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ON THE FORMAL CAUSE
OF SUBSTANCE

METAPHYSICAL, DISPUTATION XV

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INTRODUCTION & EXPLANATORY NOTES
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the human mind. Thus he thought that even the category of substance, which is not Aristotelian and realists the most real of all the categories and the support for all the rest, is but a concept which the mind imposes on appearances in space and time.


We are thinking here of Saul Kripke in Naming and Necessity (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), of Alvin Plantinga in The Nature of Necessity (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1986), of Roderich Chisholm in A Realistic Theory of Categories (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), of Baruch Brody in Identity and Essence (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980); and of Jorge J. E. Gracia in Individuality (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988). Of course, none of these is as Aristotelian in outlook as Suarez. For example, none of them, as far as we can tell, embraces a strict Aristotelian notion of form and matter, and two of them, namely, Chisholm and Plantinga, defend a Platonist notion of universals. However, all of them describe such Aristotelian doctrines as that persons are individual substances which perdure over time and which are characterized by both essential as well as non-essential properties. And Brody even defends what he himself calls an Aristotelian theory of substantial change.

MD XIII, sect. 5.

MD XIV, sect. 3.

See the present disputation, sect. 1, para. 17-18.

MD XIII, sect. 2.


Whether or not Aquinas held this view, Suarez was less certain. But he was certain it was the view of the Thomists. See the present disputation, sect. 8, para. 2.

It should be noted that the existence of the form, though necessary for it to cause, is not a causal condition in the most proper sense of the word, according to Suarez. The reason is that a causal condition must be really distinct from that of which it is a causal condition, and nothing, according to Suarez, is really distinct from its existence.

For Suarez form gives matter the property "being actualized by such and such a form," and the property "being a human body:" it does not give it the property "being such and such a form" or the property "being the substance constituted by such and such a form and such and such matter." Thus my soul gives my body the property "being actualized by a human form," but it does not give it the property "being a human soul" or the property "being a human being." On this see Frederick Copleston, A History of Philosophy, Vol. 2, Medieval Philosophy, Part I (Garden City: The Newman Press, 1950), pp. 364-385. Summa theologicae, Part I, Q. 76, a. 4.


METAPHYSICAL DISPUTATION XV

ON THE FORMAL CAUSE OF SUBSTANCE

Introduction

Since the material and the formal causes are mutually related, we shall treat first substantial form and later accidental form, using the same method we used in discussing matter. 1 For whatever is pertinent to the definition of form in general either was touched on in the disputation concerning the causes in common 2 or will be explained more clearly in the following sections of the disputation, which fit together only analogously under the common definition of form. 3 Because of the intrinsic connection between prime matter and substantial form, 4 we shall in this disputation, while treating substantial form, complete our treatment of those aspects of prime matter which we postpone until now. It ought to be said, however, that there will be no discussion of the extrinsic form, which scholars call "exemplary," about which we will speak below, because extrinsic form fits the definition of efficient cause better than that of formal cause. 5 Nor does this discussion concern separate forms, as the angelic or immaterial natures are commonly called on account of their actuality or beauty and not on account of their causality, 6 but we are treating form only as informing or as received in matter since it is that form which has the proper and specific nature of the formal cause.

It is indeed customary to divide form into physical and metaphysical; 7 the prior is that which exerts true and real formal causality, and it is, therefore, that which we must treat most extensively. It is said to be a "physical form," either because it chiefly constitutes the nature of a thing, 8 or because it is investigated principally through the analysis of physical change and is considered primarily in physics. 9 Nevertheless, it is not outside the consideration of metaphysics. 10 This is so, first, because the notion of "form" is common and abstract; then, because form constitutes the essence of a thing; and, finally, because it is one of the principal causes. At the end of this disputation we will consider what is meant by the term "metaphysical form" and the way in which it is said to be a cause.
Section 1
Whether There Are Substantial Forms in Material Things

1. Reasons for doubting that substantial forms exist in material things. The first reason for doubting that substantial forms exist is that substantial forms cannot be known by any experience, nor are they necessary to account for any of the actions and differences we perceive in things. Therefore, they should not be posited without sufficient reason. The antecedent is clear because fire, for example, can be satisfactorily understood as constituted in its being if we conceive of it as a certain kind of substance having perfect and consummate heat conjoined with dryness, even if the substance which is the subject of these accidents is simple. And this joining of the properties of heat and dryness is sufficient for all the actions of fire which we experience, as well as for the distinction between fire and water and for the change of one into the other. Such a change seems to consist in this, namely, that one substance passes from the greatest coldness to the greatest heat, and vice versa. This supposition, therefore, is enough for the constitution, distinction, and action of the elements; the same supposition, likewise, is proportionally sufficient to account for the constitution of compounds since they are made out of the mixture of the elements.

2. The second reason for doubting that forms exist is that there is an apparent contradiction involved when one speaks of a form that is both informing and substantial; for either a form is a subsistent thing and needs no sustaining subject, or it does need one. The first sort of form cannot be an informing form because it is a contradiction to suppose that something is subsistent and received in another. Again, the second sort of form is inhering and, therefore, accidental; either way there is no substantial form.

