sine qua non* conditions for acting – on the other. Under this latter heading he includes, for example, the required distinction and dissimilarity between agent and patient, the required proximity of the agent to the patient, the removal of impediments, and the presence of mere catalysts for action.⁶⁸ Because such conditions “fall under scientific knowledge” and are “in some sense *per se* with respect to physical necessity,”⁶⁹ they must be treated at length in any comprehensive account of efficient causality – a task that, as noted above, Suarez himself carries out in sections 7–9 of Disputation 18. However, from the very beginning he cautions that

because a *sine qua non* condition of this sort agrees with a *per se* principle of action in being necessarily required, in some cases it is not easy to discern in which of the two ways a given disposition or property of a thing concurs with respect to an action, that is, whether it concurs as a *per se* principle or only as a *sine qua non* condition.⁷⁰

Suarez is sensitive, by the way, to the objection that the nature and ontological status of action is no clearer than the nature of efficient causality itself. Nonetheless, he defends his reference to action in the definition of an efficient cause by insisting that even if the exact nature of action, including its disparate relations to the agent and to the effect, is murky, it is nonetheless obvious that the

66 *ibid.*

67 *ibid.*

68 In similar fashion, in order to distinguish genuine causes from mere concomitant conditions, Nancy Cartwright uses operation variables to play the role of designating actions in her formal representation of causal processes. See *Nature's Capacities and Their Measurement*, p. 109.

69 *DM* 17.2.5.

70 *ibid.*

term ‘action’ appropriately signifies the distinctive sort of dependence that an entity has on its efficient causes.⁷¹

Later, in Disputation 48, Suarez inquires more deeply into the nature of action. I will mention just one important aspect of that treatment of action. Even though all the scholastics acknowledge that the active power exercised in an action is a real accident inhering in the agent, the general consensus is that the action itself – that is, the very exercising of this power – is not an additional and distinct accident or reality inhering in the agent. Rather, the entity or reality signified by the term ‘action’, if it inheres in anything at all, inheres in the patient and not in the agent.⁷² To be sure, this reality is called an action precisely because it comes from the agent and constitutes the effect’s causal dependence on the agent at the very time at which the agent is causing it. Moreover, it is precisely because of this contemporaneous dependence of the effect on the agent that the agent itself is truly said to be acting. However, when the term ‘is acting’ is predicated of the agent, we have a case of what the scholastics call *extrinsic denomination*, that is, a predication which is such that its truth is grounded in its subject’s relation to a reality extrinsic to itself.⁷³ Accordingly, the effect or terminus *ad quem* determines the nature and identity of the action. That is, sameness of effect is a necessary condition for sameness of action and, correlatively, distinctness of effect is a sufficient condition for distinctness of action.⁷⁴

These considerations help to explain and render at least plausible a common scholastic adage that non-scholastic philosophers often find initially puzzling, namely, that a finite agent’s *transeunt* action exists in the patient and thus has the patient, rather than the agent, as its ultimate ontological subject.⁷⁵ For if an action essentially involves the emanation of an effect from an agent, then it follows straightaway that it is impossible for there to be an action without an effect or ter-

71 *DM* 17.1.5.

72 I add the qualifier “if it inheres in anything at all” in order to accommodate Suarez’s view that even though creation *ex nihilo* is an action with a terminus to which it ‘adheres’, there is no subject in which it ‘inheres’. In ordinary cases of efficient causality, on the other hand, the action inheres in the patient and is numerically identical with the passion, that is, with the patient’s being acted upon. See *DM* 48.4.10–15. In *DM* 20.4 Suarez examines in detail the exact ontological status of God’s creative action, which he characterizes as the creature’s (individual) dependence on God. See Part 5.3 below.

73 This is not, of course, to deny that certain agents, namely, material substances, undergo internal changes – for example, loss of energy – when they act. It is, however, to deny that such internal changes in the agent belong to the very nature of a *transeunt* action as such.

74 The term ‘proper effect’ is meant to distinguish the *per se* effects of actions from accidental or (in the case of free actions) unintended conjunctions of effects, where the conjunction itself has no *per se* or direct cause as such.

75 I stipulate ‘finite agent’ here because creation *ex nihilo* has no patient and hence does not inhere in any patient. See note 72 above.

minus *ad quem*.⁷⁶ And the most natural explanation for this impossibility is just the scholastic thesis that an action, though emanating from the agent, is ontologically rooted in the effect and hence in the patient.

There is yet another way to see the warrant for the scholastic adage. Suppose that all the prerequisites for an agent's acting are satisfied in a standard case of efficient causality (excluding creation *ex nihilo*). These include the agent's having a sufficient power to produce the relevant effect in the patient, the agent's being appropriately situated with respect to the patient, the patient's being properly disposed to receive the formal determination that the agent is ready to communicate, the absence of impediments, and so on. Then what is the difference between the agent's acting in such a case and its not acting? The common scholastic response is that the difference is just the coming to be of the relevant effect in the patient insofar as that effect is dependent on the agent. So no new entity need be added to the agent; instead, the action consists in something's being added to the patient. And, once again, this seems plausible. To paraphrase Suarez, an action is a path (*via*) leading from the agent, by virtue of the agent's active power, to its destination in the effect – and not something that inheres in the agent itself.⁷⁷

The final salient element in Suarez's definition of an efficient cause is the *emanation* of the effect from the cause by means of the action. We can describe this emanation more technically as the communication of being or *esse* to the effect by the cause. Later, in the discussion of *per se* efficient causality, I will say more about the notion of *esse* as Suarez uses it in this formula. But at present I want to forestall a misunderstanding of the scholastic use of terms such as 'emanation' and 'communication'.

Suarez intends the concept of emanation to cover an effect's being *produced* after not having existed as well as its being *conserved* in existence after its production, and so both production and conservation fall under the general rubric of efficient causality. However, we have already seen that this emanation is not to be construed as the communication to the effect of the agent's own proper being or of some part of the agent. In particular, despite the fact that the scholastics use Latin terms like *influxus*, *influentia*, *communicatio*, and *emanatio* to signify the agent's influence on the patient, it is not the case that the agent communicates its own individual formal determinations to the effect – as if numerically the same substantial or accidental form might "jump" or be transferred from one subject (the agent) to another (the patient). Certain occasionalists seem to have thought, to the contrary, that an Aristotelian account of efficient causality does indeed entail just such a transfer of forms, and they had argued from the absurdity of this

76 I ignore for now the complications raised by human actions that are omissions. Such 'actions' presuppose cognitive powers that are lacking in non-rational creatures. See note 96 below.

77 See Part 5.3 below for some further reflections on Suarez's use of the metaphor of a path to describe action.

idea to the conclusion that no material substance can be an efficient cause. In reply St. Thomas had clarified the matter as follows:

It is ridiculous to assert that the reason why bodies do not act is that no accident passes from one subject into another. For a hot body is said to produce heat not in the sense that numerically the same heat that exists in the heating body passes over into the heated body, but rather because by virtue of the heat that exists in the heating body a numerically distinct heat comes to exist in actuality in the heated body – a heat that beforehand existed in it potentially. For a natural agent does not transfer its own form into another subject, but instead reduces the subject that is acted upon from potentiality to actuality.⁷⁸

I raise this issue, first of all, because some early modern philosophers, most notably Leibniz, complained of the obscurity of this metaphysical model, with its invocation of the ‘reduction’ to actuality of the patient’s potentiality.⁷⁹ If the agent transfers nothing of itself to the patient, then how, they asked, does the Aristotelian picture of a material agent’s educing an effect from a patient’s potentiality differ from the occasionalist picture, according to which the material substance’s being present in the right sort of way merely provides an occasion for the effect’s coming to exist? In other words, if there is no transfer of forms, then what precisely does an effect’s causal dependence on a material agent add, ontologically speaking, to the effect’s coming into existence in the presence of the putative agent? And what, precisely, does the agent’s ‘communication’ of being or *esse* to the patient consist in?

To begin with, notice that those who – like the medieval occasionalists as well as Malebranche, Berkeley, and Leibniz – acknowledge the reality of divine *transeunt* action even while denying *transeunt* agency to natural bodies must answer a question similar to the one that they pose for Aristotelians: “What does *God’s transeunt* action consist in?” Obviously not in the literal transfer of any reality from God to a creature. Well, then, what does it consist in? The most straightforward answer is that it is simply the agent’s causal influence as terminated in the effect – which is exactly what the Aristotelians say in reply to the analogous question regarding the *transeunt* action of created agents.

To be sure, this simple reply will not satisfy philosophers who, like Hume and his progeny, profess to be mystified by the notion of action in general, even as applied to God. Indeed, perhaps no reply at all will satisfy such as these. Still,

78 *Summa Contra Gentiles* 3, chap. 69. I have explored the occasionalist position at some length in “Medieval Aristotelianism and the Case against Secondary Causation in Nature,” pp. 74–118 in Thomas V. Morris, ed., *Divine and Human Action: Essays in the Metaphysics of Theism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988).

79 See, for instance, the following selections from G.W. Leibniz, *Philosophical Essays*, edited and translated by Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Co., 1989): “Primary Truths,” pp. 30–34; “Discourse on Metaphysics”, pp. 35–68, esp. pp. 46–49; and “To Arnauld (April 30, 1687)”, pp. 81–90.

it is worth noting the great epistemic weight the Aristotelian scholastics assign to the common pre-theoretical conviction that efficient causality abounds in the world of nature.⁸⁰ When they hear the skeptical argument, propounded historically by occasionalists and positivists, that we perceive at most the mere succession of what are called ‘cause’ and ‘effect’ and not the derivation of the one from the other, their typical response is astonishment. To quote Luis de Molina, “What can be more stupid than to deny what is obvious from experience and sensation?”⁸¹ Admittedly, when we begin to ask about the precise nature of the dependence of effects on their efficient causes, the Aristotelian scholastics immediately rule out one of the first images that comes to mind for capturing the difference between real causality and mere succession (or mere counterfactual dependence), namely, the literal transfer of some ontological reality from the agent as a subject to the patient as a subject. Nonetheless, or so at least an Aristotelian will maintain, it is better to have mysteries emerge at the end of one’s investigation into an obvious starting point than to deny the obvious starting point itself – in this case, the reality of action as an observable basic primitive.

My second reason for broaching this issue is that Hector-Neri Casteñeda has argued, in light of the skeptical worries, that what is distinctive about real efficient causality is precisely the transfer of what he calls ‘causity’ from the cause to the effect:

Whatever the profound metaphysics of time and causality may be, the crucial thing is that on the surface of it *causation is communication and transmission* of something in the cause to the effect, whether by replication or by actual carrying over across time. This transfer of something, including the transfer of certain orderliness, is the substance of causation.⁸²

Casteñeda goes on to develop a number of strictures on the notion of causity, and identifies energy as conceived by contemporary physics as at least one form that causity can take.

It is not immediately clear to me how Aristotelians should react to Casteñeda’s position, since I am not confident that I understand it fully. On the one hand, according to Aristotelians, an agent must have powers that are suitable for producing particular effects, and in cases of what the scholastics call ‘univo-

80 For more on the ‘ordinary’ concept of causality, see Elizabeth Anscombe’s “Causality and Determination,” in Ernest Sosa and Michael Tooley, eds., *Causation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 88–104.

81 *Liberi Arbitrii cum Gratiae Donis, Divina Praescientia, Providentia, Praedestinatione et Reprobatione Concordia* (2nd edition: Antwerp, 1595), Part II, disp. 25, § 5. In Part 4.2.1 I will return to the issue of whether causality is observable.

82 “Causes, Causity, and Energy,” *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 9 (1984), pp. 17–27. The quoted passage is found on p. 22.

cal causality' this will involve the 'replication' within the patient of a form similar to one that the agent itself possesses in its own right. (This is especially obvious in, say, the transmission of heat and motion and in the generation of plants and animals by agents of the same species.) On the other hand, Casteñeda is less than wholly explicit about exactly what is involved ontologically in transmission and communication. At any rate, at least this much is clear: According to the scholastics, a non-negotiable ontological constraint on an acceptable account of causal communication or transmission is that it not involve the transfer of numerically the same substantial or accidental entity from the agent as a subject to the patient as a subject.

What's more, even if the sort of transmission Casteñeda has in mind is indeed an essential ingredient in efficient causality, the skeptical argument and St. Thomas's reply to occasionalism nonetheless call our attention to the fact that, familiar though it be, efficient causality is at its core an astonishing and perplexing feature of reality.⁸³ Still, as we shall see below, empiricists have not fared well in their attempt to reduce action and efficient causality to something more suited to their own more austere metaphysical and epistemological tastes.

We have now examined the main elements of Suarez's basic definition or explication of efficient causality. This definition applies both to what Suarez calls the *per se* (or *direct* or *immediate*) efficient cause, which alone "is a cause properly and absolutely speaking,"⁸⁴ and to that type of efficient cause whose influence on a given effect is mediated by its direct influence on some other effect. I will now discuss each in turn, with the aim of describing them in a precise and illuminating way.

3.2 *Per se* efficient causality

As indicated above, at the heart of any Aristotelian account of ordinary efficient causality lies the notion of the communication of formal determinations or perfections to a patient by an agent through an action. However, Suarez takes it for

83 Notice, by the way, that it does not help to follow certain of the seventeenth-century anti-Aristotelians in reducing all change in the physical world to local motion, that is, to changes of the spatial positions of bodies. For the communication of local motion from an agent to a patient is every bit as problematic, ontologically speaking, as the communication of qualitative or substantial forms. The fact that we talk glibly about the 'transfer of energy' from mover to thing moved should not obscure the fact that variations in energy levels resulting from the collisions of physical bodies are metaphysically on a par with other qualitative and quantitative modifications. Indeed, such 'transfers' or variations can be accepted with equanimity by occasionalists without any admission that real action has occurred in nature. Malebranche, it seems to me, was exactly right in pointing this out. See Nicolas Malebranche, *The Search After Truth*, book 6, part 2, chap. 3, pp. 446–452 in Thomas M. Lennon and Paul J. Olscamp, translators, *Nicolas Malebranche: The Search After Truth and Elucidations of the Search After Truth* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1980).

84 *DM* 17.2.2.

granted that that if there is such a thing as creation *ex nihilo*, then it too is an example of efficient causality. And so in order to accommodate the fact that at least one conceivable sort of action does not presuppose a preexistent patient with its own intrinsic passive potentialities and hence is not strictly speaking a change, he talks more generally of the communication of being or *esse* by means of action. For in creation *ex nihilo* the effected entity and *all* its components – material as well as formal, simple as well as complex – come into existence instantaneously as the result of the action; we might say that creation *ex nihilo* involves the communication of *esse* ‘from the bottom up’.

To be sure, Suarez has a faith-related motive for moving from Aristotle’s idea of the communication of form to the more general Thomistic idea of the communication of *esse*. For it is a Christian doctrine that “all things, visible and invisible,” were made by God from nothing. But even a non-believer can appreciate the intellectual propriety of constructing an initial explication of efficient causality in such a way as to provide conceptual space for the thesis that creation *ex nihilo* is metaphysically possible. First of all, it seems obvious that if there is such a thing as creation *ex nihilo*, it is indeed an instance of efficient causality. Second, since the possibility of creation *ex nihilo* is a substantive philosophical issue that historically has spawned an interesting and fruitful debate, the question of whether creation *ex nihilo* is possible should not, it seems, be decided antecedently one way or the other by what purports to be a general explication of the notion of efficient causality. Instead, the correct order of proceeding is first to formulate a commodious account of efficient causality and then to address the issue of whether creation *ex nihilo* is possible. This is, in fact, Suarez’s own strategy. Immediately after his general treatment of efficient causality in Disputations 17–19, he turns, in Disputation 20, to an extended discussion of creation, beginning with the question of whether creation is metaphysically possible. Of course, if there were compelling arguments against the possibility of creation *ex nihilo*, this might lead us in the end to formulate the general account of efficient causality in such a way as to entail that every action involves a preexistent patient. But an account of this sort would appropriately emerge only from an extended debate and not from an *a priori* stipulation.

Since ‘communicates *esse*’ will thus function as a primitive locution in Suarez’s characterization of *per se* and immediate causality, I want to say a bit more about the Thomistic notion of *esse* which Suarez makes use of here. In order to elucidate the broader context in which this notion is most at home, I will touch upon the theme of the relation of finite creatures to their transcendent creator, even though these theological overtones are not part of the account of *per se* efficient causality as such.

According to St. Thomas, *esse* is a principle of actuality, where, as noted above, the notion of actuality is broadly construed to encompass any positive determination or perfection, including active and passive causal powers and the entities that come to exist through the exercise of such powers. So communicating *esse* entails giving perfection of some sort or other – for example, giving

existence to a substance by actualizing a particular concrete nature characteristic of a lowest-level natural kind, or giving existence to an intrinsic accidental determination of a substance.

In any given finite entity *esse* is proportioned to that entity's nature or essence. To use St. Thomas's Platonic idiom, a finite created entity is said to 'participate in' or 'have a part of' *esse*-as-such. This is because all created or 'participated' entities have some proper part of, or finite share in, the whole gamut of possible perfections; that is, they have *esse* as delimited by their natures to what in each particular case is the *esse* proper to the sort of entity in question. So, for instance, a white oak tree has the *esse* proper to a white oak tree and, subordinated to it, the *esse* proper to its various separable and inseparable accidents. The same holds for human beings, armadillos, rhododendrons, water molecules, hydrogen atoms, photons, and so on. This explains the spirit behind St. Thomas's claim that for a living organism to exist is for it to be alive, that is, to have *esse* or actuality as proportioned to a living organism. So when a typical efficient cause communicates *esse* through its action, it gives actuality or perfection of some sort or other – either by effecting a substance of a given natural kind or by effecting some accidental form or determination in an already existing substance.

Thus, the term 'to have *esse*', unlike the term 'to exist' in at least one common use, admits of different degrees or levels – where God, who is Subsistent or Unparticipated *Esse*, the Fullness of Being, constitutes the incommensurable upper limit. Still, the two terms are equivalent in the sense that a created entity exists if and only if it has *esse* as delimited by some nature or other. More interestingly, if, as Domingo Bañez points out, we consider the *esse* received in a given creature "just insofar as it bespeaks existence absolutely, that is, not as contracted and determined to the specific or individual *esse* in which it is received and delimited [then *esse* so construed is] that through which creatures stand outside of nothingness."⁸⁵ In technical terms, for an entity to have *esse* as delimited to a given nature is, in part, for it to have *esse* in general or *esse commune*, that in virtue of which it is something rather than (literally) nothing. Thus, the communication of *esse* in any given instance of efficient causality always involves two distinguishable and complementary aspects, namely, (a) the communication of that which makes the effect to be something rather than nothing, and (b) the communication of that which makes the effect to be of one particular kind rather than another.⁸⁶

Given this general metaphysical picture, one might naturally think of created entities as being partially ordered from the less perfect to the more perfect

85 *Scholastica Commentaria in Primam Partem Angelici Doctoris Divi Thomas Aquinatis* (Venice, 1591) q. 104, a. 2, column 1974, C and E.

86 The fact that every case of efficient causality involves the transmission of that by virtue of which the effect is something rather than nothing is one of the considerations Suarez makes use of in arguing for God's general concurrence. It also helps explain St. Thomas's insistence that no secondary cause gives *esse* "except insofar as it acts by God's power." See *Summa Contra Gentiles* 3, chap. 66.

according to the type of actuality (including causal power) they have. Such an ordering reflects the degrees or grades of *esse*, that is, lesser and greater shares in the plenitude of perfections. What's more, as 'beings by participation' or 'participated beings', finite entities are such that they need not exist at all and hence must receive *esse* from causes distinct from themselves. In St. Thomas's terminology, there is in them a real distinction between *esse* and *essentia* (or individual nature). This is not a distinction between entities, since, as noted above, the essence is not a limiting principle of potentiality except insofar as it is 'already' existent. Rather, the ground for the distinction lies in the fact that (a) there is nothing about the actualized essence itself that metaphysically requires that it or any of its parts should be something rather than nothing, and thus that (b) a finite essence, along with all its parts, must owe its existence to causes outside itself.⁸⁷ Though Suarez denies that the distinction between *esse* and *essentia* is a 'real' distinction in *his* sense – which implies separability – he does not dispute either (a) or (b). So it does not follow from the distinction between *esse* and *essentia* that *esse* and *essentia* are separable in any creaturely substance or accident; it follows merely that it is metaphysically possible that there should have been no such participation in *esse*.⁸⁸ According to St. Thomas, only God is such that in him there is no distinction between *esse* and *essentia*. He is subsistent *esse* itself (*ipsum esse subsistens*), and so he cannot fail to exist and cannot fail to be 'unparticipated' or, as it were, 'unpartitioned', *esse*, a fully actual being who cannot be acted upon and who possesses all possible perfections in unlimited degree.⁸⁹

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- 87 I take this interpretation of the distinction in question to be consonant with that proposed by Charles Hart in *Thomistic Metaphysics: An Inquiry into the Act of Existing* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1959), pp. 86–92.
- 88 Of course, what I have said here presupposes – and thus is not an argument for – the thesis that all finite entities are radically contingent beings whose components would all revert to nothingness without a continuing 'adequate cause' of their existence. One might, by way of contrast, think that the need for an adequate cause applies only to complex beings and not to their elemental physical components. We will take this issue up below in the discussion of creation and conservation.
- 89 Of course, the claim that God possesses all possible perfections requires careful unpacking, since there are many formal perfections, for example, quantitative accidents, which can, strictly speaking, be possessed only by limited or finite beings. Nonetheless, the divine nature is said to contain such perfections 'eminently' by virtue of the fact that (a) all such perfections are in some way or other reflective of the divine nature and (b) God is able to produce all such perfections *ex nihilo*. Hence, the notion of *esse* enables St. Thomas to give a clear account of the ontological chasm that separates the transcendent creator of the world from his creatures. What's more, according to St. Thomas, just as each finite entity has its own proper effects, that is, types of *esse* or actuality which it can be an immediate 'principal' or 'perfecting' cause of, so too God as Unparticipated *Esse* – *esse* that is not delimited to any particular species or genus – has his own proper effect, namely, *esse*-as-such.

So it is the active communication of *esse* to an entity that constitutes the core of efficient causality, and Suarez's account presupposes that the production or conservation of *any* effect involves some agent's communicating *esse* of some sort to some entity. This is true even when a patient suffers a loss or privation of *esse* as the result of an agent's causal influence – as, for instance, when a living organism dies or when an animal is blinded by being struck in the eye. What occurs in such cases is the introduction into the patient of a formal determination which is incompatible with the form that the patient is thus deprived of.⁹⁰ Such examples should make us aware that even though every instance of efficient causality involves a giving of *esse* or perfection, this does not mean that the patient is itself more perfect *absolutely speaking* as a result of the agent's influence.

With this background in mind, I will adopt as my first causal primitive the locution '*x*, by acting, directly communicates *esse* to *y* at *t*', where (a) *x* and *y* are either substances or accidents, (b) *t* is an instant of real or, as we shall see below, imaginary time, (c) the phrase 'by acting' is meant, in accordance with what was said above, to distinguish an efficient cause from the other three types of Aristotelian causes, and (d) the phrase 'directly communicates *esse*' is meant to distinguish efficient causality in the most proper sense from the more indirect modes of efficient causality that I will discuss below under the rubric 'mediate efficient causality'. Also, as I am using this locution, it implies that *y* exists at *t* and that *t* is the time of *x*'s action. I put this last point indirectly because even those who, like St. Thomas and Suarez, insist that God is in no way measured by time nonetheless allow that God acts 'in time.' For, in keeping with what was said above about action, the time of a *transeunt* action is the time at which its effect is produced.

Suarez characterizes a *per se* and immediate efficient cause in this way:

A *per se* cause is a cause on which the effect directly depends for the proper *esse* that it has insofar as it is an effect And because only this sort of cause is a cause properly and absolutely speaking, almost the whole of the next disputation [Disputation 18] will be concerned with it alone.⁹¹

And we can now put this more formally as follows:

x is a *per se* (or *per se and immediate*) *efficient cause* of *y* at instant *t* if and only if *x*, by acting, directly communicates *esse* to *y* at *t*.

This, according to Suarez, is the metaphysical core of efficient causality. Given this view, all the other related notions that philosophers, past and present, have

Suarez examines this Thomistic thesis at length in DM 20.2 and I will take it up in Part 5 below.

90 See DM 18.11. This point is important for one of Suarez's main arguments for divine conservation. See Part 6.3 below.

91 DM 17.2.2.

used to characterize causality – for example, constant conjunction, being a non-redundant part of a minimally sufficient condition, counterfactual dependence, statistical correlation, lawlikeness, and so on – must, if they have any relevance to causality at all, find their place within the framework established by this basic causal notion.

Suarez goes on to distinguish two main types of *per se* efficient causes, namely, principal and instrumental, where an instrumental cause is an agent that a principal cause employs in some way to cause its own proper effect. Suarez spends the greater part of Section 2 of Disputation 17 canvassing four competing accounts of the distinction between principal and instrumental causes before finally devising his own. Without going into detail, I will note only that Suarez's account presupposes an ordering, according to 'perfection' or 'nobility', of causal powers and possible causal effects. In each case a given power is of itself either (a) *proportioned to* a given effect, that is, "more noble than or at least as noble as the effect,"⁹² or (b) *not proportioned to* that effect, that is, less perfect than the effect. The basic idea is that whereas a principal cause of a given effect acts by a type of power that is a fitting causal principle of the effect, an instrumental cause of that effect acts by a type of power that is less perfect than the effect and consequently needs to be 'elevated' by its participation in the more perfect power of the principal cause.

I say 'fitting' here rather than 'sufficient' because it may very well be that the principal cause needs the instrument in order to produce an effect to which it is proportioned – as, for example, novelists need instruments such as pens or word processors in order to write fiction. Still, there is clearly a sense in which the writer's powers and abilities are fitted to the final effect in themselves, whereas the instrument's powers are not.

Even though the notion of an hierarchical ordering of powers and effects stands in need of further development, there are many intuitively plausible examples of instrumental causes – for example, the tools of a craft, baseball bats, personal computers, and other entities that obviously require the action of a 'higher-order' principal cause in order to attain to effects like works of art, home runs, philosophical treatises, and so on. Suarez also produces more interesting and perhaps problematic examples, but I will not go into them here, since my main interest at present is merely in setting the stage for issues involving the distinction between principal and instrumental causes that arise mainly in the discussion of God's causal action.⁹³

With this in mind, if we adopt as a primitive the locution 'in causing y at t , x acts by a power that is proportioned to y ', we can capture Suarez's distinction as follows:⁹⁴

92 *DM* 17.2.17.

93 The interested reader can consult *DM* 17.2.7–19 & 21–22 for Suarez's explicit discussion of instrumental causality.

94 The two formulas given here apply to principal and instrumental causes *ut quod*, but

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x is a **principal per se cause** of y at instant t if and only if

- (a) x is a *per se* cause of y at t , and
- (b) in causing y at t , x acts by a power that is proportioned to y .

x is an **instrumental per se cause** of y at instant t if and only if

- (a) x is a *per se* cause of y at t , and
- (b) it is not the case that in causing y at t , x acts by a power that is proportioned to y .

It follows from the second of these formulas that in order to be a *per se* cause of an effect that it causes as an instrument, an instrumental cause must, by virtue of its relation to the relevant principal cause, be ‘elevated’ in order to attain to the principal cause’s effect.

One last note. Not only does the distinction between principal and instrumental causes allow us to identify different levels or ‘orders’ of *per se* efficient causality, but, as indicated above, the present account also allows for cooperative *per se* action within those levels or orders of causality, so that a given effect might have a number of simultaneously acting partial principal causes or simultaneously acting partial instrumental causes. For example, an agent might have a power proportioned to a given effect but still lack a *sufficient degree* of that power to cause the effect. In such a case, the agent can be at most a partial principal cause of the effect and must cooperate with other agents that have varying degrees of the same sort of power in order to constitute a *total* principal cause of the effect. Then, too, an agent might have a power that is appropriate for a given effect but needs to be supplemented by other types of principal power in order to constitute a power that is fully proportioned to the effect. In such a case the relevant cooperating agents will again be partial causes that together make up a total principal cause of the effect. Other types of examples are possible as well. Suarez’s account of efficient causality thus has the resources to distinguish partial from total *per se* causes and to distinguish both from background conditions, which are not agents as such but merely prerequisites for acting.

3.3 Mediate efficient causality

Causes that influence one effect by their direct influence on some temporally or logically prior effect fall under the broad category of what Suarez calls *per accidens* causes. He himself maintains that *per accidens* causality is too diverse and variegated a notion to be captured by a single unified account, since at least certain elements in traditional Aristotelian discussions of *per accidens* efficient causality “pertain more to modes of predicating than to modes of causing.”⁹⁵ I

can easily be adapted to apply to causes *ut quo*.

95 *Ibid.* For instance, scholastic philosophers are wont to say that Jones the builder is a *per se* cause of the house that is now being built, whereas Jones the novelist is a *per accidens* cause of the house – even though Jones the builder is identical with Jones the novelist. The difference has to do with the specific powers exercised in building, which are implicated by the term ‘builder’ but not by the term ‘novelist’.

will be concerned here only with those types of *per accidens* causes that I take to be philosophically and scientifically interesting, and, following Suarez, I will call them ‘mediate’ causes. Mediate causes do in fact lend themselves to a unified account, even though a full treatment of efficient causality would have to include a more fine-grained analysis than I can give here of the distinct ways in which agents can make indirect causal contributions to a given effect.

Per se causality involves the direct and immediate emanation of an effect from its cause or causes. It is obvious, however, that the term ‘(efficient) cause’ is used to cover a broader range of causal contributions. For instance, *x* may be reasonably called an efficient cause of *y* if it bears to *y* just the ancestral of the relation of being a *per se* and immediate efficient cause. This may occur either diachronically or synchronically: *x* may have acted long ago to initiate or maintain a chain of causes, each of which is a *per se* and immediate cause of the next and the last of which is a *per se* and immediate cause of *y*; or *x* may be a *per se* conserving cause of *z* (or of a *per se* conserver of *z*, and so on) during the very time at which *z* is a *per se* and immediate cause of *y*. In both types of case, *x* is an efficient cause of *y*, but not a *per se* and immediate cause of *y*. Again, *x* might act as what the scholastics would call a ‘disposing’ or ‘enabling’ cause of *y*. This, too, can happen in a number of ways: *x* may be a cause of *y* by virtue of its having acted to remove an impediment to *z*’s being a *per se* cause of *y*, or more remotely, by virtue of its being a *per se* cause of an agent that removes an impediment to *z*’s being a *per se* cause of *y*, and so on; or *x* may be an efficient cause of *y* by virtue of its having acted in such a way as to effect an enabling condition for *z*’s being a *per se* cause of *y* – perhaps *x* moves *z* spatially closer to *y*, or perhaps *x* acts on the subject of *y* in such a way that this subject becomes susceptible to *z*’s action, with the result that *z* is a *per se* and immediate cause of *y*. Where free agents are involved, *x* may be what Aristotelians call an ‘advising’ cause of *y*. It might happen, say, that *x* commands or asks or persuades or urges or counsels a free agent *z* to act in a given way, and that in part because of this *z* acts as a *per se* and immediate cause of *y*.⁹⁶ The list of possibilities could presumably go on, and in a very complicated causal chain we might find that all of these modes

96 Suarez is well aware that in moral philosophy the category of omission is significant. However, on his view omissions are merely ‘moral’ causes and do not as such involve the giving of *esse*. He also realizes that within moral philosophy free agents might be considered *per se* moral causes of given effects even if they are not *per se* efficient causes (or what Suarez calls a ‘*per se* physical cause’) of those effects: “A moral cause is always either (a) a cause that does not prevent something when it can and should prevent it or else (b) a cause that applies or induces a *per se* cause, whether by means of advice or entreaties or payment or sometimes even by means of local motion, as when someone applies fire to a house. For even though the individual in question is a *per se* physical cause of the motion itself, he is nonetheless only a *per accidens* cause of the burning. But this latter causality, which is *per accidens* from a physical point of view, is regarded as *per se* from a moral point of view and by imputation” (DM 17.2.6).

of causal contribution, along with various combinations thereof, are involved in the production or conservation of a given effect.

A complete theory of efficient causality would have to say more about each of the modes of causal contribution that are lumped under the category of mediate *per accidens* causality. However, my present concern is merely to formulate a simple and general characterization of indirect causal contributions of the sort in question. As I read Suarez, the key to such an account is the twofold claim that (a) an agent x is a mediate cause of a given effect y only if x it is a *per se* and immediate cause of some effect distinct from y (thus preserving the thesis that action lies at the core of efficient causality), and that (b) it is by virtue of its being a *per se* cause of z that x makes a causal contribution to y .

So we have to introduce a causal primitive such as the following: ‘by virtue of being a *per se* cause of z at t^* , x is a cause of y at t ’, where x , y , and z are distinct substances or accidents, and t and t^* are instants of real or imaginary time. (I put no temporal ordering constraints on these times in order not to beg substantive philosophical questions regarding the possibility of backwards mediate causality; this issue should, like that of the possibility of creation *ex nihilo*, be argued on its own merits and not decided by stipulation.) The primitive locution in question implies that x effects something *per se* at t^* , but does not imply that x effects anything *per se* at t and says nothing about the specific nature of x ’s causal contribution. So, for instance, x might make its causal contribution to y ’s existing long before t and not even exist at any time proximate to t . Similarly, x ’s causal contribution to y ’s existing may be more or less closely connected with x ’s proper causal tendencies or (in the case of rational beings) intentions, and more or less determinative of the specific character of the effect.

So we have:

x is a **mediate efficient cause** of y at instant t if and only if

- (a) for some z , distinct from y , and for some t^* , x is a *per se* cause of z at t^* , and
- (b) by virtue of being a *per se* cause of z at t^* , x is a cause of y at t .

Notice that nothing said so far rules out the possibility that a given agent should be both a *per se* efficient cause and a mediate efficient cause of one and the same effect. This is as it should be. Take a simple example. In developing a virtuous habit I put myself in a position to perform certain sorts of acts with more facility. So my now acting from this habit is traced back in part to my having previously acted in such-and-such a way, and so I am a mediate cause of the present act; but, of course, in such a case I am also a *per se* cause of my acting in the way in question.

This completes the promised preliminary sketch of a Suarezian model of efficient causality, though in Part 7 I will say a few words about the closely related topic of causal modality and, more specifically, about the distinction between

97 My discussion of causal modality in Part 7 will be brief, but I have discussed some

an agent's acting by a necessity of nature and an agent's acting freely.⁹⁷ Clearly, much work remains to be done in order to turn what has been proposed here into a complete account of efficient causality. Still, I believe that even this sketch shows that what Suarez has to say is interesting in its own right and merits close study especially by the proponents of neo-Aristotelian philosophies of science.

4 Aristotelian and Empiricist Accounts of Causality

A comparison of Suarez's account of causality with certain contemporary accounts inspired by Humean empiricism will prove instructive at this point.⁹⁸ Even though I will raise some objections to empiricism, my remarks are intended mainly to underscore the fundamental differences between the two types of accounts and in that way to give the reader a clearer idea of what is at stake in the choice of one over the other. (Throughout Part 4 I will assume that talk of so-called 'event causation' can be translated by Aristotelians into talk of agents exercising powers.)

4.1 Three Aristotelian theses

To make the contrast more vivid, I will first lay out three central theses of broadly Aristotelian treatments of causality. The first two are already apparent from my treatment of Suarez, and the third is a corollary that has been emphasized by contemporary Aristotelians.

The first thesis is that causality cannot be analyzed reductively by means of non-causal concepts; hence, one or more causal primitives will figure prominently in any correct account of causality. Of course, primitive notions can be more or less illuminating or precise, and so a choice among the plausible candidates will by no means be trivial. I have already argued the merits of the scholastic primitive 'communicates *esse* by means of an action', where an action is conceived of as the exercise of a causal power or, alternatively, as the culmination of a causal tendency. In addition, this first thesis goes hand in hand with the claim that at least some instances of singular causality are observable as such. I have touched on this already and will return to it shortly.

The second thesis is that the fundamental explanatory principles of natural phenomena are ontologically grounded in natural substances themselves. Though there is some disagreement here among contemporary neo-Aristotelians about

of the relevant issues at more length in "The Necessity of Nature," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 11 (1986): 215–242.

98 I will be using the writings of J.L. Mackie, David Lewis, Bas van Fraassen, and Michael Tooley as representative of the best of contemporary empiricism. In particular, I will be drawing on Mackie's *The Cement of the Universe: A Study of Causation* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1974), Lewis's "Causation" and "Postscripts to Causation", pp. 159–213 in *Philosophical Papers*, vol. II, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), van Fraassen's *The Scientific Image* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1980), and Tooley's *Causation: A Realist Approach* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1988).



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how exactly to think of this grounding, I will take for granted the scholastic view that it includes both formal causal structures (Aristotelian formal causes) and irreducible causal powers and tendencies that are tied to those structures.⁹⁹

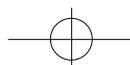
The third thesis is that singular causal facts are metaphysically prior to more general causal facts such as regularities (or uniformities or so-called ‘laws of association’). One corollary of this assumption is that causal relations, including deterministic ones, may obtain even in the absence of conditions that would engender causal regularities, at least easily identifiable ones. In fact, both Nancy Cartwright and Paul Humphreys go so far as to assert that because of the multiplicity of interfering factors present in nature, there are in fact, outside the laboratory, very few regularities of the sort Humean empiricists have traditionally appealed to.¹⁰⁰ What’s more, the regularities that do obtain are mere byproducts of the continuous integration of basic causal structures and tendencies with contingent background conditions of an atypical sort that preclude widespread interference with the normal course of causal processes (where the term ‘normal’, as used in this context, has a normative and indeed teleological import).¹⁰¹ As Cartwright puts it:

We all know that the regularity of nature so central to the more conventional picture is a pretence Nature, as it usually occurs, is a changing mix of different causes, coming and going; a stable pattern of association can emerge only when the mix is pinned down over some period or in some place. Indeed, where is it that we really do see associations that

99 Some with Aristotelian leanings evince an almost Humean aversion to irreducible causal powers or tendencies and contend that an ontological commitment to causal structures and processes is fully sufficient to yield at least limited causal laws that are relativized to carefully restricted reference groups or populations. See, for example, Salmon, *Scientific Explanation and the Causal Structure of the World*, pp. 147 and 155, and Humphreys, *The Chances of Explanation*, pp. 64–65. By contrast, Cartwright – and here she has Harré and Madden on her side – argues that deep and important suggestions by Salmon and others about how causes are to be ‘read off’ from statistical correlations already presuppose an ontology that includes irreducible powers and tendencies in addition to causal structures and processes. See *Nature’s Capacities and Their Measurement*, pp. 142–148.

100 See Cartwright, *Nature’s Capacities and Their Measurement*, p. 36; and Humphreys, *The Chances of Explanation*, pp. 55–58. Tooley, by the way, claims that those who take singular causation as basic are committed to the possibility that there should be no causal regularities at all. See *Causation: A Realist Approach*, pp. 175 and 202. I believe that this claim is false or at least in need of careful qualification, but I will not pursue the matter here.

101 Cartwright comes close to explicitly acknowledging the connection between capacities and teleological explanation when she says, “It is a common – though we think mistaken – assumption about modern physics, for example, that function is not an explanatory feature at all” (*Nature’s Capacities and Their Measurement*, p. 222).



have the kind of permanence that could entitle them to be called lawlike? The ancient examples are in the heavens, where the perturbing causes are rare or small in their influence; and the modern examples are in the physics laboratory, where our control is so precise that we ourselves can regulate the mix of causes at work. Otherwise, it seems to me, these vaunted laws of association are still very-long-outstanding promissory notes: laws of association are in fact quite uncommon in nature, and should not be seen as fundamental to how it operates.¹⁰²

So even though what happens “always or for the most part,” to use Aristotle’s phrase, is sometimes epistemically crucial for discovering recondite causal connections in nature, the notion of a causal regularity is not metaphysically fundamental and hence will not figure as a primitive in an adequate account of the nature of causality or causal modality.

4.2 *The empiricist alternative*

With these three theses in hand, I will now give a broad characterization of the empiricist alternative. To begin with, it is worth noting that so-called ‘empiricist’ accounts of causality did not originate with Hume or Berkeley or even with Malebranche, who, though usually classified as a ‘rationalist’, influenced both Hume and Berkeley in their reflections on causality. Malebranche was in fact following the lead of those medieval Islamic and Christian occasionalists who had perceived a ‘heathen’ threat to God’s sovereignty over nature, as well as a spiritual danger for believers, in the Aristotelian attribution of causal powers and actions to natural material substances.¹⁰³ The medieval occasionalists made a strict distinction between causality as attributed to God (and perhaps to spirits subordinated to God, such as intelligences and human souls) and ‘causality’ as

102 *Nature’s Capacities and Their Measurement*, pp. 181–182. It may seem that this point cuts against only regularity analyses of causality, since counterfactual analyses of singular causal statements do not invoke generic causal regularities or, to use Mackie’s term, minimal sufficient conditions. However, this is so only to the extent that our warrant for asserting the relevant counterfactual dependencies on given occasions does not itself depend, as Mackie claims it always does, on our awareness of regularities. I will not try to settle this issue here.

103 For more background, see my “Medieval Aristotelianism and the Case against Secondary Causation in Nature.” An especially engaging occasionalist account of God’s action in nature can be found in *al-Ghazali’s Tahafut al-falasifah: The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, trans. Sabih Ahmad Kamali (Lahore: Pakistan Philosophical Conference, 1963), problem 17, “Refutation of Their Belief in the Impossibility of a Departure from the Natural Course of Events,” pp. 185–196. For an occasionalist proposal within Christian theology, see Gabriel Biel, *Collectorium circa quattuor libros sententiarum* 4, pt. 1, eds. Wilfridus Urbeck and Udo Hoffman (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1975), q. 1, “Utrum sacramenta legis novae sint causae effectivae gratiae,” pp. 1–36, esp. 14–18 and 27–36.

attributed to material substances. God and (perhaps) other spirits are genuine agents exercising genuine causal powers, but they are the *only* such agents and their powers are the *only* such powers. In contrast, our ordinary and ubiquitous attributions of power and action to material substances are strictly speaking false; whatever truth they might embody is best captured, according to the occasionalists, by a reductive analysis that replaces notions such as *causal efficacy*, *action*, *causal power*, and *causal tendency* with metaphysically tamer notions such as *constant conjunction* or *counterfactual dependence*, which do not presuppose agency on the part of material substances. This is the origin of the idea of a so-called ‘occasional cause’, that is, an entity *c* such that *c*’s presence in the right way in given circumstances is an occasion for God (or perhaps some subordinate spiritual agent) to act in those circumstances as an immediate cause of some characteristic effect *e*. The relation between *c* and *e* is thus strong enough to undergird *e*’s constant conjunction with or counterfactual dependence on *c*, but weak enough not to imply any genuine causal activity or power on the part of *c*. Or so, at least, the occasionalists claim.

Malebranche and Berkeley are full-fledged subscribers to this picture; their complaint is not with the notions of agency or power as such, but rather with the deleterious theological consequences of ascribing agency and power to putative natural ‘causes’. In the hands of Hume, however, the occasionalist critique of Aristotelianism is absorbed into a general assault on ‘metaphysical’ notions that have an ‘insufficient basis’ in sensory experience. By Hume’s lights the whole gamut of concepts that enter into an Aristotelian account of efficient causality fail to pass epistemic muster, regardless of what the humanly inaccessible truth about the “secret powers” of things might be.

Hume’s legacy is evident among his contemporary successors, who are all in general sympathy with J. L. Mackie’s assertion that causation is “not anything in which there is an observable necessity (or efficacy or agency or power or force or energy or productive quality).”¹⁰⁴ Such philosophers differ from Aristotelians on two broad issues, namely, (a) the status of the *concept* of a cause, or what Mackie calls “our idea of causation,” and (b) the *reality* which that concept signifies, or what Mackie calls “causation in the objects.” I will deal with each in turn.

4.2.1 Our idea of causation

On the empiricist view our ordinary concept of a cause is in some straightforward sense a psychological or theoretical construct that is not formed directly from sensory experience. This claim is shared in common by almost all empiricists,

104 *The Cement of the Universe*, p. 6. Even though Tooley is a realist in holding that “causal facts,” that is, facts involving causal modalities, are not reducible to non-causal facts, he nonetheless holds that (a) causal modality is not grounded in the essential natures or powers of physical substances and that (b) causal terms are theoretical because they “do not refer to what is immediately given in experience” (*Causality: A Realist Approach*, p. 317). This is enough for him to count as an empiricist in the present context.

even though they disagree over just what the content of the concept is.¹⁰⁵ For instance, Hume himself believed that our ordinary concept of a cause mistakenly implies an *a priori* knowable ‘necessary connection’ between causes of a certain type and effects of a certain type, whereas Mackie takes this concept to imply instead the simple counterfactual dependence of the effect on the cause in the relevant circumstances.¹⁰⁶ Be that as it may, it is the claim itself that I wish to focus on, because from an Aristotelian perspective, the idea that causal concepts are theoretical, as opposed to strictly observational, seems wildly outlandish.

Elizabeth Anscombe captures this Aristotelian sentiment by pointing out that the abstract concept of a cause is inseparable from a vast array of ordinary action and power concepts, as well as from natural kind concepts:

How does someone show that he has the concept *cause*? We may wish to say: only by having such a word in his vocabulary. If so, then the manifest possession of the concept presupposes the mastery of much else in language. I mean: the word ‘cause’ can be *added* to a language in which are already represented many causal concepts. A small selection: *scrape, push, wet, carry, eat, burn, knock over, keep off, squash, make* (e.g. noises, paper boats), *hurt*. But if we care to imagine languages in which no special causal concepts are represented, then no description of the use of a word in such languages will be able to present it as meaning *cause*. Nor will it even contain words for natural kinds of stuff, nor yet words equivalent to ‘body’, ‘wind’, or ‘fire’. For learning to use special causal verbs is part and parcel of learning to apply the concepts answering to these, and many other, substantives. As surely as we learned to call people by name or to report from seeing it that the cat was on the table, we also learned to report from having observed it that someone drank up the milk or that the dog made a funny noise or that things were cut or broken by whatever we saw cut or break them.¹⁰⁷

Empiricists are thus committed to much more than simply the claim that the single, abstract concept *cause* is theoretical and not purely observational or ‘empirical’. This point is borne out by a close examination of Michael Tooley’s criteria for the analyzability, and hence theoretical status, of terms in our language.¹⁰⁸ If one measures Anscombe’s list against Tooley’s criteria, it is clear that

105 Perhaps van Fraassen is an exception here. Even though he endorses – indeed, revels in – the fundamental empiricist picture, he believes that most empiricists go wrong by failing to realize that the concept of a cause, far from being metaphysically charged, is in fact a metaphysically tame concept which is properly used only to provide “empirically adequate” answers to limited and highly contextualized requests for explanation. See *The Scientific Image*, chap. 5.

106 See *The Cement of the Universe*, pp. 29–43.

107 “Causality and Determination,” p. 93.

108 *Causation: A Realist Approach*, p. 25. On Tooley’s account, a term is unanalyzable

all the terms on the list – including ordinary action verbs and natural kind terms – turn out to be theoretical and hence in need of analysis. And even though Tooley himself distinguishes ‘analyzability’ from ‘reducibility’ (which he equates with equivalence in meaning), his main argument for the analyzability of causal terms – a venerable one that goes back at least as far as al-Ghazali – is wholly consonant with the empiricist program:

“..... even if it turns out that some non-reductionist account of causation is correct, it will still be true that there is no observable difference between a world in which all of the non-causal facts are as they would be if states of affairs were causally related, and a world in which the states of affairs in question really are causally related So there cannot be any properties or relations, with which one can be directly acquainted, that are associated with causal terms. Consequently, neither causal terms, nor nomological terms, can be treated as primitive, however familiar some of them may be. Analysis is required.”¹⁰⁹

To revert to Anscombe’s example, Tooley is claiming that we cannot be “directly acquainted” with someone’s drinking up the milk and hence that ‘drinking up the milk’ is a theoretical expression. To be sure, we can be trained to observe – “in the ordinary non-technical sense” of ‘observe’¹¹⁰ – that someone is drinking up the milk whenever we are directly acquainted with the ‘non-causal’ facts that accompany someone’s drinking up the milk. Likewise, we can be trained to report that we see an aardvark or a red oak tree. But on Tooley’s view this no more proves that ‘drinking up the milk’ or ‘aardvark’ or ‘red oak tree’ is not a theoretical term than the fact that we can learn to report “This is sodium chloride” proves that ‘sodium chloride’ is not a theoretical term.¹¹¹ In short, even though we use causal concepts to make observation reports “in the non-technical sense,” these concepts are not strictly observational, and so we are engaging in theoretical – and hence ‘analyzable’ – discourse when we use them successfully.

All of this will seem quite astonishing to an Aristotelian. As Anscombe dryly comments, “Someone who says [that we can never observe causality in the individual case] is just not going to count anything as ‘observation of causality’.”¹¹² As I noted above in the discussion of substance, Aristotelians will concede that causal derivation – or, to use Suarez’s more precise formulation, the communication of *esse* through action – is not observable in exactly the same way in

only if the universal associated with is one with which we are “directly acquainted.” For the reasons explained in the argument quoted below, Tooley believes that none of terms on Anscombe’s list meets this condition.

109 *Causation: A Realist Approach*, p. 28.

110 *Causation*, “Introduction,” p. 13.

111 *Causation*, “Introduction,” pp. 13–14.

112 “Causality and Determination,” p. 92.

which colors or smells or the other qualities that Aristotelians call *proper sensibles* are observable. For causes, along with middle-sized material substances, are *common sensibles* – that is, objects of all the senses taken together rather than the special objects of single sensory faculties taken by themselves – and as such they are *per accidens* rather than *per se* objects of sensation. Aristotelians will likewise concede that on many occasions it will not be obvious just which agents are responsible for given effects. But they will insist nonetheless that these concessions do not at all undermine the conviction that observability in the “ordinary non-technical” sense is *primitive* or *baseline* observability and that, unlike the term ‘sodium chloride’, terms such as ‘salt’, ‘drink up the milk’, ‘cut’, ‘push’, and so on are non-theoretical. Indeed, it is only because we observe causes unproblematically in certain cases that we have so much as an inkling of what we are seeking in the less evident cases. In short, the Aristotelian conviction is that any world in which no one ever really drank up the milk or in which, strictly speaking, there were no aardvarks would indeed be “observably different” from the world we live in, even if all the ‘non-causal’ facts were the same in both worlds.¹¹³ And as for the breathtaking empiricist suggestion that “Aristotle was apparently unaware that there are very serious difficulties concerning the concept of causation,”¹¹⁴ the ready reply is that Aristotle could hardly be faulted for failing to recognize ‘difficulties’ manufactured by dubious accounts of sense perception and concept formation.

But beyond that, empiricists have not had much success in saying just what our concept of a cause is. Mackie rightly rejects Hume’s assertion that this concept involves an *a priori* knowable necessary connection between cause and effect, but his own suggestion that it involves mere counterfactual dependence among distinct events seems clearly mistaken.¹¹⁵ For even though the attribution of a causal concept often supports a claim of counterfactual dependence, there are clear cases in which the concept of causality is applicable but not the concept of counterfactual dependence among events, and vice versa.¹¹⁶ In fact, it seems

113 I must confess that I do not know what it would be for all the non-causal facts to be the same in such a case. As young children we learn to make the distinction between, say, someone’s drinking milk and someone’s merely appearing to be drinking milk. But the non-causal facts cannot be the same in the two cases, no matter how similar the circumstances might be. If nothing else, it seems that at least the spatial location of small quantities of milk, or the chemical composition of white liquid substances, or something of this sort, will be different.

114 *Causation*, “Introduction,” p. 31.

115 I have in mind here cases of causal preemption, causal overdetermination, and so on, which plague counterfactual analyses of causality, regardless of whether they pretend to be analyses of our concept of a cause, as with Mackie, or analyses of “causation as it exists in the objects,” as with Lewis.

116 For instance, in cases of what Lewis calls ‘late’ causal preemption (see below) we have no problem in applying the concept of a cause even while denying the application of the concept of counterfactual dependence. Again, we can easily recognize that

clear that the heart of our concept of a cause is very much like what Suarez says it is – namely, the concept of the direct production or conservation of an effect by an agent’s action or, more generally, the concept of the *active source* of an effect. What’s more, as I will emphasize in a moment, it is precisely this understanding of a cause that serves as the touchstone against which the empiricists themselves test their various analyses of “causation in the objects.” To put it bluntly, the ‘intuitions’ they bring to their project of analyzing the notion of a cause are essentially Aristotelian intuitions – and well they should be.

4.2.2 Causation as it is in the objects

I turn, then, to “causation as it is in the objects.” The reductive analyses of justify causality formulated by empiricists fall into two main categories, regularity (or uniformity) analyses and counterfactual analyses, with each capable of being formulated in such a way as to take into account probabilistic, as well as deterministic, causal relations. There is an abundant critical literature on both sorts of analysis, and I will not try to reproduce or even summarize it here.¹¹⁷ But it is fair to say that despite the ingenuity and depth of the best attempts – namely, those of Mackie and David Lewis – to formulate reductive analyses of “causation as it is in the objects,” no such attempt has been successful.

In any case, from an Aristotelian perspective the significance of the empiricist literature on causality lies not so much in the details as in how empiricists conceive of the problematic within which they carry out their enterprise. I will comment briefly on three general points.

The first is that, as intimated above, empiricists seem willing to judge their own analyses by essentially Aristotelian ‘intuitions’. Unlike Hume, they do not take the ordinary concept of a cause to be in need of wholesale revision, and so they are willing to take our commonplace use of causal terms as normative in assessing their own analyses of “causation as it is in the objects.” As I urged above, however, our everyday use of causal locutions seems clearly to imply that causes are active sources of effects, and it is precisely because contemporary empiricists implicitly presuppose this idea that they feel constrained in the end to alter their analyses in fundamental ways. This is clear with both Mackie and Lewis.

I begin with Mackie. According to his initial formulation of the regularity analysis, c is a cause of e in circumstances (or ‘causal field’) f if c is an ‘*inus*’ condition for e in f , where an *inus* condition is an insufficient but necessary part of a condition that is itself minimally sufficient, though not necessary, for e in f .¹¹⁸ To put it in a slightly different way, c is a cause of e in f if c is a non-redun-

what Suarez calls *sine qua non* conditions for efficient causality are non-causes on which effects are nonetheless counterfactually dependent.

117 For beginners, see the articles reprinted in *Causation*, along with the bibliography at the end of the book.

118 *The Cement of the Universe*, p. 62. Notice that, from an Aristotelian perspective, this

dant proper part of some generic or uniform condition that is minimally sufficient for e in f . However, it is clear upon reflection that this analysis is too broad, since it counts as causal relations uniformities that are stable and yet either wholly coincidental or else traceable to a common cause. Suppose, to use Mackie's example, that it is a stable regularity that workers in London leave for home just after the hooters signaling the end of the workday sound many miles away in Manchester. In that case, the sounding of the Manchester hooters turns out to be an *inus* condition for the London workers' leaving for home. Instead of accepting this consequence of his theory and thus calling for a reform of our ordinary talk about causality, Mackie assumes that he must alter his analysis fundamentally, so that it is no longer a 'pure' regularity analysis. He does this by stipulating that in addition to being an *inus* condition for e , c must be 'causally prior' to e in order to count as a cause of e , where the definition of causal priority includes reference to the fixity of events – a notion to which an analysis of "causation as it is in the objects" is not clearly entitled.¹¹⁹

Mackie is of course correct in assuming that the case of the Manchester hooters is a counterexample to his original theory. But it seems clear that this is so simply because, in the case as described, we cannot plausibly imagine how the putative cause could have been an active source – that is, an Aristotelian efficient cause – of the effect. Indeed, as Nancy Cartwright has argued, the application of the regularity account presupposes the ability to rule out certain regularities as 'non-starters', and this in turn presupposes the ability to identify singular causal facts about the exercise of powers or capacities on the part of particular agents.¹²⁰

Now for Lewis. According to his counterfactual analysis, c is a cause of e just in case c and e both occur, and there is a causal chain $x_1 \dots x_n$ (where n is greater or equal to 1) such that *not-c* counterfactually implies *not-x₁ ... not-x_n* counterfactually implies *not-e*. Each effect in the causal chain running from c to e is thus an event which is 'causally dependent' – that is, counterfactually dependent – on its predecessor. This analysis seems able to handle Mackie's example, but falls prey to instances of what Lewis calls 'late preemption'. In such cases, c is 'intuitively' a cause of e , but if c had not directly caused e , c^* would have directly caused e instead – where it is c itself, and nothing earlier in its causal ancestry, that preempts c^* . Hence, *not-c* does not counterfactually imply *not-e*, and so according to the analysis c is not a cause of e .

account of *inus* conditions gives us no way to distinguish among agents, patients, and *sine qua non* conditions within particular causal situations.

119 For one thing, this condition rules out backward causation *a priori*, whereas the question of whether backward causation is possible cannot – and should not – be settled merely by an analysis of causation. Also, Mackie himself acknowledges that as he defines causal priority, the resulting modification of his analysis of causation does not work if the world is wholly deterministic. And, once again, the question of whether the world is deterministic should not be settled merely by an analysis of causation. See *The Cement of the Universe*, p.192.

120 *Nature's Capacities and Their Measurement*, chap. 3.

Now given that Lewis has at this point in his discussion already shown his analysis to be plausible – or at least salvageable – for a wide range of problematic cases, one might have expected him simply to challenge the intuition that *c* is a cause of *e* in this instance. But he does not. Instead he alters his analysis fundamentally, so that it is no longer a ‘pure’ counterfactual analysis. He does this by introducing the notion of ‘quasi-causal dependence’ which allows for causality when *e would have been* counterfactually dependent on *c* if the circumstances had not been “spoiled” by something “extraneous” – specifically, in the case of late preemption, by the preempted *c**.¹²¹ But what is it that so strongly convinces Lewis (and the rest of us) that *c* is a cause of *e* even in the case of late preemption? The answer seems clear: we take *c* to be an active source of *e*.

The second general point is that empiricists generally lack a sophisticated understanding of, and sometimes even an awareness of, the resources that an Aristotelian account of causality can bring to bear on otherwise puzzling cases. This is a large issue, but the main point I want to make is simply that contemporary empiricists, unlike their early modern predecessors, evince little awareness of what might have attracted the scholastics and others to the Aristotelian account in the first place. I will focus here on one example from Lewis and one from Mackie.

In order to accommodate probabilistic or ‘chancy’ causation, Lewis amends his original analysis of causal dependence, according to which an actual event *e* is causally dependent on an actual event *c* just in case *c* counterfactually implies *e* and *not-c* counterfactually implies *not-e*. According to the amended analysis, an actual event *e* is causally dependent on an actual event *c* just in case *c* counterfactually implies *e* to a degree *x* of probability, and *not-c* counterfactually implies *not-e* to a degree *1-y* of probability, where *x* is much greater than *y*. Lewis then imagines a friendly objector constructing a scenario in which this amended analysis is satisfied, but in which the improbable is true and *e* would have occurred even if *c* had not occurred; in other words, in this particular instance it is not the case that *not-c* counterfactually implies *not-e*. In this scenario, the objector continues, the original analysis still yields the correct result that *e* is not causally dependent on *c*, whereas the amended analysis yields the incorrect result that *e* is causally dependent on *c*, even though in this singular and improbable case *e* would still have occurred without *c*. Lewis responds by denying in effect that the constructed scenario is possible, since the proposition *e would have occurred even if c had not occurred* cannot be true if the conditions of the amended analysis are satisfied:

The objection presupposes that the case must be one kind or the other: either *e* definitely would have occurred [without *c*], or it definitely would not have occurred. If that were so, then indeed it would be sensible to say that we have causation only in case *e* definitely would not

121 “Postscripts To ‘Causation’,” pp. 205–206.

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have occurred without c But I reject the presupposition that there are two different ways the world could be, giving us one definite counterfactual or the other. That presupposition is a metaphysical burden quite out of proportion to its intuitive appeal; what is more, the intuition can be explained away. The presupposition is that there is some hidden feature which may or may not be present in our actual world, and which if present would make true the counterfactual that e would have occurred anyway without c . If this counterfactual works as others do, then the only way this hidden feature could make the counterfactual true is by carrying over to the counterfactual situation and there being part of a set of conditions jointly sufficient for e . What sort of set of conditions? We think at once that the set might consist in part of laws of nature, and in part of matters of historical fact prior to the time t , which would together predetermine e . But e cannot be predetermined in the counterfactual situation. For it is supposed to be a matter of chance, in the counterfactual situation as in actuality, whether e occurs So the hidden feature must be something else. But what else can it be? Not the historical facts prior to t , not the chances, not the laws of nature or the history-to-chance conditionals that say how those chances depend on prior historical facts. For all those are already taken account of, and they suffice only for a chance and not a certainty of e .¹²²

From an Aristotelian perspective, however, the scenario is possible, the objector's intuition is perfectly sound, and the "hidden feature" in question is just an action or the absence thereof. For suppose that on this occasion the 'powerful particulars' involved in c did not in fact act in such a way as to effect e , but that some other agents that were wholly independent of c did so act. Then it is true in this singular instance that e would have occurred even if c had not occurred – despite the fact that the probability of e 's occurring without c was at the time very low. Thus, the scenario makes perfectly good sense from an Aristotelian point of view and, in fact, it is the possible occurrence of cases just like this that leads Cartwright to posit an *action* or *operation* variable as an essential element in the representation of probabilistic causes.¹²³ Lewis does not so much as entertain this suggestion, even if only to reject it.

The second example concerns Mackie's attempt to subsume the Aristotelian notion of a causal power or tendency into his regularity theory of causality. In explicating St. Thomas's natural philosophy, Peter Geach had claimed that the idea of causal interference "just cannot be logically brought into a uniformity doctrine of causality," because Humeans lack the Aristotelian notion of an impedible causal tendency.¹²⁴ To illustrate his point, Geach introduces the following example. Let A be a heating unit that by itself would raise the tempera-

122 "Postscripts To 'Causation'," pp. 180–181.

123 *Nature's Capacities and Their Measurement*, 109–112.

ture of a certain room 25° F. in one hour, and let *B* be a cooling unit that by itself would lower the temperature of the room 10° F. in one hour; then the combined operation of the two units will result in the temperature increasing 15° F. in one hour. On an Aristotelian theory, this effect is easily explained as the outcome of each of the units exercising its own power while impeding the causal tendency of the other, with the result that neither attains its intended effect; instead, the two of them form a total agent which, in acting by contrary powers, produces a 15° F. increase in temperature. Geach, however, contends that a regularity account of causality cannot explain this situation except by asserting implausibly that the effect is “compounded of a non-existent rise of temperature by 25° F. and a non-existent fall of temperature by 10° F.,” since these ‘non-existent effects’ are entailed by the only two relevant uniformities – namely, that *A* always raises the temperature 25° and that *B* always lowers the temperature by 10°.¹²⁵

Mackie counters by pointing out that his ‘minimal sufficient conditions’ are “complex uniformities” and not just the “simple uniformities” Geach has in mind. As such, they include the negation of any possible interfering factors. Thus, in ordinary circumstances, where there is no interference, *A*’s operation is an *inus* condition for the temperature’s rising 25° F., and the minimal sufficient condition of which *A*’s operation is a non-redundant part includes, at least implicitly, *the negation of B’s operation*. Analogously, in the absence of interference, *B*’s operation is an *inus* condition for the temperature’s falling 10° F., and the minimal sufficient condition of which *B*’s operation is a non-redundant part includes, at least implicitly, *the negation of A’s operation*. By contrast, in the circumstances described by Geach – where there is interference – the relevant minimal sufficient condition is a different one of which both *A*’s operation and *B*’s operation are non-redundant parts, and this condition is sufficient for the temperature’s rising 15° F.

In general, Mackie tells us, we are never in a position to know the *full* complex regularity that is applicable to a particular concrete causal situation, just because we do not have detailed knowledge of all the possible sources of interference which our sufficient conditions as thus far formulated are subject to. Our best strategy is simply to take what we do know thus far and simply add to it the negation of all possible ‘interfering factors’. This gap in our knowledge, Mackie suggests, is just the reason why we have recourse to talk about causal powers and tendencies; for if we knew all the relevant complex regularities, then we could simply invoke them and dispense with all mention of tendencies or interference. Thus, far from pointing to the existence of ‘mysterious’ teleological realities in the world, talk of causal tendencies is instead a placeholder for gaps in our knowledge of full complex uniformities. As Mackie puts it:

It will be clear from what has been said above that though interference

124 *Three Philosophers*, pt. II, “Aquinas,” pp. 101-9.

125 *ibid.*, p. 102.

could not be brought into a doctrine of simple uniformities, it is easily accommodated in a doctrine of complex uniformities. Interference is the presence of a counteracting cause, a factor whose negation is a conjunct in a minimal sufficient condition (some of) whose other conjuncts are present. The fact that scientists rightly hesitate to assert that something always happens is explained by the point that the complex uniformities they try to discover are nearly always incompletely known. It would be quite consistent with an essentially Humean position – though an advance on what Hume himself says – to distinguish between a full complex physical law, which would state what always does happen, and the law as so far known, which tells us only what would, failing interference, happen Moreover the rival doctrine can be understood only with the help of this one. What it would be for certain behaviour to be ‘proper to this set of bodies in these circumstances’, what Aquinas’s tendencies or *appetitus* are, remains utterly obscure in Geach’s account; but using the notion of complex regularity we can explain that *A* has a tendency to produce *P* if there is some minimally sufficient condition of *P* in which *A* is a non-redundant element.¹²⁶

However, it takes only a moment’s reflection to see that Mackie’s suggested account of a causal tendency leads to absurdities, and that – just as Geach contends – this notion is not so easily accommodated by a regularity theory. In Geach’s example, the relevant full minimal sufficient condition will have the form *ABnot-XY*, where *A* stands for the operation of the heating unit, *B* stands for the operation of the cooling unit, and *not-X* and *Y* stand for the full complement of negative and positive conditions – some known and some unknown – which, taken together with *A* and *B*, are minimally sufficient to produce the effect of the temperature’s rising 15° F. in the relevant circumstances. Since *A* and *B* are both non-redundant elements of this minimal sufficient condition, it follows, according to Mackie’s suggestion, that the operation of the heating unit has a tendency to raise the room’s temperature 15° F. in one hour – which seems just wrong, since it was stipulated that it has a tendency to raise the temperature 25° F. in the absence of interference. But, more spectacularly, the operation of the cooling unit, too, has a tendency to produce a 15° F. rise in the room in one hour – which is plainly absurd. In general, then, the claim that something has a tendency to produce whatever it is an *inus* condition for will lead to wildly counterintuitive consequences. On this score, at least, the Aristotelian account is clearly superior.

The third and final general point has to do with the epistemic pessimism endemic to empiricism. One key difference between the occasionalists and the empiricists is that the occasionalists claim to know the source of the regularities, and of the corresponding counterfactual dependencies, that we find in nature – namely, God’s efficacious decisions about how he will characteristically act in

126 *The Cement of the Universe*, p. 76.

the world. The regularities are thus intended consequences of the provident exercise of genuine causal power on the part of God. What's more, the occasionalists simply take it for granted that these regularities require some explanation. This is why they take Aristotelian accounts of efficient causality in nature to be at least understandable, even if false. Berkeley, for instance, finds it wholly unsurprising that those "heathens who had no just notions of the omnipresence and infinite perfection of God" would as a matter of course seek to ground natural uniformities in the powers intrinsic to material substances themselves.¹²⁷

Hume, too, often seems to concede that there must be an ultimate source of the regularities in nature. His constant theme is, rather, that this source, whatever it might be, is epistemically inaccessible to us; our minds are simply incapable of discovering the "secret powers" at work in the world of nature.¹²⁸ We can only grasp certain functional dependencies which, as it luckily turns out, enable us to make fairly accurate predictions about the future – either in the informal way characteristic of day-to-day living or in the more sophisticated way discovered by the methods of scientific inquiry.

What is interesting about Hume's successors is that they give the impression that we should simply accept the regularities (or contingent 'laws of nature', in Tooley's case) as primitive facts about the world, cosmic coincidences with no source in any power or agency, be it natural or divine. At the very least, no such source is to be thought of as an object – even an unattainable ideal object – of intellectual inquiry. As van Fraassen puts it, empiricism "must involve throughout a resolute rejection of the demand for an explanation of the regularities in the observable course of nature, by means of truths concerning a reality beyond what is actual and observable, as a demand which plays no role in the scientific enterprise."¹²⁹

This deep pessimism about the powers of reason is no less remarkable for having become so commonplace among contemporary philosophers.¹³⁰ Perhaps it is understandable that such pessimism should have emerged historically in reaction to the excessive optimism of some strains of Enlightenment rationalism,

127 *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, ed. Kenneth Winkler (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1982), p. 89. On an Aristotelian view, such regularities – that is, things that happen "always or for the most part," to use Aristotle's expression – are the byproducts of the exercise of causal power by natural agents.

128 Unlike Mackie, I do not take Hume's references to the "secret powers" of things to be ironic, and so to that extent I do not take Hume to have been giving an analysis of "causation as it is in the objects." I take him rather to have been telling us just what we can and cannot claim to know about causation.

129 *The Scientific Image*, p. 203.

130 It is just this sort of pessimism about the powers of reason that Pope John Paul II laments as a cultural impediment to genuine human flourishing. See his encyclical *Fides et Ratio* (1998), esp. nn. 5–6 and 45–48.

but this brand of epistemic despair is nonetheless a far cry from the hopeful sentiment of Plato and Aristotle, who saw intellectual inquiry as an adventure opening up new vistas on the first principles of reality. The empiricists, with their vaunted ‘tough-mindedness’, have succeeded only in embodying the forlorn dictum of Simonides the ancient poet that human beings ought to keep their sights forever fixed on the mundane.¹³¹ Contrast this with the attitude of St. Thomas and Suarez and the other scholastics, who are often disparaged for having placed faith *before* reason but who, on the whole, had much more faith *in* reason than the empiricists do. For evidence of this, I will now examine Suarez’s treatment of creation, conservation, and concurrence.

5 Disputation 20: Creation

In the last three parts of this introductory essay my aim is to lay out the main conclusions and lines of argument of the three disputations translated in this volume. I will not try to reproduce the full depth or richness of Suarez’s meticulous argumentation, and so this summary is meant to be a guide to, and not a substitute for, the reader’s own close perusal of the text.

5.1 *The possibility and actuality of creation*

Suarez begins Disputation 20 by asking whether we can establish by natural reason that creation *ex nihilo* is possible or even actual. He takes it to be certain – with the certitude of faith – that creation is both possible and actual. But the issue here is whether the possibility and actuality of creation can be made *evident* and thus be counted among the preambles of the Faith.

The first order of business is to give a precise characterization of creation *ex nihilo*. As noted above, for an entity to be made *ex nihilo* is for some agent to make it without acting on any subject (or patient) and thus without actualizing any antecedent passive potentiality had by any subject. In short, every part of an entity created *ex nihilo* – that is, every aspect of its being or every reality that belongs to it – depends directly on the agent’s creative action. So even though creation *ex nihilo* is similar to other instances of efficient causality in having a terminus *a quo* (the total absence of any potentiality) and a terminus *ad quem* (the existence of a subsistent entity with all its parts and formal determinations), it is not strictly speaking a change, since it has no perduring subject or, to use Aristotle’s term, ‘matter’. Further, unlike acts of generation, the action of creation precludes any series of alterations that leads up to its terminus *ad quem*; rather, it is an action that takes place “all at once,” so to speak, and with no causal preparation. Thus, in the sentence ‘This thing is made *ex nihilo*’, the expression ‘*ex nihilo*’ is correctly understood as playing one or the other of two complementary roles. It can be taken to signify either (a) that the creative action has no

131 A related image that might occur to one versed in the Gospels is that of the crippled woman who had been bent over with her eyes fixed to the ground for eighteen years, unable to look upward until Jesus cured her. See Luke 13:10–13.

subject or (b) that the terminus *a quo* of the creative action is utter nothingness rather than, as in ordinary instances of efficient causality, the mere privation of some accidental or substantial form for which the subject of the action has an antecedent passive power or potentiality.¹³²

More positively, what is conferred in creation is *esse* “from the bottom up,” that is, every aspect of reality which the created entity has at the instant it is created. St. Thomas describes God’s proper activity as the communication of “*esse-as-such*” or of “being insofar as it is being.” This notion, which is meant to capture the universality and transcendence of God’s causal influence, lies at the heart of an account of all the types of divine action, including creation, conservation, and concurrence. Suarez himself is willing to use this notion to describe God’s creative activity as long as it is understood to mean that what is effected in an instance of creation is “everything required for the existence” of the created subsistent entity.¹³³ We can thus characterize it as follows:

x gives *esse-as-such* to *y* at instant *t* if and only if (a) *x* is a principal *per se* efficient cause of *y* at *t*, and (b) for any entity *z* such that *z* is either a component of *y* at *t* or an accident of *y* at *t*, *x* is a principal *per se* efficient cause of *z* at *t*.

With this core notion in hand, we can now characterize creation *ex nihilo*. As we have seen, in the case of creation the giving of *esse-as-such* is accomplished without the actualization of any preexistent potentiality. What’s more, Suarez insists with other scholastics that whatever is created, properly speaking, “must be subsistent or must at least be made in the manner of something subsistent.”¹³⁴ So the components and accidents of a subsistent entity are not the direct object intended in creation, but are instead said to be “co-created” when the subsistent entity is created.¹³⁵

Given this background, we can now characterize *de novo* creation as follows:¹³⁶

132 See *Summa Theologiae* 1, q. 45, a.1, ad 3.

133 *DM* 20.2.24.

134 *DM* 20.1.1.

135 See St. Thomas, *Summa Theologiae* 1, q. 45, a. 4. This consideration becomes important in Disputation 21, because even though some accidents are conserved “*per se* and immediately” by their finite causes as well as by God, the accidents in question inhere in a subject and hence are not subsistent. God’s *per se* and immediate conservation of substances is, by contrast, an action without a subject and has a subsistent entity as its terminus *ad quem*.

136 I give a characterization only of *de novo* creation here because Suarez argues in section 5 of Disputation 20 that newness of being is not absolutely necessary for creation. See part 5.4 below. Also, the third condition leaves conceptual space for the disputed thesis that the same entity can be created more than once. Whereas some

***x* creates *y ex nihilo* and *de novo* at instant *t* if and only if (a) *y* is a subsistent entity, and (b) *x* gives *esse*-as-such to *y* at *t* and (c) neither *y* nor any of *y*'s components or accidents existed immediately prior to *t*.**

Suarez gives a three-stage 'natural' proof for what he calls the "absolute possibility" of creation *ex nihilo*. In the first stage he argues that the notion of creation *ex nihilo* involves no incoherence or contradiction. For the general concept of an action implies only that every action must belong to an agent and have an effect – and not that it must involve a patient that is acted upon. But if the concept of the *action* of creation *ex nihilo* involves no incoherence, then we can infer, second, that the concept of the *power* to create *ex nihilo* likewise involves no incoherence or contradiction. Finally, if we assume that God exists as an absolutely perfect being – an assumption that Suarez argues for later in the *Disputationes Metaphysicae* without appealing to God's power to create *ex nihilo* – then it follows, third, that the power to create *ex nihilo*, which is itself a great perfection, is *in fact* had by God. So creation *ex nihilo* is possible in the strong sense that the power to create *ex nihilo* is in fact had by some actually existing agent. And this is a conclusion that has been established by natural reason.

Suarez next tries to show that creation *ex nihilo* is not only possible but has in fact occurred. His strategy here is inductive. He canvasses the broad categories of actually existing entities – generable (and hence corruptible) material substances and their elements, ingenerable (and hence incorruptible) material substances, and finite immaterial substances – and argues in each case that (a) the entities in question must have been made by some agent in order to exist and that (b) they could have been made only if they themselves have been created *ex nihilo* or, in the case of generable material substances, some essential component of them has been created *ex nihilo*. (It is for this reason that generated material substances are called creatures and are said to be created, even though they have not been created *de novo* in the strict sense defined above.)

This part of section 1 contains an interesting critique of the ancient philosophical dictum that matter is eternal and uncreated.¹³⁷ Suarez first points out that given matter's lowly ontological status, it is incredible that it should have a great perfection – namely, existence from itself (*esse ex se*) – that is arguably lacked by both corruptible and incorruptible finite substances. His second, and perhaps more interesting, argument is this: Suppose that matter is eternal and uncreated, having its existence *ex se*. Then as such it either lacks every form or has some form. Even though, given Suarez's own account of primary matter, the first alternative is possible, it is nonetheless highly improbable. But if the second alternative is true, then it is the whole matter/form composite that has its existence *ex se* – in which case the substance in question is incorruptible and, for this

philosophers have denied that this is a real possibility, Suarez himself thinks otherwise. See *DM* 20.4.13, 26.4, and 50.9.10–18.

137 See *DM* 20.1.18–20.

reason, its matter is incapable of entering as an essential component into the composition of any other substances.¹³⁸ One immediate consequence is that if all matter were formed from eternity, then the generation and corruption of genuine substances would be impossible. But generation and corruption is obviously possible. Therefore, it is not the case that matter has its existence *ex se*.

This argument runs deeper than might appear at first glance. One historically popular reply has been to embrace the second alternative and to claim, in the manner of the ancient atomists, that there are certain fundamental material substances which have always existed *ex se* and which are the elemental components of all material objects. But this reply, its scientific credentials aside, seems to commit its proponents to just the sort of reductionism that prompted Aristotle to emphasize the notion of nature as form in the first place. For if we conceive of the fundamental substances in this way, then they are incapable of becoming subordinate ‘virtual’ parts of higher-order unified substances, with the result that the material objects constituted by such fundamental entities can at most be aggregates of substances rather than genuine substances in their own right.

5.2 *The nature of creative power*

In sections 2 and 3 of Disputation 20 Suarez turns his attention to the nature of creative power. More precisely, he asks whether the power to create *ex nihilo* must be wholly unlimited or whether it might instead be had in some limited way by a finite or creaturely substance. St. Thomas had argued that any creator must be Unparticipated *Esse* or “*esse-through-its-essence*,” an agent who has all perfections and hence is capable of creating any creatable being. It follows straightforwardly from this view that the power to create *ex nihilo* cannot be communicated to any creature.

To be sure, Suarez deems it certain – or almost certain – that God alone can have the power to create *ex nihilo*. For it is a Catholic doctrine that all creatures have been created by God alone and hence that no creature has in fact created anything. But if no creature has in fact created anything, then it is highly likely that no creature has the power to create *ex nihilo*, since God would not give creatures a power they never exercise. What’s more, if no creature has the power to create *ex nihilo*, then it is almost certainly impossible that any creature should have this power:

[For] if such a creature were possible, it would surely constitute a different order and grade of creature over and beyond those that now exist, since it would have a distinct and higher mode of operating; therefore, it would have pertained to the perfection of the universe that such an order

138 See Part 2.2 above for an explanation of the notion of an essential part. Also, as I point out in a note to the translation, the present argument is not weakened by the hypothesis that matter was eternally divided into distinct parts. For in that case the same argument applies to each of the parts of matter.

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or grade of creatures should exist in it; therefore, conversely, since God established the universe without any such creature, this is an indication that (a) no such creature is contained within the order of creatures or is possible, and, consequently, that (b) this sort of creature is irrelevant to the completeness of the universe.¹³⁹

However, once again, the question before us is whether this conclusion can be made evident by natural reason alone, and on this score Suarez is much less sanguine than St. Thomas. He begins by precisely delineating the thesis under dispute. First of all, we must distinguish a *principal* power to create from an *instrumental* power to create. As explained above, a principal power is one proportioned to the effect, whereas an instrumental power is one that is not so proportioned and must thus be “elevated” by a principal power in order to cause the effect.¹⁴⁰ Suarez, like his predecessors, is mainly concerned with the question of whether creatures can have a principal power to create *ex nihilo* – though in section 3 he does briefly discuss the possibility of an instrumental power to create.

He next distinguishes three different types of principal power which might count as powers to create *ex nihilo*: (a) a power that has *creatable being* as its adequate object, so that it is proportioned to every creatable being and so is capable of producing any creatable being *ex nihilo*; (b) a power to create a limited range of beings *ex nihilo* in a manner independent of any other principal power; and, finally, (c) a power to create some limited range of beings *ex nihilo* in a manner dependent on God’s general concurrence.

Suarez argues compellingly that neither the first nor the second type of power to create can be conferred on any creature.¹⁴¹ But even if this is so, it still remains an open question whether a limited creative power of the third type can be communicated to a creature, either as a ‘connatural’ principal power that the creature has by its very nature or as a supernatural principal power that is added to its nature by God.

Historically, neo-Platonists had claimed that the immaterial intelligences emanating from the First Cause are able to create entities lower than themselves in the hierarchy of being. But even without endorsing an emanationist scheme of this sort, we can still imagine a created agent that is capable of giving *esse* “from the bottom up” to just a single species of substance. For instance, it is imaginable that there should be a human being who is able to create iron ingots *ex nihilo* simply by saying the words “Let there be an iron ingot here now,” and who is able to annihilate the ingots so created simply by saying the words “Let this iron ingot be reduced to nothingness.” In fact, we could imaginatively construct

139 *DM* 20.2.12.

140 See Part 3.2 above.

141 In the case of the second type of power, Suarez’s proof anticipates the claim, to be argued for in Disputation 22, that God is an immediate and *per se* principal cause of any effect caused by any created agent.

a scenario in which this person alternately creates and annihilates iron ingots twenty times during a minute-long interval and does so in a laboratory set up to ensure that nothing already existent enters into the composition of the ingots when they are created and that nothing remains of them when they are annihilated.

Suarez does not directly appeal to any example of this sort, but he does bring to bear the same kind of considerations in favor of the claim that creatures could have a dependent and restricted power to create *ex nihilo*.¹⁴² After all, such a power would not be infinite or unlimited in its object. Nor, Suarez claims, would it seem to be infinite in its mode of acting, since the fact that the action of creation *ex nihilo* lacks dependence on a subject does not by itself imply an infinite power. For, first of all, the contribution of the subject or patient in ordinary cases of efficient causality seems to be finite and hence could seemingly be compensated for by the power of a higher finite agent. Second, it is often the case that a greater power is required to produce a more perfect entity from a greater antecedent potentiality than to produce a less perfect entity from a lesser antecedent potentiality; for instance, it takes more power for a gifted author to write a brilliant novel than for a normal child to build a sand castle. So why shouldn't a mere creature have the power to create a low-level entity such as an iron ingot *ex nihilo* – that is, from a complete absence of antecedent potentiality? Such a power would seem on the surface to be much less impressive than, say, Suarez's ability to write the *Disputationes Metaphysicae*. Finally, even if one could persuasively argue that a limited power to create cannot be *connatural* to a creature, this does not rule out God's conferring the power as a *supernatural addition* to the creature's nature. It is far from immediately evident, then, why a creature could not have a dependent and stringently restricted power to create *ex nihilo*.

Suarez looks at four arguments that attempt to undermine considerations such as these. With a line of reasoning that Suarez finds plausible though not demonstrative, Duns Scotus tries to show that none of the physical components of either material or immaterial finite substances can serve as the ontological bearer of the power to create *ex nihilo*. In particular, Scotus argues that (a) material substances cannot create through either their matter or their form or their accidents, and that (b) created spiritual beings cannot create through any of their accidents. Suarez beefs up Scotus's argument by arguing against the possibility, unexamined by Scotus, that created spiritual beings might create through their substance or essence.

Having dismissed an argument of Ockham's that he finds unimpressive, Suarez next considers in some depth two arguments by St. Thomas which focus not on the ontological bearer of creative power but instead on the object of the power to create *ex nihilo*. Consonant with what was said above, both these arguments are designed to show that the power to create *ex nihilo* must have all cre-

¹⁴² See *DM* 20.2.8–9.

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atable beings as possible objects and thus that there cannot be a limited creative power. To use St. Thomas's terminology, an agent's having the power to give *esse*-as-such to any one entity entails its being a 'universal' cause whose proper effect is *esse*-as-such and which thus has the power to give *esse*-as-such to *any* creatable being.

Suarez, though, detects an ambiguity in these arguments. It is true, he concedes, that only the First Cause can have *esse*-as-such as a *proper* effect; but, he argues, this does not rule out a creature's being able to give *esse*-as-such to a limited range of beings:

From the general principles in question one may very well infer that a power of creating which has *creatable being* as its object – that is, *esse* itself insofar as it includes the whole range of possible participated being – is incommunicable to a creature. But from this it cannot be inferred that all *participation* in this universal creative power is incommunicable to a creature, where such participation is limited and restricted to a certain genus or species of creatable entities, or even to certain individuals. For a power of this sort, thus restricted, (a) involves no contradiction in the terms themselves and (b) cannot be shown to be impossible just on the basis of the principles in question. The first of these points is clear from the fact that the creation of, say, a lion is distinct in species from the creation of a human being; therefore, it is not impossible, just on the basis of the terms themselves, that there should be a created power that is commensurate with the creation of a given species and yet not commensurate with creation taken in its full range The second point is clear from the fact that a created power of this sort, even if it is a power to create, will have a limited and particular effect as its object, and not an absolutely universal effect And so a power that corresponds adequately to a certain sort of creation, rather than to creation as such, need not be absolutely universal; therefore, it is not necessary that such a power should be proper to the First Cause.¹⁴³

In the end, then, Suarez does not find St. Thomas's argument to be probative and concludes that natural reason cannot demonstrate that only God has the power to create *ex nihilo*. Instead, he reiterates the argument, noted above, which makes explicit appeal to the revealed doctrine that all finite beings have been created by God alone:

I believe that on the basis of the things that have been made it can be shown with a very high degree of probability that an absolutely infinite power is required for the creation of any entity whatsoever. For despite the fact that a great number of very excellent substances have been made by God, none of them has received the power to create even the least entity, one that is close to nothingness. This, then, is an indication that

143 *DM* 20.2.26.

[the lack of creative power] stems exclusively from a limitation that belongs to all these creatures, no matter how excellent they might be. Otherwise, one could not explain why the surpassing perfection found in the angels – or at least in the Seraphim – is not sufficient for [such a power]. And from here one may further conjecture that the higher order to which a creative power must necessarily belong is none other than the order of *esse*-through-its-essence itself.¹⁴⁴

I will tarry only a moment over Suarez's discussion of whether an instrumental power to create *ex nihilo* could be communicated to a creature. He first argues that no created substance or accident can be a *connatural* instrument of creation *ex nihilo*, one that by its nature is designed to serve as such an instrument. But he then considers the possibility that God might use some created substance as a divine or supernatural instrument of creation in much the same way that he uses ordinary substances like water as divine instruments to effect grace in the sacraments ministered by the Church, or in much the same way that he uses the priest's words of consecration at Mass as a divine instrument to convert bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. Suarez concedes that if these examples of sacramental causality are, as some claim, effected through the mediation of accidents – namely, special supernatural powers – with which God endows the water and the words of consecration and which themselves have a *connatural* capacity to be instruments for their respective effects, then there cannot be any analogous instrumental power to create. For, as he has already argued, no possible accident can serve as a *connatural* instrument of creation.

However, Suarez's own view is that no such superadded accidents are required for sacramental causality. Rather, in the sacrament of baptism God simply uses water as an instrument to effect grace without conferring any new power on it – in much the same way that I might use a hammer as an instrument to drive a nail without conferring any special new power on it. And, more interestingly in the present context, God simply uses the priest's words of consecration as instruments in converting the bread and wine without conferring on those words any new power. I call this example more interesting because, as Suarez points out, even though God's act of transubstantiating the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ has the bread and wine – and not nothingness – as its terminus *a quo*, it is nonetheless not an action on a subject. For, according to Catholic doctrine, none of the essential parts of the bread and wine remains after the consecration, and so there is nothing that might serve as the subject of the action of transubstantiation.¹⁴⁵ Like creation, then, transubstantiation is not a change, strictly speaking. So if the spoken words of consecration can, as Catholic doctrine affirms, be a divine instrument of transubstantiation, it is not at all evident

144 *DM* 20.2.40. The Seraphim are the highest beings in the angelic hierarchy.

145 See *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, 32nd ed., #802 and #1652 (new numbering).

why some created substance could not likewise serve as an instrument of creation *ex nihilo*.

5.3 The ontology of the action of creation

In section 4 of Disputation 20 Suarez asks about the ontological status of the action of creation *ex nihilo*. All the competing positions agree that on the side of the terminus *ad quem*, an action of creation is just the relevant creature's total dependence on God, at the instant of creation, for its own subsistent existence and for the existence of all its components and formal determinations.¹⁴⁶ Scholastic authors commonly refer to this dependence as the creature's 'passive creation' or its 'being-created' (*creari*) or, more generically, its 'being-made' (*fieri*).

But beyond this there is disagreement. On the one hand, many Thomists hold that an entity's passive creation is an individual accident that inheres in it – more specifically, the categorial relation of dependence that results from its having been created *ex nihilo* by God. The nominalists, on the other hand, deny that the passive creation is in any way distinct from the creature; rather, the passive creation – that is, the action of creation – is just the creature which terminates it and so is not a distinct entity in its own right. Suarez rejects both positions in favor of a third, which I will now lay out. The conclusions he argues for here are best seen as a simple application of the general account of action already described in Part 3 to the peculiar case of creation *ex nihilo*, in which there is an action with a terminus *ad quem* but without a passion, that is, without a patient's being acted upon.¹⁴⁷

Suarez's position is encapsulated in four assertions that he propounds and defends in this section of Disputation 20. The first assertion, which he takes to be uncontroversial and shared in one way or another by all the competing positions, is that the creature's dependence on God at the instant of creation *ex nihilo* is something that exists in – or, better, belongs to – the creature. For this dependence is just "the creature's *passive emanation* from God, that is, its being-made,"¹⁴⁸ regardless of whatever else might be said about its ontological status. This is in keeping with the scholastic claim that an action is both (a) the active production of the effect that terminates it and (b) the effect's passive emanation from and dependence on the agent at the instant it is produced.

Suarez's second assertion, aimed at the nominalists, is that the creature's dependence on, or passive emanation from, God is something distinct from the

¹⁴⁶ It is important to remember that we are taking creation in the strict sense here, since the dependence relations will be different for entities that come into being through substantial or accidental change.

¹⁴⁷ Recall that in ordinary cases of efficient causality the action, looked at from the side of the patient, is just the passion, that is, the patient's being acted upon so as to produce the effect that terminates the action.

¹⁴⁸ *DM* 20.4.11.

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creature itself. His main argument for the distinction between the dependence and the created entity is that the very same creature can be the terminus of numerically distinct emanations or dependences:

If God annihilated a given angel and afterwards created him again, the [later] dependence would not have to be numerically the same dependence that existed beforehand. For even though God could bring it about that [it was indeed numerically the same dependence], there is no reason for us to claim that this is necessary. After all, if the same light successively depends on different agents through different dependences, then why can't God bring it about that the same angel successively depends on him through different dependences?¹⁴⁹

Suarez also points out that if God created a substance by using a finite instrument of creation and later conserved that substance by himself alone, then the substance's earlier dependence on God and the instrument would be numerically distinct from its later dependence on God alone. These examples, he claims, prove that the dependence is at least *modally* distinct from the creature it belongs to. Thus, even though any given creature is essentially dependent on God in the sense that it cannot exist without some actual dependence on God, there is no *particular* such dependence which is itself essential to it.

Suarez's third assertion consists of the following claims: (a) the creature's dependence on, or emanation from, God is not *really distinct* – that is, separable – from the terminus *ad quem* of the creative action; (b) this dependence, *pace* the Thomists, is not the categorial relation of dependence that *results from* the creative action, since this categorial relation is the creature's 'having-been-created' rather than its 'being-created'; and (c) the dependence is instead a mode of its terminus *ad quem* and is thus *modally distinct* from the created entity.¹⁵⁰

Suarez takes the first of these claims to be obvious. The dependence or emanation cannot be a separable entity that is itself the terminus of an emanation, since such an intermediate entity is wholly superfluous and, worse yet, positing it would lead immediately to a vicious infinite regress of emanations and dependences.

The second claim follows straightforwardly from the fact that creation is an action without a subject. For a categorial relation is an accident that presupposes the existence of its subject, whereas the action of creation is naturally or conceptually prior to the existence of the created substance and, indeed, produces that very substance as its terminus *ad quem*. Hence, this action – that is, this dependence or emanation – cannot be an accident of the creature in the way in which a passion is an accident of the substance that serves as the subject of an accidental change.

149 *DM* 20.4.13.

150 For a brief explanation of Suarez's account of real, modal, and conceptual distinctions, see *DM* 20.1, note 5 below.

What remains, says Suarez, is that the dependence is a *mode*, rather than an accident, of the created substance – a mode through which that substance comes to be. This dependence is modally distinct from its terminus, because it cannot exist without having this very terminus, whereas – as Suarez has already argued – its terminus can exist without this particular dependence or emanation. And on Suarez’s theory of distinctions this asymmetry is necessary and sufficient for a modal distinction.

One might still wonder, though, about how exactly we ought to conceive of the ontological character of the dependence or passive emanation, and in the fourth assertion Suarez attempts to fill out the picture with a more positive suggestion. Because creation is not an action on a subject, the dependence or emanation is neither a change nor a passion. However, as a genuine action, it still has “the true nature of a path or of the creature’s being-made.”¹⁵¹ But what precisely does this mean? After all, if the dependence is somehow “in” the substance that serves as its terminus, how can it be that it does not “inhere in” its terminus as an accident, albeit a modal accident? How exactly are we to think of its relation to the created substance?

Let’s take Suarez’s use of the term ‘path’ (*via*) at face value and think of the dependence or passive emanation as a line – or, better, a vector – propagated from the agent and terminating in the created entity, which serves as its endpoint or terminus. With this model in mind, we can grasp more clearly all of the principal claims that Suarez makes about the action of creation *ex nihilo*.

First of all, just as the vector is in some obvious sense prior to the point it terminates in, so too the dependence or passive emanation is prior to the creature that terminates it and whose existence it issues in. And so, given that substances are naturally prior to their accidents, it follows that the dependence cannot be an accident inhering in the created entity. In the same way, it is appropriate to say that the vector culminates in the endpoint and perhaps even that it propagates the endpoint, but it would be inappropriate to say that the vector inheres in the endpoint as an attribute or accident.

Second, just as a single endpoint can serve as the terminus of numerically distinct vectors, so too a given creature can be the terminus of numerically distinct emanations; and just as a given vector is defined in part by its terminus and so could not have had any other terminus, so too the particular dependence or emanation that terminates in a given creature could not have terminated in any other creature. These two assertions, taken together, are sufficient to establish Suarez’s claim that the creature (endpoint) is modally distinct from the dependence (vector minus the endpoint).

Third, we can reasonably claim that the vector is, at least virtually, ‘in’ its endpoint, since the endpoint partially defines the vector and is, as it were, what the vector is aiming at. So, too, we can say that the dependence or emanation is, at least virtually, ‘in’ the creature as the terminus *ad quem* it is aimed at – even

151 *DM* 20.4.17.

though it is more accurate to say that the creature's dependence *establishes* it as a subsistent entity and for this reason does not presuppose it as an ontological subject. Rather, the dependence is a transcendental, and not categorial, relation linking the creature to its creator as its present and actual cause.

5.4 *Creation ab aeterno*

In section 5 of Disputation 20 Suarez asks whether creation *ex nihilo* entails a newness of being or whether instead some entity could have been created from eternity. By 'eternity' in the present context he means a duration without beginning that we can conceive of "in no way other than through its coexistence, as it were, with an imaginary infinite succession."¹⁵²

It is important to distinguish the question Suarez is asking here from the question of whether motion and time are possibly such that they have no beginning and are thus infinite *a parte ante*. On an Aristotelian philosophy of nature time is just a measure of motion and so if there were no motion, there would be no time. Thus, in creating a world with motion, God also creates time and determines its topological structure. The classical philosophical question of whether the world is (or is able to be) eternal can thus be reformulated in part as the question of whether the world is (possibly) such that in it motion and time stretch infinitely into the past without beginning.

However, in section 5 Suarez is concerned, as he puts it, with "the world's substance" and not with "its motion."¹⁵³ To understand this more clearly, we must first grasp the distinction between *permanent* entities and *successive* entities. The latter are entities which – like motions, changes, and, by extension, the temporal intervals that measure them – do not exist all at once as wholes; instead, their very nature is such that in order for them to exist as wholes, one part of them must succeed another. By contrast, corruptible and incorruptible substances are permanent entities whose substantial being or *esse* is not intrinsically successive but is had all at once – so that, leaving aside their operations, their *esse* itself

152 *DM* 20.5.13. In general, 'duration' signifies perseverance, but not necessarily succession, in either a substance's being (*esse*) or its operation (*agere*). Suarez distinguishes several species of duration, each corresponding to a particular type of being. The three types of 'permanent' duration are (a) God's duration (eternity, properly speaking), (b) the duration of ingenerable and incorruptible created substances (aeviternity), and (c) the duration of generable and corruptible substances and accidents. These durations are called 'permanent' because their subjects are permanent, as opposed to successive, entities – a distinction that I will explain in a moment. In the present context, then, the beings said to be created 'from eternity' are thought of as eternal in an extended sense, because they imitate God in having no beginning of existence, even though, unlike God, they are such that a beginning of existence is compatible with their natures. See Disputation 50 for Suarez's full treatment of duration.

153 *DM* 20.5.1.

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is had no more perfectly at one time than at another. In rebutting the claim that eternal existence is impossible for a creature because it would entail an infinite perfection on the part of the creature, Suarez himself puts it this way:

No real infinity within the created entity follows from eternal creation. For even though an eternal duration is called infinite by virtue of the fact that it lacks a beginning, what is adjoined to the creature in reality is not an infinite perfection, but rather one and the same perfection existing forever. In the same way, an angel's coexisting with or enduring for a thousand years of celestial motion is not, within the angel, a greater physical perfection than his existing for a single moment; rather, it is the very same perfection enduring as a whole without interruption.¹⁵⁴

So the question before us in section 5 is this: Could a permanent substance have been created from eternity with no beginning of its existence?

Above I gave a characterization of creation *de novo*, that is, creation involving a newness of being or beginning of existence. I will now adapt this account to creation *ab aeterno* in order to make the question before us more precise:

x* creates *y ex nihilo* and *ab aeterno if and only if (a) *y* is a subsistent entity, (b) *x* gives *esse-as-such* to *y*, and (c) there is no beginning of *x*'s giving *y esse-as-such*.

The question, then, is whether it is possible for a permanent subsistent entity, whether corruptible or incorruptible by its nature, to have received *esse-as-such ab aeterno*.

Suarez first asserts that no possible creature is such that its creation is intrinsically or necessarily eternal. This follows straightaway from the Catholic doctrines that (a) no act of creation was in fact eternal and that (b) God creates freely and not by a necessity of nature.¹⁵⁵ If creation *ab aeterno* is possible, it is possible merely because of God's power to freely create *ab aeterno* and not because there is any requirement – either on his part or on the part of his creative act or on the part of the thing created – that creation should be eternal.

However, Suarez next asserts that it is not incompatible with the nature of creation *ex nihilo* that the creation of some entity should be effected from eternity:

Actual newness of being – that is, not being effected from eternity – does not belong to the nature of creation. This is proved from the fact that a newness of being is not included in the definition of creation, correctly understood Either (a) the phrase 'out of nothing' is taken negatively, in which case it signifies the absence of a material cause, and on this

154 *DM* 20.5.14.

155 On Suarez's view, the second doctrine – that God creates freely – can be established within natural theology, though the first doctrine – that no act of creation was in fact eternal – cannot be. See *DM* 30.16.20–51.

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score there is no necessity for a newness of being, since even if creation were eternal, it could have been independent of a material cause; or else (b) the phrase 'out of nothing' denotes a relation to a terminus *a quo*, which has to be non-being absolutely speaking, and in that case it denotes merely an order of nature and not an order of duration This order of nature consists merely in the creature's having of itself no *esse* at all unless that *esse* is communicated by another through creation For this reason, even if it were created from eternity, it would still be created out of nothing.¹⁵⁶

This confirms the point, made above, that it is the giving and receiving of *esse*-as-such that lies at the heart of the notion of divine action, including creation *ex nihilo* and divine conservation. Thus, the duration of an entity created *ex nihilo* is incidental to the absolute dependence it has on God alone for its subsistent existence. This will be reemphasized below in the discussion of conservation.

Suarez's replies to two objections are worth looking at briefly. The first objection is that creation *ab aeterno* is impossible because it obliterates the distinction between creation and divine conservation. After all, an entity created from eternity would "never have been created but would always have been conserved – which seems plainly to involve a contradiction."¹⁵⁷ Suarez replies as follows:

Even in the case of an eternal creation it is possible to draw a conceptual distinction between creation and conservation. For insofar as this creation is said to exist absolutely in eternity itself as a simple participation in created *esse*, it has the nature of creation, whereas insofar as we envision within it a certain imaginary succession, it has the nature of conservation for any designated instant of that succession.¹⁵⁸

Following Suarez's suggestion that we speak here in terms of imaginary time, we can give the following characterization of conservation *ab aeterno*:

x* conserves *y* *ab aeterno if and only if there is some interval of imaginary time stretching back infinitely into the past such that for any instant *t* of that interval, *x* gives *esse*-as-such to *y* at *t*.

The second objection is that even if incorruptible beings could be created from eternity, corruptible beings could not be, since it is a contradiction that a corruptible being should exist for an infinitely long time. Suarez counters that an eternal creature could be either a corruptible or incorruptible being. For anything created from eternity must have remained unchanged for an infinitely long inter-

156 *DM* 20.5.14.

157 *DM* 20.5.2.

158 *DM* 20.5.20.

val of imaginary past time, and this condition is equally possible – and equally quaint – for both incorruptible beings and corruptible beings.

But why must an entity created *ab aeterno* have remained unchanged from eternity? The key to Suarez's answer is the premise that every change must have a beginning. His argument for this premise goes as follows: Any change presupposes that the subject of the change successively lacks and then acquires the form communicated by the agent of the change; but the subject cannot both lack the form from eternity and have it from eternity, because this would entail a contradiction; so no change could itself have existed from eternity, and thus every change must have a beginning.

With this premise in hand, take a substance S that has existed from eternity and designate t_i as the first moment at which a change occurs in S , that is, the first moment at which S has some form that it previously lacked. *Ex hypothesi*, S will have existed for an infinitely long time before t_i and, furthermore, will have existed *in its original state* for an infinitely long time before t_i . So a substance created from eternity will have existed in the same state from eternity before it begins to undergo change.

This is an intriguing argument. After all, it seems eminently reasonable to believe that any ordinary substance which begins to exist in time has a first instant of existence, and that at this first instant it is in a state which is presupposed by the changes that occur in it immediately after it begins to exist. Any such change, then, must have a beginning that occurs later than, though as close as you please to, the instant of the substance's coming-to-be. Now simply extend this argument to a substance created *ab aeterno*. Any such substance will have been created in a certain state, and any change that occurs in it will presuppose that original state. But in that case, no matter when the change begins, the substance to be changed will already have endured for an infinitely long time in its original state.¹⁵⁹

Still, one might reply that even if every change must have a beginning, it is less clear that there must be a beginning of change in a substance created from eternity. Why couldn't it be true that for any instant t_i of an infinite stretch of past imaginary time, a change in that substance begins before t_i ?

This point seems to be well taken. Notice, though, that even if there were no first change for a given substance created *ab aeterno*, every change in that substance would still have a first moment and hence would be preceded by an infinite stretch of past imaginary time. And that may be all that Suarez needs in order for his argument to go through.

In any case, from here he goes on to conclude that a corruptible substance can be created from eternity as long as no contrary agents act on it for an infinite stretch of past imaginary time. To be sure, if such a substance were a living being, it could exist from eternity only "in a preternatural state." But, Suarez contends, the same would be no less true of an incorruptible substance, since such substances naturally undergo constant change.

¹⁵⁹ Suarez proposes this very argument near the end of *DM* 20.5.16.

6 Disputation 21: Conservation

Suarez introduces Disputation 21 by tying together the three disputations on divine action:

Now that the first emanation of all entities from the First Cause has been explained, we must next talk about the sort of continuous or perpetual dependence these entities have on that same First Cause for their *esse* and operation – or, conversely, about the influence or governance that the same First Cause exercises over the effects he has created in order that they might be able to subsist and to act.¹⁶⁰

Disputation 21 deals with the First Cause's conserving influence on the *esse* or subsistence of the beings he has produced, while Disputation 22 discusses his general influence on the natural operations or actions of those beings.

In my discussion of divine conservation I will treat in reverse order the topics that Suarez takes up in the three sections of Disputation 21. I will first explain the three modes of conservation, then discuss the distinction between creation and conservation, and, lastly, examine the two principal arguments Suarez offers for the thesis that divine conservation is necessary for the continued existence of finite substances.

6.1 Three modes of conservation

In section 3 of Disputation 21 Suarez isolates the sense in which the conservation of finite substances is a divine prerogative. He does this by distinguishing, with St. Thomas, three distinct ways in which an agent may be said to conserve an already existent substance.¹⁶¹

In the loosest sense, an agent conserves a substance not by positively communicating any sort of *esse* to it, but simply by counteracting or removing agents whose action would otherwise contribute to the substance's being corrupted and thus ceasing to exist. Suarez calls this *per accidens* conservation. A moment's reflection reveals that only corruptible substances can be conserved *per accidens*, and that secondary or created agents can directly contribute to the *per accidens* conservation of corruptible substances. Thus, *per accidens* conservation is not reserved to God alone.

A stronger mode of conservation is what Suarez calls *per se and mediate* conservation. An agent conserves a substance in this way when it effects "the influx or inpouring of certain dispositions or forms which are required in order for that thing to be conserved in *esse*."¹⁶² So an agent is a *per se* and mediate

¹⁶⁰ DM 21.introduction.

¹⁶¹ In what follows I will be concerned mainly with the conservation of substances, even though Suarez spends the last two-thirds of section 3 discussing various disagreements concerning the conservation of accidents. I will return to accidents at the end of Part 6.

¹⁶² DM 21.3.2.

conserving cause of the substance in question by virtue of being a *per se* and immediate *productive* cause of certain accidents in that substance, namely, accidents through the mediation of which the substance is able to resist corruption. Take the case of a living organism. Suarez has in mind various agents (e.g., the sun and other providers of heat and light, oxygen, foods, liquids, etc.) which directly contribute to the organism's health and well-being in a way required for the continuation of its life. Clearly, *per se* and mediate conservation can be exercised by those many secondary agents that effect and maintain the various internal characteristics without which the subject of those characteristics would not long survive as a member of its natural kind; and so this type of conservation is not a divine prerogative. As St. Thomas puts it, "In the very creation of things God institutes an order such that some of them depend on others through which they are secondarily conserved in *esse*."¹⁶³ Once again, it is clear that only corruptible substances can be conserved *per se* and remotely. What's more, *per se* and remote conservation is clearly an action whose subject is the conserved substance itself. For a *per se* and remote conserving cause helps sustain a given substance by communicating certain accidents to it.

Still, we can conceive of a more fundamental type of conserving action which has the conserved substance as its terminus *ad quem* rather than as its subject, and which is, as it were, an extension of the original production of the substance. Suarez calls this *per se* and *immediate* conservation and describes it as "the persisting influx or inpouring of the very *esse* which was communicated through the production" of the substance.¹⁶⁴ So a substance can be conserved *per se* and immediately only by an agent that is at least capable of having been a *per se* and immediate cause of its production.

Below I will examine two of Suarez's arguments for the claim that *per se* and immediate conservation is necessary for the persistence of every finite substance. But assuming for now that such conservation is indeed necessary, Suarez considers it utterly obvious that only God, acting by himself, can be a *per se* and immediate conserver of those substances that have no intrinsic potentiality for undergoing dissolution or corruption – namely, immaterial substances (angels and human souls) and incorruptible material entities (celestial bodies on an Aristotelian cosmology, atoms in the classical sense if there are any, and the primary matter that serves as an essential part of all corruptible substances). For such entities can be produced only through creation *ex nihilo* properly speaking, and given that no finite agent is capable of participating as a principal efficient cause in their production, no such agent can effect their conservation *per se* and immediately.¹⁶⁵ To the contrary, these entities can be conserved *per se* and immediately only by an agent capable of creating them *ex nihilo*.

163 *Summa Theologiae* 1, q. 104, a. 2, ad 1.

164 *DM* 21.3.2.

165 Can a created substance serve as an instrumental, rather than principal, cause of con-

The case of corruptible material substances is more problematic, since their production normally depends on created agents as *per se* efficient causes. To be sure, it is clear that if such substances require *per se* and immediate conservation, God must act to conserve them, since the conservation of their matter cannot be effected without his influence. What's more, it is certainly possible for God to effect the *per se* and immediate conservation of such substances by acting alone without the cooperation of any created cause. Nonetheless, it is not immediately evident why the conservation of these substances as composites of form and matter might not, like their production, be effected by a cooperative action on the part of God and created agents.

Suarez, however, argues at some length that only God, acting by himself, can be a *per se* and immediate conserver of corruptible material substances. For, first of all, the univocal generating causes of corruptible substances – for example, the parents of animals – are clearly not *per se* and immediate conservers of the substances they generate.¹⁶⁶ To the contrary, a generated substance depends on its univocal generating causes only as causes of its 'being-made' (*causa fieri*), and it is able to go on existing even if its generating causes cease to exist. Nor, Suarez argues, do any other created agents, corruptible or incorruptible, ever conserve a corruptible substance *per se* and immediately, even if they might have played a causal role in its production. For that role would have consisted in their being instrumental causes of certain antecedent alterations that are required naturally for the generation of a given kind of substance, and this sort of causal influence ceases once the substance in question has been produced.¹⁶⁷ It follows that even if God might have cooperated with created agents in *producing* corruptible substances, it is only by acting alone that he *conserves* such substances *per se* and immediately – assuming, once again, that such conservation is required for the continued existence of a generated substance.

This conclusion should come as no surprise. After all, if *per se* and immediate conservation is on a metaphysical par with production, then it is not an action on the conserved substance as a subject – just as production does not involve an action on the substance that is produced. In the case of production *ex nihilo*, the action has no subject at all, whereas in the case of production through generation, the subject of the action is the matter which serves as an essential component of the produced substance and which is formed into a substance of a given natural kind. Thus, in both cases the substance produced is the terminus *ad quem* of the productive action rather than its subject. But then, analogously, *per se* and imme-

servation? It seems that the answer is affirmative if and only if a created substance can serve as an instrumental cause of creation *ex nihilo*. See Part 5.2 above.

166 As noted in Part 3.1 above, a *univocal* cause of a given effect is one that communicates a form exactly similar to one that it itself has. In cases of efficient causality in which this condition is not satisfied, the agent is called an *equivocal* cause.

167 See *DM* 21.3.6–7.

mediate conservation must also consist, not in an action on the corruptible substance, but in the very emanation of that substance as a whole, along with all its parts and accidents – so that if the conserving action were to cease, the substance would *immediately* cease to exist. But Suarez is surely correct in insisting that no corruptible substance depends on a created agent for this sort of causal influence. If anything, it would seem much more reasonable to deny the necessity for *per se* and immediate conservation in the first place than to assert that a created agent is capable of effecting it.

With this in mind, we can propose the following thesis about *per se* and immediate conservation:¹⁶⁸

Agent *x* **conserves** subsistent entity *y* ***per se* and immediately** at *t* only if (a) for some temporal interval *i* that includes *t* but begins before *t*, *y* exists throughout *i*, and (b) *x* gives *esse*-as-such to *y* at *t*.

In short, it seems eminently reasonable to believe that, like creation *ex nihilo*, the *per se* and immediate conservation of a subsistent entity is an action without a subject and a communication of *esse*-as-such. So if this sort of conservation is indeed required for the continued existence of a subsistent entity, then it can be effected only by an agent capable of creating *ex nihilo*. Therefore, only God is able to conserve a substance *per se* and immediately.

6.2 Conservation and creation

This explication of *per se* and immediate conservation dovetails nicely with the traditional scholastic view, mentioned above, that the same divine action lies at the heart of both creation *ex nihilo* and divine conservation. But here we have to draw a distinction between (a) substances that come into existence through creation *ex nihilo*, properly speaking, and (b) substances that come into existence through generation.

In the case of a substance that has been created *ex nihilo* and *de novo*, God's *per se* and immediate conservation of that substance is just the very same action as his creating it *ex nihilo*. For the creation and conservation are the very same exercise of active power, by the very same agent, with the very same effect, throughout a continuous interval of time. So in this sort of case God's communication of *esse*-as-such to the substance is simply one action extended through time. Notice, though, that the way in which creation and conservation constitute

168 I have stated this thesis in terms of subsistent entities, because Suarez maintains that certain types of accidents can be conserved *per se* and immediately by secondary causes. These include, among others, thoughts conceived of as immaterial mental accidents; for thoughts exist only as long as the intellect that has them gives them *esse*. But God's action as a *per se* and immediate conserver is also required, and, furthermore, since what is being conserved in such cases is an accident that inheres in a subject, this sort of conservation is an action on a subject and not the conservation of a subsistent entity. See *DM* 21.3.10–17. I will return briefly to accidents in Part 6.3.

the same action is different from the way in which, say, a single alteration is the same action throughout the interval in which it occurs. For the alteration by its nature continuously approaches its terminus *ad quem* and thus is essentially a *successive* entity that must last for an interval of time in order to be the action it is. By contrast, the conservation that follows immediately upon creation *ex nihilo* is an extension in time of an action that had attained its terminus *ad quem* at its very first instant. And unlike generation, which is also instantaneous, this action attained its terminus *ad quem* with no causal preparation. So it is incidental – and not essential – to this action that it should persist through time. That is why Suarez claims that the “conservation corresponding to creation” is, like the subsistent *esse* it effects, a *permanent*, rather than successive, entity.¹⁶⁹ Further, as we saw above, essentially the same account holds for God’s conservation of a substance that is created *ex nihilo* and *ab aeterno*.

However, the case of generated substances is different from this, because here the production and the conservation are two distinct actions. This is evident from the fact that the agents differ in the two cases. Generation always has created agents among its efficient causes and is always an action on a subject, whereas we have already seen a persuasive argument for the claim that the *per se* and immediate conservation of a created substance is an action without a subject and can be effected only by God acting alone. So in the case of a generated substance, God concurs with created agents in the production of the substance but then conserves it *per se* and immediately by himself alone.

Of course, we have not yet looked into the question of how it is that God concurs with created agents in their production of substances and accidents; this is the topic of Disputation 22. But given that God does so concur, it follows that the production of generated substances differs from their *per se* and immediate conservation – even though, to be sure, their production itself presupposes the previous creation *ex nihilo* of the matter that they have as an essential part.

6.3 *The necessity for conservation*

So far we have been assuming that created substances need to be conserved *per se* and immediately in order to persist in existence. Why does Suarez accept this thesis?

His first answer is that the doctrine “that all beings outside of God depend for their *esse* on divine conservation is absolutely certain and part of the Faith,”¹⁷⁰ and he cites extensive evidence from Sacred Scripture and from the Fathers and Doctors of the Church in support of this assertion. But, of course, his principal task in the present context is to ascertain whether this doctrine can be proved by natural reason, and in fact he believes that it can be.

Here I will lay out his two most interesting arguments for this doctrine. In these arguments, he once again assumes the existence of God as a perfect being and First Agent.

¹⁶⁹ See *DM* 21.2.4.

¹⁷⁰ *DM* 21.1.4.

The first argument is borrowed from St. Thomas.¹⁷¹ Even if a substance might in fact be produced by certain secondary agents, it does not absolutely require the action of any secondary cause in order to exist. For every generable substance is such that God is able, acting by himself alone, to create that substance *ex nihilo*. So, to use St. Thomas's technical term, a created cause that produces a substance is a cause just with respect to the substance's being made in a certain way (*causa secundum fieri tantum*). By contrast, all beings other than God essentially depend on God for their existence. For each such being is either a substance, a part of a substance, or an accident. If it is a substance, then either it itself or some essential part of it must have been created *ex nihilo*. If it is an accident or a part of a substance, then its existence depends upon the existence of a substance whose own existence presupposes God's having created something *ex nihilo*. So, claims St. Thomas, for every entity outside of himself God is not just a cause with respect to that entity's being-made but a cause with respect to its *esse* (*causa secundum esse eius*). After rejecting a question-begging interpretation of this claim, Suarez explains it as follows:

God is a cause of his effects in such a way that by their intrinsic nature, and with an intrinsic necessity, they require that cause in order to exist. For, as we explained above, they depend essentially on that cause.¹⁷²

But now we should remind ourselves of why finite substances, ingenerable as well as generable, require some agent's action in order to exist. It is because they do not exist of themselves (*ex se*) or by their very essence; that is, there is nothing about them that demands that they should exist or have existed at all. So at the very least they require a cause in order to come into existence. But the mere fact that they already exist as subsistent beings does not alter their status as beings whose substantial *esse* requires a cause. In this regard, any other moment of their existence is on a par with the first moment of their existence. But we have already seen that God is the only cause capable of sustaining the effect of a substance's production after the moment of production. Therefore, once a finite substance has been produced, God conserves it by his active influence for as long as it exists:

If a participated *esse*, by reason of itself alone, requires the influence of the First Agent in order to exist in reality at some given time, then it requires that same influence at any time at which it exists. For it is always the same *esse*, and whatever belongs to it *per se* and primarily always belongs to it.¹⁷³

And because God conserves every subsistent entity *per se* and immediately, it follows that he likewise conserves *per se* and immediately all of the sub-

171 See *Summa Theologiae* 1, q. 104, a. 1.

172 *DM* 21.1.9.

173 *DM* 21.1.12.

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stance's parts and accidents, including its causal powers and susceptibilities. This point will become important below when we discuss God's general concurrence.

The second argument is quite ingenious. Suarez takes it to be obvious that all finite entities depend on God at least *permissively* for their continued existence; that is, they continue to exist only because God as the First Agent at least permits them to exist. What's more, it is not just their non-corruption that depends on God in this way, but the very fact that they are something rather than, literally, nothing at all. So it is only by God's permission that any given finite entity is not reduced to nothingness. For, as Suarez argues,

it pertains to God's omnipotence that he should be able, if he so wills, to reduce the entities he has created to nothingness; therefore, in order for those entities to be conserved in *esse*, what is required at the very least is God's permission, which consists in his not willing to reduce them to nothingness even while he is able to.¹⁷⁴

Given the assumption that God exists and is a perfect being, it seems eminently reasonable to believe that he is capable of annihilating any finite being. After all, given that creation *ex nihilo* has been shown to be possible, it is hard to imagine why anyone would balk at the possibility of annihilation. If there is nothing incoherent in the concept of annihilation, and if, further, God is omnipotent, then it follows that God is able to annihilate, just as he is able to create *ex nihilo*. But once these points are granted, Suarez easily reaches the conclusion that God must conserve entities not just permissively but *positively*, that is, through an actual causal influence:

[This] is proved both from the fact that (a) there are many entities that cannot be deprived of their *esse* by a contrary action, for example, angels and other simple entities; and also from the fact that (b) every positive action necessarily tends toward some *esse*, and thus if God always needed an action in order to destroy entities, he would not be able to annihilate them; therefore, in order for their annihilation to be possible, he must be able to annihilate them just by withholding his action or influence; but this cannot be the case except insofar as they depend on that influence and action for their *esse* and being-conserved.¹⁷⁵

Every action has a formal terminus *ad quem*, namely, the *esse* that it communicates.¹⁷⁶ So even if an action corrupts some material substance, it does so only by introducing forms which are incompatible with that substance's continued existence. Thus, corruptive action, unlike annihilation, leaves some positive entity in its wake. It follows that the literal annihilation of a substance can be brought about only by an *omission* on God's part, that is, by his ceasing to give

174 *DM* 21.1.14.

175 *DM* 21.1.14.

176 See *DM* 18.11.7 for Suarez's compelling argument for this claim.

esse-as-such to that substance. Therefore, if God is capable of annihilating a substance that now exists, then it follows that he is presently conserving that substance *per se* and immediately.

This strikes me as a very nifty argument. For given the other assumptions noted above, it derives the thesis of divine conservation just from the weak premise that God is able to annihilate the substances he has brought into existence.

7 Disputation 22: God's General Concurrence

By the end of Disputation 21 Suarez takes himself to have established that every effect depends on God *per se* and immediately for its *conservation*. One way to broach the topic of section 1 of Disputation 22 is to ask whether every effect likewise depends on God *per se* and immediately for its *production*. When the production takes place directly through creation *ex nihilo*, the answer is obviously affirmative. But the more problematic case is production through the communication of an accidental or substantial form, since such production is normally effected by the action of secondary causes.

The question can be put in a slightly different way by asking whether God acts *per se* and immediately in every action of a created or secondary cause. To be sure, God *per se* and immediately conserves created agents with their active powers at the very time when they are engaged in their productive activity. But from this it follows only "that God's influence is required remotely and *per accidens* for the action of any created cause."¹⁷⁷ The question now being posed is whether every action of a created agent is literally a single *cooperative* action with the First Agent, an action in which God and the created agent are both *per se* and immediate causes of the very same effect at the very same time.

In reply to these questions, Suarez holds that (a) every effect depends on God *per se* and immediately for its production and that (b) in order for created agents to act in any way or to effect anything at all, they require God's *per se* and immediate cooperation, that is, his 'general concurrence'. Disputation 22 is devoted to an explication and defense of this 'concurrentist' thesis.

We might note in passing that, unlike other parts of natural theology, the topic of God's general concurrence does not have deep roots in classical pagan metaphysics. For even though Suarez notes at one point that God's general concurrence "does not seem to have been entirely unknown even to the philosophers,"¹⁷⁸ he begins Disputation 22 with the observation that "one finds few remarks by Aristotle or the other philosophers about the First Cause's concurrence with secondary causes as regards their actions."¹⁷⁹ This is one case in which divine revelation has opened up for natural reason a set of questions that might otherwise have been neglected or at least given short shrift. For, as Suarez

177 DM 22.1.1.

178 DM 22.1.13.

179 DM 22.Introduction.

is at pains to show, the reality and nature of God's general concurrence with the actions of secondary causes can be established without explicit appeal to Christian revelation.

I will begin by outlining the basic account of God's general concurrence that Suarez shares in common with his (mainly Thomistic) rivals. Then, after discussing his principal arguments for the necessity of such concurrence, I will explain his criticisms of those positions according to which God's concurrence involves something in addition to the very action by which the secondary cause's effect is produced. Finally, I will examine his own distinctive account of God's general concurrence with the free actions of rational creatures, including their sinful actions.

7.1 The basic account of God's concurrence with secondary causes

The precise mode of God's influence in the ordinary course of nature has been a subject of debate within all the major theistic intellectual traditions, though it is within the Catholic tradition that this debate has been conducted with the most philosophical sophistication. Historically, the problem of divine action in the natural world – or, alternatively, the problem of secondary causality – emerged from reflection upon narrower but more immediately pressing problems. Within medieval Islamic thought, the rising influence of neo-Platonic necessitarianism, with its rejection of the possibility of miraculous divine action, prompted orthodox thinkers to formulate accounts of God's constant activity in the natural world as a backdrop against which the possibility of miracles might be persuasively defended. This was the origin of the occasionalist denial of secondary causality. Within Catholic scholasticism, on the other hand, it was chiefly puzzlement over God's causal involvement with sinful human actions that led eventually to general treatments of divine action in the natural world, with St. Thomas himself being “the first scholastic doctor to treat this question in a special place, that is, detached from the problem of the cause of sin, and to extend it explicitly to all natural operations, whether they be operations of nature or of the will.”¹⁸⁰

In Disputation 22 Suarez simply assumes that created substances do in fact act as genuine efficient causes, since he has already argued in Disputation 18 against the occasionalists.¹⁸¹ His first target is instead Durandus de Saint-Pourçain, a fourteenth-century Dominican who held that God contributes to the actions of created substances *solely* by creating and conserving them along with their active causal powers, and that created agents for their part can and do cause their effects without any immediate divine influence. So, according to Durandus, when created substances directly produce an effect, they *alone* are the *per se* and

180 Eduardo Iglesias, S.J., *De Deo in Operatione Naturae vel Voluntatis Operante* (Mexico City: Buena Prensa, 1946), p. 102.

181 See *DM* 18.1. For more on the arguments of Suarez, Molina, and St. Thomas against occasionalism, see my “Medieval Aristotelianism and the Case against Secondary Causation in Nature.”

immediate causes of that effect, whereas God is merely a remote cause of the effect by virtue of his conserving action. Consequently, the actions of created substances are their own actions and not God's actions; and at the moment at which the effects of such causes are produced, those effects do not depend immediately on God, but instead depend *per se* and immediately only on their created causes.

Durandus is convinced that there is no philosophically adequate way to conceive of an immediate concurrence on God's part with created causes. For it seems that any account of the putative cooperative action between God and a secondary cause will have to divide the effect or at least the action. But if the effect is divided into one part caused immediately by God and another part caused immediately by the secondary cause, then the secondary agent will cause its part of the effect by itself – which is contrary to the concurrentist thesis. By the same token, if the action is divided into two, then the secondary cause's action will in principle be independent of God's action – which, once again, is contrary to concurrentism. But suppose the concurrentist claims, as Suarez in fact does, that the same effect is wholly from God and wholly from the secondary cause by one and the same action? This, Durandus retorts, is impossible:

It is possible for numerically the same action to be immediately from two agents but from neither completely, as when two people are dragging a boat or when two candles are causing one light; for the movement of the boat is not completely from either one, and the illumination of the air is not from either candle by itself and perfectly. In such cases two incomplete agents take the place of one complete agent. But there appears to be no possible way for the action to be immediately and completely from each without its being the case that numerically the same principle or numerically the same power is in both of them.¹⁸²

But God and creatures obviously do not act by the same power. So, it seems, concurrentism must be false.

I will now outline the basic account of God's general concurrence which Suarez shares in common with his Thomistic rivals and which he takes to be immune to Durandus's objections. There are five main tenets of this concurrentist position. The first is that God is a *per se* and immediate cause of any effect produced by a created agent, while the second is that in producing such an effect, God and the created agent act by the very same cooperative action. These two points have already been touched upon.

The third tenet is that God and the secondary agent act by different powers within diverse orders of causality. More specifically, the secondary agent acts by

182 Durandus de Saint-Pourçain, *In Sententias Theologicas Petri Lombardi* II (Venice, 1571; reprinted at Ridgewood, N.J., 1964), dist. 1, q. 5, § 12. I have explored Durandus's arguments more thoroughly in "God's General Concurrence with Secondary Causes: Pitfalls and Prospects," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 67 (1994): 131–156.

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its created or natural powers as a *particular* cause of the effect, whereas God acts by his uncreated power as a *general* or *universal* cause of the effect.

This tenet, which encapsulates the concurrentist reply to Durandus, requires careful unpacking. Concurrentists are committed to the view that when God cooperates with a secondary agent to produce a given effect *per se* and immediately, the contributions of God and the secondary agent are complementary. The problem is to formulate a satisfactory metaphysical characterization of this complementarity that (a) will not dissolve into occasionalism by rendering the secondary cause's contribution superfluous and that (b) will not dissolve into Durandus's position by rendering God's contribution superfluous.

The only viable way to do this is to claim that certain features or aspects of the unitary effect are traceable primarily to God and that certain other features of the unitary effect are traceable primarily to the secondary agents.¹⁸³ Accordingly, concurrentists claim that God acts as a universal cause whose proper effect is *esse-as-such*, while the secondary cause, so to speak, directs God's universal agency toward its own proper effect, that is, toward a particular effect to which its natural powers are ordered in the relevant concrete circumstances. This should not be understood to mean that God's concurrence is exactly similar in every instance of secondary causality or that it is, as it were, an "indifferent" influence that is somehow particularized by the secondary cause. To the contrary, in each instance God's action and the secondary cause's action are one and the same action, and so just as the actions of secondary causes are obviously multifarious in species, so too God's concurrence varies in species from one circumstance to another.¹⁸⁴ Rather, the point of calling God a universal cause of the effects of secondary agents is, in part, that any communication of *esse* by a secondary agent is a participation or sharing in God's own communication of *esse-as-such*, and that God's manner of allowing for this participation is to tailor his proper causal influence in each case to what is demanded by the natures of the relevant secondary agents.

Given this, it seems reasonable to claim that one and the same effect is from God insofar as it is something rather than nothing and from its secondary causes insofar as it is an effect of a certain species. For example, a newly conceived armadillo is from God insofar as it is something rather than nothing and from its parents insofar as it is an animal of the species *armadillo* rather than some other sort of effect.¹⁸⁵ This formulation seems to capture both (a) the idea that a sec-

183 In "God's General Concurrence with Secondary Causes: Pitfalls and Prospects" I develop this theme at more length. There I try to show that if we conceive of principal causality and instrumental causality as different orders of causality, then ordinary instrumental causality can serve as a fitting analogue of God's concurrence with secondary causes. In particular, it is reasonable to claim that in cases of instrumental causality various features of given effects can be traced back primarily to the principal cause and other features primarily to the instrument.

184 See *DM* 22.4.8 for an explicit enunciation of this claim.

185 According to Suarez, another aspect of the effect that is traced back to God's con-

ondary cause's communication of *esse* presupposes God's contribution and (b) the idea that the particular type of *esse* communicated in any instance of secondary causality stems from the natures of the relevant secondary causes. In summary, then, the effect is undivided and yet such that both its universal or general cause and its particular causes contribute to its production in distinctive and non-redundant modes.

By contrast, if God had acted by himself to create the baby armadillo *ex nihilo*, then he would have been a particular cause of it.¹⁸⁶ As things stand, however, his cooperative influence is merely general or universal in the sense that he allows the active powers of the relevant secondary agents to determine the specific nature of the very same effect that his own influence plays an essential role in producing. In short, the manner of his concurring is adapted in each case to the natures of the relevant secondary agents and is different from the mode of acting he would have engaged in if he had caused the relevant effect by himself. A secondary agent, on the other hand, cannot act at all or communicate *esse* to any effect independently of God's general concurrence, since its power, even if sufficient for the effect within the order of secondary causes, needs God's concurrence in order to be exercised. As Suarez puts it, God's readiness to grant his concurrence to a created agent in a set of concrete circumstances is one of the prerequisites for that agent's acting in those circumstances. But an agent is 'proximately able' to act, or 'in proximate potency' for acting, only when *all* the prerequisites for its acting have been posited in reality. It follows that even though a created agent might have a power which is sufficient within its own order for a given effect, it is not proximately able to produce the effect without God's readiness to grant his concurrence for that very effect.¹⁸⁷

Thus, in holding that God acts as both a *universal* and *immediate* cause of the effects of secondary agents, the concurrentists delineate a mode of cooperative action that defines a middle position between occasionalism, which in essence holds that God is a *particular* cause of every effect produced in the world, and Durandus' position, which holds that God is only a *remote* – that is, *non-immediate* – cause of the effects produced by secondary agents. What's more, the distinction between universal and particular causality gives the concurrentists the resources to explain how two agents, operating by different powers and in different orders of causality, can produce one and the same effect by a single cooperative action.

currence is the fact that the form produced is *this* singular form rather than some other exactly similar form. See Part 7.2 below. So while the *kind* or *species* of the effect is traced back to the secondary cause, its *singularity* is traced back to God.

186 See *DM* 22.4.9.

187 See *DM* 22.4.6. Suarez calls this readiness on God's part "the concurrence in first act," as opposed to "the concurrence in second act," which is the actual concurrence and identical with the cooperative action between God and the secondary cause. This distinction will become crucial below in the discussion of free action.

The fourth tenet is that the secondary cause's contribution to the effect is subordinate to God's contribution. As Suarez puts it:

If we draw a conceptual distinction between the action insofar as it is from the First Cause and the action insofar as it is from the secondary cause, then the action can be said to be from the First Cause in a prior and more principal way than from the secondary cause; and, similarly, the First Cause will be said to have his influence on the action prior in nature to the secondary cause's having its influence on it. For, first of all, the First Cause is a higher cause and influences the effect in a more noble and more independent way. Second, the First Cause is related to the action *per se* and primarily under a more universal concept, since the First Cause has an influence on every effect or action whatsoever precisely because *every* effect or action has some share in being. The secondary cause, on the other hand, always has its influence under some posterior and more determinate concept of being.¹⁸⁸

The fifth and final tenet is that in any given case the cooperative action of God and the secondary cause with respect to a given effect is such that the influence actually exercised by the one would not have existed or effected anything at all in the absence of the influence exercised by the other. This follows from the fact that a secondary cause is unable to effect anything without God's concurrence, taken together with the fact that in any given concrete situation God's general concurrence complements the particular concurrence of the secondary cause and hence does not overdetermine the effect.

Putting these five tenets together, we can formulate the following concurrentist thesis:

Necessarily, for any created agent x , action a , effect y , and time t , x acts by means of a as a *per se* and immediate particular cause of y at t only if (a) God acts by means of a as a *per se* and immediate general cause of y at t , and (b) x 's causal contribution to y at t by means of a is subordinated to God's causal contribution to y at t by means of a , and (c) God's general causal contribution to a exists at t if and only if x 's particular causal contribution to a exists at t .

This, then, is the sort of divine cooperation with secondary causes that Suarez is concerned to defend. Below I will fill out this picture by exploring the differences between Suarez's full account of God's concurrence and that of his Thomistic opponents. But first I want to look briefly at five of the arguments he proposes in section 1 on behalf of the claim that God's general concurrence is required for the actions of secondary causes.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁸ *DM* 22.3.10.

¹⁸⁹ I have looked at some of these arguments in more detail in "God's General Concurrence with Secondary Causes: Why Conservation is Not Enough," *Philosophical Perspectives* 5 (1991): 553–585.

7.2 *The necessity for God's general concurrence*

The first two of the arguments I will examine attempt to show that the doctrine of God's general concurrence is entailed by, or at least closely connected with, the already established claim that God conserves every finite being *per se* and immediately:

[The true] position is that God acts *per se* and immediately in every action of a creature, and that this influence of his is absolutely necessary in order for a creature to effect anything [This] can be sufficiently proved by natural reason. To begin with, this truth seems clearly to be entailed by what was said above about conservation, so that for this reason, too, it is almost as certain in the Faith that God effects all things immediately as that he conserves all things immediately.¹⁹⁰

The thrust of these two arguments is that concurrentism follows straight-away once we recall that a principal ground for the doctrine of divine conservation is the premise that every finite entity depends on God not just with respect to its being-made but also with respect to its *esse*. That is, every finite entity essentially requires God's causal activity in order to exist. But given that God's proper effect is *esse*-as-such and that every finite entity participates in *esse*, it seems natural to express this essential dependence of creatures on God by the following general thesis:

Necessarily, for any finite entity x and time t such that x exists at t , God gives *esse*-as-such to x at t .

And this thesis entails that God is a *per se* and immediate cause of any entity produced by secondary causes at the very moment when that entity is produced. So the first two arguments are meant to highlight a deep tension between Durandus' acceptance of the doctrine of divine conservation, on the one hand, and his rejection of the doctrine of God's general concurrence on the other.

The first argument for what Suarez calls this "first line of reasoning" goes like this:

This first line of reasoning is proved, first of all, by the fact that if it is not the case that all things are effected immediately by God, then neither is it the case that they are conserved immediately, given that an entity is related to its *esse* in the same way that it is related to its being-made. For an entity's *esse* cannot depend more on an adequate cause *after* it has come to be than it did *while* it was coming to be. Likewise, if the cause depends on God for its *esse*, then the effect will, too, since both are beings-through-participation. Therefore, just as the cause is dependent at the instant at which it acts, so too the effect is dependent at the instant at which it comes to be, since they are both beings-through-participation at that instant as well. Therefore, every effect of a secondary cause depends

190 *DM* 22.1.6.

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on God for its being-made, and as a result a secondary cause can do nothing without God's concurrence.¹⁹¹

Now Durandus might try to evade this argument by denying the general thesis formulated above and substituting for it the weaker thesis that a finite entity depends on God *either* mediately *or* immediately at every moment at which it exists. Why, he might ask, can't the secondary causes of an effect be "adequate causes" of it at the moment of its production and even perhaps – in the case of some accidents – for at least a short time thereafter? Then, once the effect's secondary causes cease to act, God can step in to conserve it *per se* and immediately. After all, even on the concurrentist view God acts with a greater efficacy when conserving an effect *per se* and immediately by himself alone than he does when producing the effect by his general concurrence.

Suarez is well aware of this way out:

Perhaps Durandus will reply that (a) for as long as the effects of secondary causes are being produced or conserved by those causes, they are being effected or conserved by God only mediately, but that (b) when the secondary cause's action ceases, then God conserves the effect immediately by himself, despite the fact that it had been produced immediately by the secondary cause alone; for no created entity can either have or retain *esse* without an efficient cause. And so as long as the secondary cause is immediately acting, it itself suffices; but when it ceases to act, then in order for the entity to endure in *esse*, God must act to conserve it – just as we ourselves likewise claim that when the secondary cause ceases to act, then the First Cause uses more power and efficacy.¹⁹²

Suarez counters this objection by pointing out that if the effect can exist without God's immediate influence at the moment it is produced, then it does not essentially require God's immediate influence in order to exist. So then why should it require God's *per se* and immediate influence to continue in existence after the causes that produced it cease to act? Why won't a mediate influence suffice for conservation as well? Durandus seems to have no satisfactory reply to this question. Yet given the arguments that establish the necessity for *per se* and immediate divine conservation, it seems wholly unwarranted to even countenance the possibility that only a mediate influence on God's part is required for a finite entity's conservation. In short, Durandus' position tends to undermine his own acceptance of the doctrine that God conserves all creatures *per se* and immediately.

Hence, one of the principal grounds for the thesis that God *conserves* every being *per se* and immediately seems to lead ineluctably to the thesis that God *produces* every being *per se* and immediately. This same ground figures as well

191 DM 22.1.7.

192 DM 22.1.7.

in the second argument for the “first line of reasoning,” which invokes the existential claim that the action, as a mode of the effect, is itself a participated or finite being. Here Suarez begins by pointing out that, according to Durandus, the secondary cause’s action, conceived of as an entity distinct from the agent and the effect, does not itself require God’s immediate and *per se* influence in order to exist. To be sure, this action is not itself the secondary cause’s effect, but is instead ‘co-produced’ in the production of the effect. Still, it is a distinct entity which, according to Durandus, has its immediate origin solely from the secondary agent and not from God, and so it does not essentially depend on God for its *esse* at any moment of its existence. But if the action does not depend on God’s *per se* and immediate influence, then by parity of reasoning there is no basis for insisting that the form produced by the agent should depend on God’s *per se* and immediate conservation once its producing causes cease to act. For if one finite or ‘participated’ entity – namely, the action itself – can exist without God’s immediate action, there is no reason why another finite entity – namely, the action’s effect – should require God’s immediate action in order to exist.

So while the first argument focused on the entity or form that terminates the action, this second argument focuses on the action itself. But the theme is similar: If Durandus is willing to affirm that finite entities are able to exist even for short intervals without God’s *per se* and immediate influence, then he has no good reason to affirm the doctrine of divine conservation.

The third argument aims not to establish a deep tension among the defining tenets of Durandus’s position, but rather to show that even if his position does not suffer from irremediable internal tensions, it nonetheless does not do full justice to God’s sovereignty as the First Agent over the created world.

This argument draws attention to a certain type of miracle recorded in Sacred Scripture, the distinguishing feature of which is that even while God accomplishes the miracle by himself, the relevant created agents and patients are poised for the production of an effect directly contrary to the miraculous effect. St. Thomas, in distinguishing such miracles from those that are *supra naturam* and others that are *praeter naturam*, labels them *contra naturam* miracles:

[A miracle] is called *contra naturam* when there remains in nature a disposition that is contrary to the effect that God works, as when he kept the young men unharmed in the furnace even though the power to incinerate them remained in the fire [Daniel 3], and as when the waters of the Jordan stood still even though gravity remained in them [Josue 3].¹⁹³

Using as his example the miracle of the three young men in the fiery furnace, Suarez argues in effect that Durandus’s position fails to give a satisfying meta-

193 *De Potentia*, q. 6, art. 2, ad 3. *Supra naturam* miracles involve effects that no created agent is capable of producing in any way or under any circumstances, and *praeter naturam* miracles involve effects that created agents are capable of producing but not capable of producing as quickly or as directly or with as much abundance as God produces them.

physical account of *contra naturam* miracles, since it entails that in order for God to protect the young men from the intense heat of the fire, he must hinder the fire from without. For according to Durandus, the fire's action is its own action and not God's and so, given that the fire is a 'natural agent' that acts by a necessity of nature once all the prerequisites for its action have been posited, it will automatically incinerate any human body brought near it. Because of this, God can save the young men only if he counteracts the fire by removing one of the prerequisites for its incinerating the young men. But to accomplish this, he must either act directly against the fire or else impose some external impediment to its action.

But, says Suarez, this detracts from God's sovereignty over the created world. Why so? Because God does not have to *act against* natural agents *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. *Pace* Durandus, it is not enough to reserve to God the power, say, to miraculously extinguish the fire, or to miraculously interpose a natural impediment between the flesh and the fire by creating a heat-resistant shield, or to miraculously endow the flesh with some special heat-resistant quality. Rather, God controls his creatures *from within* as their sovereign creator and governor. They are beholden to his word. He can make it the case that the fire does not incinerate the flesh without acting against it.

In short, to preserve God's sovereignty we need an account of divine action which, like concurrentism, is consistent with the claim that God accomplishes *contra naturam* miracles by *omission* rather than by *commission*, even while all the relevant creatures retain their normal causal tendencies and susceptibilities, and even while all the other prerequisites for action are satisfied. For on the concurrentist theory, the fire cannot act unless God cooperates with it, and in the miracle of the fiery furnace God simply withholds his concurrence and thus deprives the fire of its proximate ability to act on the three young men.¹⁹⁴ Recalling the argument for divine conservation which appealed to the possibility of annihilation, Suarez puts it this way:

Just as God can deprive a created entity of its *esse* merely by withholding his action, so too he can deprive a created entity of its natural action merely by withholding his concurrence; therefore, just as from the former power one may evidently infer an immediate dependence in *esse*, so too from the latter power one may infer an immediate dependence in the action itself. The antecedent (I grant in all honesty) is not evident from

194 Recall, by the way, that according to the biblical story the soldiers who threw the three young men into the furnace were themselves incinerated. On the concurrentist view, God grants or withholds his concurrence with respect to particular effects. So it is possible in the circumstances described in Daniel 3 for God to grant his concurrence to the fire with respect to the incineration of the soldiers but to withhold from the very same fire his concurrence with respect to the incineration of the young men, even though the young men are just as close to the fire as the incinerated soldiers are.

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any natural experience. However, it is sufficiently evident from supernatural effects. For God deprived the Babylonian fire of its action, even though no impediment was set against it from without; therefore, he accomplished this by withholding his concurrence. For how else could he have done it? This is what is meant in Wisdom 11, when it is said that the fire was forgetful of its power – namely, because it was unable to exercise its power without God. And it is of itself wholly consonant with the divine power that it should have within its control the actions of all things, just as it has within its control the *esse* of all things.¹⁹⁵

Notice that even though the argument presupposes that the miracle of the fiery furnace is itself best construed as a miracle by omission, this presupposition is not absolutely crucial to the point that Suarez is making. What *is* crucial is the claim that God at least can accomplish some miracles by omission – and this seems to be an eminently plausible claim.

The fourth argument is likely to sound peculiar to readers unversed in scholastic ontology, but the background provided above in Parts 2 and 3 will help us grasp it. According to the scholastics, when a secondary cause acts, it produces a form that constitutes *this* actualization of *this* preexistent potentiality; that is, forms, both substantial and accidental, are individual entities. For even though they are not subsistent beings in their own right, they are nonetheless ‘gappy’ individuals that are apt by their nature to enter into transcendental relations with their complements. Thus, substantial forms unite with primary matter to constitute substances, whereas accidental forms inhere in substances as the actualizations of various potentialities had antecedently by those substances.

The argument goes as follows: Even though secondary agents, as particular causes, do indeed determine the *specific nature* of any effect they produce, they are not ordered toward just one *singular* form out of the many exactly similar but numerically distinct forms that they have the power to produce in a given set of circumstances. Hence, says Suarez, it is plausible to think that God’s concurrence is necessary in order for a secondary agent to produce some one singular effect from among those many possible ones:

A secondary cause is unable to determine itself to an effect as an individual and particular effect, since its power is always indifferent with respect to many individuals and is not sufficiently determined by the subject and the circumstances; therefore, what is required is the cooperation of the First Cause, who by his will is able to determine that power to a singular effect.¹⁹⁶

The argument presupposes that because of his comprehensive and particular knowledge of all possibilities, God is able from eternity to intend singular effects

195 *DM* 22.1.11. In modern editions, the verse from Wisdom is located at 16:23.

196 *DM* 22.1.12.

qua singular. And when he offers his concurrence to secondary agents in concrete situations, he offers it just for the production of one singular form rather than for the production of some other exactly similar form. Accordingly, it is only that singular form that the relevant secondary agent is *proximately* able to produce in that concrete situation. Suarez puts it as follows during a discussion of God's concurrence with those secondary agents that act 'naturally', that is, by a necessity of nature:

At the instant or time at which they act, [secondary] causes that act naturally are absolutely unable, all things considered, to effect anything except the very entity – in species and *as an individual* – which they in fact effect As far as the individuality is concerned, the point is proved by the argument given above. For even though a natural agent has the active power to produce a number of individual effects, still, that power, by itself alone, is insufficient without God's concurrence; therefore, if the natural agent does not have that concurrence, it will be an entity that is [only] in remote potency for acting and not in proximate potency. So, for instance, a fire deprived of God's concurrence will not be said, absolutely speaking, to be capable of producing heat; to the contrary, it will be said, absolutely speaking, to be incapable of producing heat. Therefore, since causes of this sort have only a divine concurrence that has been prepared for a numerically unique effect, it is this effect alone that they are able, absolutely speaking, to produce by their power – that is, by their *proximate* power, which includes not only the mere ability to act but, in addition, all the prerequisites for acting.¹⁹⁷

Similar considerations apply to the immanent acts of intellect and will that are produced by rational creatures, even though, as we will see in Part 7.4 below, God's concurrence with free acts is a bit more complicated than his concurrence with acts that occur by a necessity of nature. Still, the only point relevant to the present context is that finite rational agents lack the sort of comprehensive and particular knowledge of possible objects that is required to intend a singular form – in this case a singular act of intellect or will – *qua* singular. In summary, then, Suarez is arguing that without God's concurrence there would be no satisfactory explanation for why *this* singular form, rather than some other exactly similar one, is produced by *this* particular exercise of a finite agent's power.

The last argument I will mention is aimed at establishing an *a priori* predilection for concurrentism over Durandus's position. The claim is, in effect, that Aristotelian naturalists who are Christians should be antecedently disposed to countenance in nature the maximal degree of divine activity compatible with the thesis that there is genuine secondary causality. Suarez calls this his "best argument":

¹⁹⁷ *DM* 22.4.6. Italics added.

This manner of acting in and with all agents pertains to the breadth of the divine power, and on God's part it presupposes a perfection untainted by imperfection; and even though it does bespeak an imperfection on the part of the creature (whether we are thinking of the secondary cause or of the action or of the action's effect), this imperfection is nonetheless endemic to the very concept of a creature or participated being as such – as the arguments already given make clear. For the rest, there is in this way a perfect and essential ordering between the First Cause and the secondary cause, and there is nothing impossible here Therefore, this general influence should not be denied to God.¹⁹⁸

This argument does not require much comment; indeed, it is hard to imagine that Durandus would disagree with the general sentiment expressed here by Suarez. After all, Durandus's primary purpose is to safeguard the claim that created substances are genuine efficient causes. If he became convinced that a coherent version of concurrentism were available, he would, it seems, lack any good philosophical or theological reason for not embracing it.

7.3 *Just an action or a principle of action as well?*

We have now seen how Suarez articulates and defends a conception of God's general concurrence that he shares in common with most of his opponents. In section 2 of Disputation 22 he tries to show, against an array of Thomistic authors, that this concurrence *involves nothing other than* God's actual influence on the secondary cause's action and effect. More specifically, he argues at great length that God's general concurrence has no effect within the secondary agent itself that is in any way prior to the cooperative action by which that agent's own effect is produced; rather, God's concurrence is just his contribution to that cooperative action, that is, to the cooperative production of the joint effect. In the words of the title of section 2, Suarez's claim is that God's general concurrence is "something in the manner of an action" and not "something in the manner of a principle of action."

But what is it to claim that God's concurrence involves "something in the manner of a principle of action"? And why do many Thomistic authors make this claim?

To answer these questions, we should begin by noting that the theories opposed to Suarez's take their inspiration from a model that many scholastic thinkers associate with certain traditional axioms regarding the subordination of finite agents to God – namely, the model of a craftsman using a tool in order to produce an artifact. The craftsman fashions the artifact *through* the tool as an instrument, and this in turn suggests that the craftsman does something *to* the tool even while using it in the production of the effect. In other words, the craftsman is not only engaging in a cooperative or joint action with the tool, but is also uni-

¹⁹⁸ *DM* 22.1.13.

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laterally imparting to the tool a principle of action that is causally prior to that cooperative action.

But what sort of ‘principle of action’ are we speaking of here? There are two possible answers to this question, corresponding to the two theories that Suarez criticizes in section 2.¹⁹⁹

According to the first answer, in using the tool the craftsman imparts to it a *power* that ‘completes’ or ‘perfects’ its intrinsic power and makes the tool proximately able to act on the relevant patient in such a way as to produce the artifact. So on this view the tool’s intrinsic power is insufficient for the effect even within its own order of causality – namely, instrumental causality – and so that power needs to be supplemented by a ‘higher agent’, the craftsman. Moreover, the power conferred by the craftsman is best thought of as transient in the sense that it is not a type of power that could be had by the tool as a form or characteristic that endures beyond the temporal interval during which the craftsman is using it; to the contrary, it is a type of power that the tool has when and only when it is being moved by the higher agent in the cooperative action by which the artifact is produced.

According to the second answer, in contrast, the craftsman does not empower the tool, but simply *applies* the tool’s intrinsic power to the patient in such a way as to produce their joint effect. On this view, the tool’s power is antecedently sufficient within the order of instrumental causality and does not need supplementation. Instead, the tool, with its preexistent power, simply needs to be moved or directed in the appropriate ways by a higher agent in order to be proximately able to participate in the production of the effect. In technical terms, this motion is variously called an ‘application’ or ‘pre-motion’ or ‘predetermination’ which has the tool as its subject and is prior in some obvious sense – even if not temporally prior – to the cooperative action by which the artifact is produced.

So the answer to the original question is this: The relevant principle of action conferred on the tool by the craftsman is either a *power* or the *application of a power*. And it is the reception of this principle of action that constitutes the tool’s subordination to the craftsman during the time of their cooperative action.

When we turn now to God’s general concurrence with secondary causes, this model, articulated in one of the ways just explained, yields the standard interpretations of the following scholastic axioms: (a) ‘A secondary cause does not act unless it is *moved* (or: *pre-moved*) by the First Cause’, (b) ‘A secondary cause is applied to its action by the First Cause’, (c) ‘A secondary cause is *determined*

199 As Suarez points out, each of these theories can be interpreted either narrowly or broadly. On the narrow interpretation, the theory holds that God’s general concurrence is something *other than and prior to* the action by which the secondary cause’s effect is produced. Since this interpretation makes the theories functionally equivalent to Durandus’s position, I will simply ignore it and look at the broad interpretation, according to which God’s general concurrence is something *in addition to* the action by which the secondary cause produces its effect in cooperation with God.

(or: *predetermined*) to its effect by the First Cause', (d) 'A secondary cause *acts in the power of* the First Cause', and (e) 'A secondary cause is *subordinated* in its acting to the First Cause'. And it is precisely these standard interpretations that give rise to the two theories of God's concurrence that Suarez finds wanting.²⁰⁰

According to the first of these theories, by his concurrence God's first 'completes' the secondary cause's power and then proceeds to produce the effect in cooperation with the secondary cause, where the completion of the power is causally (rather than temporally) prior to the cooperative action. Suarez gives two descriptions which, taken together, capture the most plausible version of this theory:

The concurrence is a certain entity that emanates from the First Cause and is received in the secondary cause, bringing the secondary cause to final completion [as an agent] and determining it to produce a given effect. The reason why this concurrence is said to be something "in the manner of principle" is that it is the secondary cause's power to act or, at least, it formally brings that power to completion.²⁰¹

The First Cause's concurrence is something in the manner of a principle and infused power The concurrence begins, as it were, with the conferral of this power and yet does not consist in this conferral [alone], but rather proceeds further right to the creature's very own action, with the result that what influences the action immediately is not only the power communicated to the secondary cause but also the divine and uncreated power itself.²⁰²

Suarez begins his critique of this theory by insisting that the powers of secondary causes are usually complete or perfect within their own order of causality just in virtue of God's having created and conserved them. Hence, secondary agents do not normally need a supplementary power of that same order – that is, a special power that is contemporaneous with their action. To put it in technical terms, secondary agents are as a general rule 'perfectly constituted in first act within their own order' prior to the time when their power is exercised.

Moreover, even if it is true that in some cases the power of a secondary cause needs to be supplemented by God or some other higher agent at the very time of the action, this supplementation is naturally prior to God's general concurrence and not a part of it:

200 As I will point out below, Suarez is willing to accept the axioms. However, he rejects the standard interpretations of them, in part because they are obscure and in part because, as he sees it, they undermine the relative autonomy of secondary agents – an issue that becomes especially important in treating God's concurrence with the free acts of rational creatures.

201 *DM* 22.2.2.

202 *DM* 22.2.4.



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It is true that God sometimes, at least supernaturally, makes up for a secondary cause's imperfection by supplementing its power to act; he does this especially in our own case when he infuses the supernatural habits. But this falls outside of our present topic, since such an infusion of power has to do not with the First Cause's concurrence, but rather with the secondary cause's being elevated or perfected through the First Cause's action. Accordingly, if we are speaking of a secondary cause that has been perfectly constituted in first act within its own order, then it is pointless to add to it some other principle of acting that is received within it.²⁰³

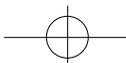
In other words, God's general concurrence always presupposes that the secondary cause's power is complete and sufficient within its own order of causality, regardless of how or when this completion is accomplished. It is only when the secondary cause proceeds from 'first act' into 'second act' – that is, only when it proceeds from already *having* sufficient power to actually *exercising* that power – that God's concurrence comes into play.

And in reply to the objection – again inspired by the model of the craftsman and the tool – that the power conferred by God on the secondary cause is indeed part of his general concurrence because it is an instrument through which he himself acts, Suarez asks whether or not God's contribution to the effect is exhausted by his producing this 'instrumental' power within the secondary cause. If the answer is yes, then God is merely a remote cause of the secondary agent's effect, since the only power by which he acts is a created power that inheres, even if only briefly, in the secondary cause. On the other hand, if God's contribution to the joint effect is not exhausted by the production of this alleged instrumental power, but includes as well an independent and immediate exercise of his own uncreated power, then any instrumental power is wholly superfluous:

If in addition to the influence of this instrumental power, God is also said to influence the secondary cause's action immediately by his own uncreated power, then it is at once evident *per se* how pointless the alleged instrumental power that remains on God's part would be. For the divine power is intimately present there through itself. And by its own eminence this power is sufficient to have, and proportioned for having, a *per se* influence on the action; indeed, it must necessarily have such an influence in order for the creature to be able to effect any action whatsoever. Therefore, an instrumental power of the sort in question on God's part is unnecessary; therefore, such a power is wholly irrelevant to the First Cause's concurrence, which is necessary *per se* and pertains to the secondary cause's essential subordination to the First Cause.²⁰⁴

203 *ibid.*

204 *DM 22.2.6.*



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At this juncture the objector might concede Suarez's point, but insist that even if God does not confer any power on the secondary cause, he must at least *apply* or *pre-move* or *predetermine* that cause, with its own intrinsic power, in order to make it proximately capable of producing the joint effect. For surely, the argument goes, the secondary cause's essential subordination to God can be preserved only if God is thought of as acting *on* and *through* it.

This brings us to the second theory, which corresponds to the second opinion about the craftsman's relation to the tool. Suarez characterizes this theory as follows in two different places:

The second position is that the First Cause's concurrence is something in the manner of a principle within the secondary cause itself and is ordered toward its action, though not as a *per se* principle of that action [that is, a power], but only as a necessary condition for acting. This seems to be the position of all those who claim that God's concurrence occupies itself with the secondary cause prior to the latter's action, by applying or determining it to that action.²⁰⁵

The First Cause's concurrence begins (as I will put it) with the motion or application of the secondary cause, but is consummated in the immediate and *per se* causing of the very effect or action of the secondary cause itself.²⁰⁶

So on this theory God's concurrence does not produce a power within the secondary cause, but instead produces a motion by which God applies the secondary cause to its action. Still, this application or pre-motion must be "at least causally prior" to the secondary cause's action.²⁰⁷ For even though the application is temporally simultaneous with the action by which God and the secondary cause cooperate in the production of the latter's effect, it has the secondary cause itself as its subject and hence cannot be identical with the cooperative action. This is why Suarez calls the application a "necessary condition" for the cooperative action.

Each of the arguments for the second theory invokes one of the scholastic axioms noted above, and the model of the craftsman and the tool looms prominently in the background throughout. Like the tool, the secondary cause must be pre-moved or applied to its action; that is, it must be directed or determined by the art and power of the divine craftsman to produce the effect that its own intrinsic power is proportioned to. And just as the tool acts in the power of the craftsman, so too the secondary cause acts in the power of the First Cause. Again, just as the tool is elevated by the craftsman's application so that it can participate in producing the craftsman's proper effect – namely, the artifact – so too the sec-

205 *DM* 22.2.7.

206 *DM* 22.2.14.

207 *DM* 22.2.7.

ondary cause is elevated by the First Cause's application so that it can participate in producing God's proper effect – namely, *esse*. Or so, at least, argue the proponents of the second theory.

Suarez, however, is not impressed with these arguments and goes so far as to call the alleged application (or pre-motion or predetermination) “neither necessary nor fully intelligible.”²⁰⁸ He argues in effect that while the model of the craftsman and the tool might help us to appreciate certain general features of God's general concurrence, it is badly misleading in the details.

First of all, the craftsman's application of a tool typically aims at putting the tool into the appropriate spatial relations with the patient. By contrast, God's general concurrence already presupposes that the secondary agent is suitably proximate to its patient. For this proximity is one of the prerequisites for the secondary agent's action, and God's general concurrence presupposes that all the necessary conditions for acting are already satisfied.

Again, the craftsman's application of the tool has as its direct formal terminus or effect a series of spatial locations that belong to the tool as accidental forms. By contrast, there is no plausible analogue for such an effect in the case of God's putative application of the secondary cause:

If [the application] is an instance of real efficient causality, then it will be a real movement or change belonging to the secondary cause. What terminus, then, does it have? Not a spatial terminus or a terminus in any category other than *quality*, as seems *per se* evident. But neither can the terminus be a quality. For if this quality is bestowed as a power of acting the arguments made above [against the first position] will be brought to bear again. On the other hand, if the quality is not bestowed in order to effect anything, then it has nothing to do with acting, and there is no possible reason why it should be called a necessary condition. You will object that it is necessary for conjoining the secondary agent to the First Agent in the way that an instrument is conjoined to the principal cause. But this and similar claims, which can be expressed in words, cannot be explained in terms of realities. For the conjoining in question is neither a real union nor a more intimate presence, but only some new effect, the role of and need for which in the secondary cause's action is what we are scrutinizing.²⁰⁹

So unlike the craftsman's application of the tool, God's alleged application of the secondary cause has no obviously relevant effect within the secondary cause. Suarez's conclusion is that God's concurrence does not, after all, involve an 'application' of the secondary cause in any non-metaphorical sense.

Again, whereas the tool's acting in the power of the craftsman is perhaps identifiable with the craftsman's application of it, a secondary cause's acting “in

208 *DM* 22.2.14.

209 *DM* 22.2.23.

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the power of God” is nothing more than its acting “through a power that participates in a higher power and with a dependence in [its] action on the actual influence of that power.”²¹⁰ But this is compatible with the claim that by his concurrence God acts *with* the secondary cause rather than, literally, *on* or *through* it.

The model of the craftsman and the tool is especially troublesome when applied to the free actions of rational creatures. According to Suarez, an agent is free just in case, with all the prerequisites for acting having been posited, that agent is (a) able to act – that is, to will – and also able not to act (*freedom with respect to exercise*) and (b) able to will an object and also able to will some contrary object (*freedom with respect to specification*).²¹¹ His charge in the present context is that because the pre-motions or predeterminations posited by his opponents are causally prior to the secondary cause’s action and ordered toward a single effect – in this instance a single act of the rational agent’s will – they are destructive of both freedom with respect to exercise and freedom with respect to specification:

The condition called a ‘predetermination’ is not only *unnecessary* for a free cause in light of its peculiar mode of acting, but is also for that very reason *incompatible* with it if it is going to act freely with respect to both exercise and specification. For the use of freedom would be impeded on both these counts by such a predetermination. This claim is explained, first, for the case of indifference with respect to the *specification* of the act: Since the First Cause alone is said to effect the predetermination in question, the will is merely in passive potency with respect to it; hence, the will is not free with respect to it, but is instead passively or negatively indifferent, in the way that matter is indifferent with respect to various forms. For, as we showed above, there is no freedom in a passive faculty as such. Therefore, it is not within the will’s active and free power to receive this or that determination; therefore, since it is determined to only one act, it is able to effect that act and no other.²¹²

Indifference with respect to the *exercise* of the act is likewise destroyed. For, as has been explained, if the sort of predetermination in question is necessary, then before it is received, the will does not have it within its active and free power to exercise the relevant act, since it is not yet a proximate principle – that is, a principle that is complete and accompanied by all the prerequisites for acting. It is not yet even a remote active power (as I will put it), since it does not have it within its power to do anything to acquire the condition or predetermination in question.

210 *DM* 22.2.51.

211 See *DM* 19.2.

212 *DM* 22.2.35. Suarez’s argument against possibility of a passive faculty’s being free can be found at *DM* 19.2.19-20.

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Instead, it is merely in passive potency with respect to that condition – which is not sufficient for freedom.²¹³

As we shall see below, the rejection of predeterminations does not by itself guarantee freedom as Suarez defines it. But the affirmation of predeterminations does seem to destroy freedom so defined, since, according to Suarez’s opponents, the predeterminations are themselves necessary prerequisites for a secondary cause’s acting in any way at all. But if that is so, then Suarez’s arguments seem to be right on the mark. First of all, the pre-motion or predetermination is always ordered toward the exercise of the relevant power, in this case the faculty of the will. It seems to follow that if the predetermination is in place, then the rational agent is unable to refrain from acting – which undermines freedom with respect to exercise. Second, any predetermination is ordered toward a particular species of effect. And here it seems to follow that the agent cannot will any object other than the one toward which the predetermination is ordered – which undermines freedom with respect to specification.

The Thomists have standard replies to arguments of this sort, including an alternative account of what freedom consists in. According to this account, free acts cannot be predetermined by any *temporally antecedent* causal activity but are compatible with God’s *contemporaneous* predeterminations, which are coordinated by divine providence with the rational agent’s own intentions and choices. Hence, it is not the case that an act is free only if all the prerequisites for action are compatible with its not being exercised or with some other contrary act of will being exercised; rather, an act is free only if all the prerequisites for action *other than God’s contemporaneous predeterminations* are compatible with its not being exercised or with some other contrary act of will being exercised.

Here, as earlier in Disputation 19, Suarez tries to show that the Thomistic replies to his arguments are unsatisfactory. However, I will not pursue the dispute over predeterminations and the nature of free agency any further here, except to note that it cannot be understood in isolation from the whole nest of interrelated issues involving providence, predestination, foreknowledge, and grace that set Dominican and Jesuit thinkers at odds with one another in the last half of the sixteenth century.²¹⁴

Suarez ends section 2 by trying to show that the truth of the scholastic axioms listed above can be preserved without invoking applications (or pre-motions or predeterminations) that have the secondary cause as their subject and are causally prior to its action. I will leave it to others to assess the plausibility of

213 *DM* 22.2.37.

214 For an overview of the debate between the Jesuits and Dominicans, see the introduction to Luis de Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge (Part IV of the “Concordia”)*, translated, with an introduction and notes, by Alfred J. Freddoso (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988). Also, the interested reader should look at *DM* 19.2 and *DM* 19.4–9 for Suarez’s extensive discussion of free agency.

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Suarez's interpretations of these axioms. I do wish, however, to make one methodological point in this connection.

Since Suarez is doing intellectual inquiry within a tradition, he sees himself as obligated to put a true rendering on metaphysical postulates that have become entrenched within that tradition. This practice of appropriating deeply entrenched verbal formulas may sometimes involve, as it does in this case, interpreting the formulas in a way which would have been rejected by many of one's predecessors, and for this reason the practice is often thought to involve an odd combination of intellectual slavishness to one's tradition and downright disingenuousness in the claim that one is somehow preserving hallowed truths. But it does not – or, at least, it need not – involve intellectual vices of this sort.

First of all, the practice may just as easily be seen to exhibit certain moral virtues that are arguably necessary for successful intellectual inquiry, even if such virtues are not highly valued by accounts of inquiry that are more individualistic than Suarez's. Chief among these virtues are gratitude to and respect for one's intellectual predecessors within the tradition, especially the most illustrious of them; and closely related to these virtues is intellectual humility of a sort that fosters an abiding awareness of one's intellectual dependence on the tradition, as well as the more common sort of humility that fosters a deep sense of one's own intellectual limitations.

Second, the standards for succeeding at this practice of appropriation are sometimes misunderstood. Take the example at hand. A sufficient condition for the success of Suarez's appropriation of the relevant scholastic axioms is his being able to give credible, even if unusual, interpretations of key elements in the writings of, say, Aristotle or Pseudo-Dionysius or St. Thomas. That is, to the extent that he can plausibly argue that others have misinterpreted the luminaries of the tradition, his own interpretations will gain in stature. But this is not a necessary condition for success. What Suarez must show is that his interpretations of the axioms, whether or not they correspond to the intentions of the giants of the tradition, serve to advance the tradition on the points in question and on important related issues. He might do this by arguing convincingly that the received interpretations are false, but he will be successful even if he shows only that his own understanding of the axioms opens up interesting and potentially fruitful alternative ways of formulating as well as solving central metaphysical problems within the tradition.

7.4 God's concurrence and free action

Broadly speaking, Suarez's account of God's general concurrence runs parallel to the account published by Luis de Molina a few years before the appearance of the *Disputationes Metaphysicae*.²¹⁵ However, with respect to free acts of will Suarez's account represents a genuine advance in precision and detail.

215 See Part II of Molina's *Liberi Arbitrii cum Gratiae Donis, Divina Praescientia, Providentia, Praedestinatione et Reprobatione Concordia* (Antwerp, 1595).

Suarez begins section 4 of Disputation 22 by explaining how God concurs with secondary agents that act naturally, or by a necessity of nature, rather than freely.²¹⁶ These natural agents are necessarily such that they act in a given set of circumstances to produce a given effect when and only when all the prerequisites for their acting are satisfied in those circumstances. These prerequisites include both (a) ‘internal’ conditions such as the potential agent’s possession of enough power to produce the effect and (b) ‘external’ conditions such as the receptivity of the patient, its proximity to the agent, and, as we have seen, God’s concurrence in first act – that is, God’s offer of, or readiness to grant, his concurrence for the action.²¹⁷

Given that God always accommodates his concurrence to the nature and requirements of created causes, the manner in which he concurs with naturally acting causes is straightforward. In each case, he simply gives the relevant secondary agent a concurrence that it requires in order to produce the type of effect to which its nature is determined in the relevant circumstances. And although God does this freely, he also does it, says Suarez, “in the manner of a nature” – that is, he does it as a matter of course.²¹⁸ For having willed to create and conserve naturally acting causes as part of his providential plan, God freely adopted from eternity a general policy of granting them a concurrence which is ‘owed’ to them by a “debt of connaturality” – that is, a concurrence that satisfies the requirements of the natures with which God has endowed them.²¹⁹

To be sure, this general policy admits of exceptions, as when God works miracles by omission. But in addition to the general policy, God’s providential plan includes his willing ‘efficaciously’, in each particular case of actual secondary causality, to concur with *this* particular natural agent in *these* particular circumstances for *this* particular action producing *this* particular effect:

Just as God decided from eternity to produce these particular [naturally acting] entities and not others, and to produce them at this particular time and in this particular order and with these particular motions, etc., and not in any other way, so too he also decided to concur with these same entities in their actions according to their capacity. And just as God has an absolutely distinct and particular knowledge of all things, so too his will decides all things distinctly and in particular, and it extends to

216 Unlike some scholastic authors, Suarez denies that natural agents can act indeterministically, and so he does not distinguish natural agents from agents that act by a necessity of nature. However, the focus of this part of section 4 is on actions that occur by a necessity of nature. If some natural agents are able to act indeterministically, Suarez would have to deal with them in a way analogous to the way in which he deals with free agents.

217 On this last point, see *DM* 22.4.7.

218 *DM* 22.4.3.

219 *ibid.*

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each individual thing according to its capacity and need; therefore, in giving his concurrence, he decided from eternity to concur with this cause, in this place, and with respect to this subject for this individual action and effect in particular, and to concur at another time for another action, and so on for all actions.²²⁰

Moreover, because natural agents act from what we might call ‘deterministic natural tendencies’, their actions occur by a necessity of nature.²²¹ For this reason, God wills “in an absolute and determinate way” to concur with both the *exercise* of their power and the *species of action* to which that power is uniquely determined in the relevant circumstances.²²² That is, each action of a natural agent is such that God (a) wills it unconditionally and (b) offers for it only a concurrence that corresponds to the agent’s deterministic natural tendency in the circumstances. Thus, it is a necessary truth that God *offers* his concurrence to a natural agent for a particular action and effect if and only if the agent *actually produces* that very effect by that very action. In technical terms, God’s concurrence with a natural agent exists in first act only if it exists in second act as well.

Suarez points out, however, that if God offered his concurrence in this very same way to agents capable of free action, their freedom would be destroyed with respect to both exercise and specification, even in the absence of the sort of pre-motions or predeterminations posited by his opponents. For if God offered his concurrence to a free agent for just a single act of will in a given set of circumstances, and if he willed “in an absolute and determinate way” the one act for which that concurrence were offered in those circumstances, then the agent in question (a) would have to elicit an act of will, and so would not be free with respect to *exercise*, and (b) would have to elicit just that act of will for which God was offering his concurrence, and so would not be free with respect to *specification*.

Suarez notes that there have been two principal ways of solving this problem within the Catholic intellectual tradition. Some authors, accepting a single account of divine concurrence for both natural and free causes, have claimed that the freedom of rational agents is preserved by the mere fact that God gives his concurrence freely. Suarez rejects this reply outright, contending that the cooperative action in which God concurs can be free with respect to God and yet not free with respect to the relevant created cause. As we saw above, this is exactly how things stand with regard to the actions of natural agents; God freely concurs

220 *DM* 22.4.6.

221 For an analysis of a deterministic natural tendency, see “The Necessity of Nature.” Notice that God concurs freely in actions that occur by a necessity of nature. Suarez expresses this by saying that the actions are free for God but necessary for the relevant secondary agents. So the whole framework of natural modality presupposes God’s free actions of creating, conserving, and concurring with secondary agents.

222 *DM* 22.4.5.

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with such actions, and yet they occur by a necessity of nature. So this way of responding to the problem fails to preserve creaturely freedom.

A second ploy is simply to claim that in giving his concurrence God wills not only the action but the *mode* or *modality* of the action, so that in the case of free agents he wills that their acts be elicited *freely*. Suarez agrees with this claim, but argues that it is not sufficient by itself. For the metaphysician must give a coherent account of just how it is possible for God to concur causally with an act that is elicited freely, that is, how it is possible for a rational agent's free act to be God's act, too:

This teaching, thus taken in a general way, is absolutely certain; yet it is also certain that when God wills something to happen in a certain determinate mode, it pertains to his wisdom and efficacy to apply causes that are suited to that mode of acting. For he would be at odds with himself if he willed something to happen in a given mode and then in some other way impeded or removed the causes for that mode of operating. Accordingly, what we are asking in the present context is this: When God wills that a secondary cause act freely and with indifference, how he is able to make his concurrence determinate without this involving a contradiction? Thus, it is not enough to claim that the two things blend together in the efficacy and agreeableness of divine providence. Rather, one must either explain how it is that there is no contradiction between them – which the present reply does not do – or else look for some other mode in which God can move the creature “efficaciously and agreeably” in such a way that it acts and acts freely.²²³

Having completed his brief survey of other views, Suarez proposes his own ingenious alternative. Stated simply it is this: When God offers his concurrence for a particular free act of will *A*, he, first of all, makes this offer conditionally on the free agent's cooperation, so that even with the offer of concurrence in place, the agent is still able not to elicit *A*; and, second, he simultaneously offers his concurrence with respect to at least one other particular act *A** that is contrary to *A*, so that even with the offer of concurrence for *A* in place, the agent is still able to elicit *A** instead. The first point preserves freedom with respect to exercise, while the second preserves freedom with respect to specification. I will now elaborate on each in turn.

When God offers his concurrence for a particular free act of will that lies within the power of a rational agent, he does not will that act in the “absolute and determinate way” in which he wills the actions of secondary causes that act by a necessity of nature. Rather, he wills a free act only conditionally:

God does not, through the act of will by which he decides to give his concurrence to a free cause, decide altogether absolutely that the free cause will exercise the act in question; nor does he will absolutely that

223 *DM* 22.4.13.

the act exist. Instead, with a sort of implicit condition he wills the existence of the act to the extent that the act proceeds from him and from that concurrence of his which he has decided to offer. And by virtue of that volition he applies his power to the act in question, but on the condition that the secondary cause – that is, the created will – should likewise determine itself to that action and issue forth into it. For by its freedom the will is always able not to issue forth into the act.²²⁴

So in the case of a free act, God's offer of concurrence does not – as it does with acts that occur by a necessity of nature – automatically result in the cooperative action; in technical terms, the concurrence can exist in first act even if it never exists in second act, that is, even if the act of will for which it is given is never exercised. Still, because God's readiness to give his concurrence completes the prerequisites for a free act of will, the agent is in the strict sense *proximately* able to elicit the act even if, as it may turn out, the act is never elicited. Hence, Suarez's definition of freedom with respect to exercise is satisfied, since the agent is able to refrain from eliciting the act even though all the prerequisites for action – including the concurrence in first act – have been satisfied. This, Suarez contends, is the way in which God's concurrence is accommodated to rational agents as far as the free exercise of their acts is concerned.

What's more, Suarez argues that only this mode of concurring with free acts can preserve the truth that even though God is a cooperating cause in acts that are sinful, he is not a source of the defectiveness of such acts. Like any other effect of a secondary cause, a sinful act cannot occur without God's general concurrence. Indeed, in order for God to have free creatures at all and to preserve their freedom, he must offer his cooperation with respect to acts that are sinful; otherwise, created rational agents would never be proximately able to turn away from him. Nevertheless, God's offer of concurrence for such acts does not imply that he approves of them or that he in any way induces free creatures to elicit them. In technical terms, the fact that he offers his concurrence for a sinful act does not itself entail that if the act is in fact elicited, God wills it by his "providence of approval" (*providentia approbationis*); rather, he wills such an act only conditionally and, if it is elicited, it falls only under his "providence of permission" (*providentia concessionis*).

So God's permission of a sinful act consists precisely in (a) his willing it only conditionally, (b) his offering his general concurrence with respect to it, and (c) his doing nothing positive to induce the agent to elicit it. This is one way to understand St. Thomas's claim that while an act that is sinful is from God, God is not a cause of sin.²²⁵ To use the manner of speaking introduced above, the fact that a sinful act is something rather than nothing is traced back primarily to God as a universal cause, but the fact that it is morally defective rather than morally

224 *DM* 22.4.14.

225 See *Summa Theologiae* 1–2, q. 79, a. 1–2.

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upright is traced back entirely to its secondary agent as a particular cause. Also, it is crucial to keep in mind that God's general concurrence is not his only contribution to free acts. Out of love he almost always prompts us toward good acts by various means, both natural and supernatural; yet he allows us to reject this assistance and, as it were, to abuse his general concurrence.

In summary, then, any free act of will for which God offers his general concurrence is such that the secondary agent is proximately able to refrain from eliciting it. And Suarez is able to give a coherent metaphysical account of how this is possible.

Let us turn briefly to freedom with respect to specification. When God offers his concurrence to a free agent, he offers it for two or more distinct acts that are contrary to one another:

God offers concurrence to each secondary cause in a mode accommodated to its nature; but the nature of a free cause is such that, after all the other conditions required for acting have been posited, it is indifferent with respect to more than one act; therefore, it must also receive the concurrence in first act in an indifferent mode; therefore, it must be the case that, from the side of God, the concurrence is offered to a free cause not just with respect to one act but with respect to more than one act If this were not so, then the created will would never be proximately capable of effecting more than one act; therefore, it would never be free with respect to the specification of the act.²²⁶

In keeping with what was said above, a free agent is proximately able not to elicit *any* of the acts of will for which God offers his concurrence in a given set of circumstances. The further point that Suarez makes here is that in any such set of circumstances God offers a free agent numerically and specifically distinct concurrences for numerically and specifically distinct acts of will. This preserves freedom with respect to specification.

Once again, then, the way in which God offers his concurrence to a free agent is accommodated to the secondary cause's mode of acting. And what was said about sinful acts in the discussion of freedom with respect to exercise applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to freedom with respect to specification. In particular, given that one or more of the acts for which God offers his concurrence on a given occasion is sinful, if any of those acts is actually elicited, God can plausibly be said to *permit* that act rather than to induce it or to be the source of its moral defectiveness.

One final point. Along with his opponents, Suarez accepts the Catholic doctrine that God exercises particular providence over the world, so that every particular effect produced in the created world is either (a) explicitly and knowingly intended by God from eternity or (b) explicitly and knowingly permitted by God from eternity. In answering objections to his account of God's concurrence

226 *DM* 22.4.21.

with free acts, Suarez acknowledges that in order for this account to cohere with the orthodox understanding of God's particular providence, it must be the case that from eternity, and naturally prior to any act of his will with respect to creatures, God has so-called 'middle knowledge' – or, as Suarez refers to it, "conditional foreknowledge" – of how all possible free agents would act in every possible situation in which they were offered "indifferent concurrence" for their free acts. Such knowledge is necessary because God's conditional offer of concurrence for free acts does not by itself settle the question of just which free acts will be elicited. And so because he does not know exactly how free creatures will act just on the basis of his own intention to concur with their actions, God needs middle knowledge antecedently in order to for his providential plan to be complete – that is, in order to be able to knowingly intend or permit free acts as particulars.²²⁷ However, Suarez denies that God's having middle knowledge renders otiose his offer of concurrence for free acts that are never in fact elicited. For, he argues, unless the concurrence is actually offered for such acts in the way stipulated above, no act that is in fact elicited will be free – and this because it will not satisfy the causal prerequisites for freedom.²²⁸

8 Conclusion

One purpose of this introductory essay has been to give to the reader a sense of the power of Suarez's metaphysics as it touches on efficient causality and divine action. Suarez is a profound metaphysician whose work will have lasting value for the intellectual tradition within which he labored. But, beyond that, his metaphysics, with its combination of breadth of vision and analytical depth, embodies a boldness and confidence about the potentiality of human reason that can serve as part of the antidote to the philosophical and cultural pessimism – or so I would call it – that has dominated Europe and America during the last half of the twentieth century. I hope that this essay has in its own faltering way helped to convey both that breadth and that depth.

Appendix: An outline of the *Disputationes Metaphysicae*

What follows is an outline of the *Disputationes Metaphysicae* that helps make clear the overall structure of the work. The individual disputations are designated in parentheses, with asterisks indicating those disputations that are presently available in English translation.

- I. The nature of metaphysics (1)
- II. The transcendentals: being and its attributes (2–11)
 - A. Being (2–3)

²²⁷ For an extensive treatment of the issues involved here, see the Introduction to Luis de Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge (Part IV of the "Concordia")*.

²²⁸ See *DM* 22.4.38–39.

1. The essential notion of being (2)
 2. The attributes of being in general (3)
 - B. One (4–7)
 1. Transcendental unity in general (4)
 2. Individual unity and its principle (5*)
 3. Formal and universal unity (6*)
 4. The various kinds of distinctions (7*)
 - C. True (8–9)
 1. Truth as an attribute of being (8)
 2. Falsity (9)
 - D. Good (10–11)
 1. Transcendental goodness (10*)
 2. Evil (11*)
- III. The causes of being (12–27)
- A. The causes of being in general (12)
 - B. The material cause (13–14)
 1. The material cause of substance (13)
 2. The material cause of accidents (14)
 - C. The formal cause (15–16)
 1. The substantial formal cause (15)
 2. The accidental formal cause (16)
 - D. The efficient cause (17–22)
 1. The efficient cause in general (17*)
 2. The proximate efficient cause, its causality, and the everything required for causing (18*)
 3. Causes that act necessarily and causes that act freely or contingently (19*)
 4. The first action of the First Cause, creation (20*)
 5. The second action of the First Cause, conservation (21*)
 6. The third action of the First Cause, concurrence (22*)
 - E. The final cause (23–24)
 1. The final cause in general (23)
 2. The ultimate Final Cause (24)
 - F. The exemplar cause (25)
 - G. Properties common to all the causes (26–27)
 1. The relation of the causes to their effects (26)
 2. The relation of the causes to one another (27)
- IV. The division of being into infinite and finite (28–31)
- A. The distinction between infinite and finite being (28)
 - B. Infinite Being (29–30)
 1. The First Being insofar as his existence can be known by natural reason (29)

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2. The First Being insofar as his nature can be known by natural reason (30)

C. Finite being (31*)

V. The division of finite being into substance and accident (32–38)

A. The distinction between substance and accident (32)

B. Created substance (33–36)

1. Created substance in general (33)

2. Primary substance (or suppositum) (34)

3. Immaterial substance (35)

4. Material substance (36)

C. Accidents in general (37–38)

1. The essential notion of an accident in general (37)

2. The relation of accident to substance (38)

VI. The division of accidents into the nine categories (39–53)

A. The division of accidents into the nine highest genera (39)

B. Quantity (40–41)

1. Continuous quantity (40)

2. Discrete quantity (41)

C. Quality (42–46)

1. Quality and its species in general (42)

2. Potency and act (43)

3. Habits (44)

4. Contrariety among qualities (45)

5. Intensity of qualities (46)

D. Relation (47)

E. Action (48)

F. Passion (49)

G. Time (50)

H. Place (51)

I. Position (52)

J. Having (53)

VII. Real being vs. being of reason (54)