3. The third reason for doubting that forms exist is that, if we posit substantial forms, it is impossible to understand how changes and generations occur unless we suppose that something comes to be out of nothing, which is not possible according to natural principles. The inference is clear because either the whole substantial form exists before its generation, or part of it does, or none of it does. The first alternative cannot be held, for otherwise 1) an infinite number of forms would pre-exist in matter and 2) nothing new would in fact come into being; it would only seem to do so. Nor can the second alternative—that part of the form pre-exists its complete generation—be maintained: First, because in the same part of matter it is impossible for there to exist one part of the form without the whole since substantial form is indivisible; and, second, because, even if part of the form pre-exists and part has to be educed, the latter part would come into being out of nothing, since it cannot come into being from the pre-existing part. There remains, therefore, the third possibility, namely, that form comes to be out of nothing, which is, nevertheless, absurd and exceeds the power of natural agents.

4. The ancient philosophers did not know of substantial forms. On this question nearly all the ancient philosophers were ignorant of substantial forms, as is obvious from what we reported above concerning their opinions about prime matter or the first subject of natural changes. For, since they thought that the first subject was a complete being in act, they could not recognize the substantial form because substantial form and prime matter, which is pure potency, are, as it were, correlatives. A few later philosophers also denied the existence of substantial forms, at least in the elements. Alexander of Aphrodisias indicates this in his Commentary on the Metaphysics, book 12, commentary 12, although there he seems to be merely giving an example and to be speaking analogously. John Philoponus also taught this, in his Commentary on Generation and Corruption, book 2, commentary 7, and earlier Galen held the same opinion in On the Elements, book 1, and before him Empedocles, who did not deny forms for compounds but for the elements, as Aristotle indicates in Physics I, text 50 [189a16], and Physics II, text 22 [194a20-27].

Resolution of the Question

5. It should, therefore, be said that, besides matter, all natural or corporeal things consist of substantial form as their intrinsic principle and formal cause. This is the view of Aristotle in innumerable places. He often reprimanded the ancient philosophers because, having almost passed over substantial form, they directed all their inquiry toward matter.

This opinion of Aristotle is obvious from the whole of Book One of the Physics, and from Book Two, chapter 1 [193b7], where he says that form has a more perfect nature than matter. He holds the same thing in On the Parts of Animals I, chapter 1 [694b29], and in Metaphysics VII, chapter 4 [1025b10] and XII, chapter 2, [106b10] where he calls form a "thing something" because it completes the substance which is a "this something." And, again, especially in Book Seven of the Metaphysics, he calls form "something is" [1029b12] and gives as the reason why that form is that which constitutes and distinguishes the essences of things. 25

Again in On the Soul II, chapter 1 [412a7-11], he distinguishes substance into matter, form, and the composite, and he calls form "entelechy." Peter Fonseca wrote a great deal and with much erudition concerning this name at the end of Book One of his Commentary on the Metaphysics. Scholars, nevertheless, commonly teach that the word "entelechy" is more general and has a wider comprehension than "substantial form," because it properly signifies perfection or the act perfecting a thing. It is customarily attributed to sub-
stantial form by *antinomasia*, since such a form is the first act and highest perfection of the substance.

Aristotle also often used other names to refer to substantial form, which we will note below when explaining its causality. Nevertheless, Aristotle was not the discoverer of the truth concerning the existence of substantial forms. Plato recognized their existence before him, as is evident from the *Timaeus*, where Plato calls forms "images of real being," (51a6) that is, copies of the Ideas, since he posited Ideas only of substances. And before Plato some of the philosophers are believed to have touched on the existence of substantial forms, as is clear from Aristotle in *The Parts of Animals* I, chapter 1 (694b29), and in other places that were cited above.

This teaching concerning the existence of substantial forms is now so commonly accepted in philosophy that it can only be denied through great ignorance. Furthermore, it is so in harmony with the truth of the Christian faith, that its certitude is greatly increased because of that fact. Therefore, it is appropriate that proof of this truth begin from a principle certain by faith and evident by the natural light of reason.

The Existence of Other Substantial Forms
Can Be Inferred From the Nature of the Rational Soul

6. The first argument for the existence of substantial forms is that a human being consists of a substantial form as an intrinsic cause; therefore, all other natural things also do. The first premise of this argument is proven because the rational soul is a substance and not an accident, as is plain from the fact that it can exist by itself separate from the body since it is immortal. It is, therefore, sufficient of itself and independent of a subject. Hence, it is not an accident but a substance.

Again, that soul is the true form of the body, as faith teaches, and as is also evident by the natural light of reason. For it cannot be an attendant substance or something moving the body from without; otherwise, it would not cause the body to live, nor would the functions of life depend essentially on its union with and presence to the body. Finally, it would not be a human being, as such, who understood, but some other attendant substance. Therefore, a human being consists of a body as matter and a rational soul as form. Hence, this soul is a substantial form because, as we will show below, the term "substantial form" signifies nothing other than a certain partial substance which can be united to matter in such a way that it composes with it a substance that is whole and essentially [per se] one, such as a human being.

7. The inference drawn from the substantiality of the human soul is indeed proven by assuming the discussion is about natural things which are subject to generation and corruption. For, in this respect, these things belong to the same order as human beings, and transformations and changes can occur between them. From this, nonetheless, it can easily be concluded a fortiori that the same thing must be said about incorruptible bodies, given our teaching above concerning their matter. Therefore, a human being's composition from matter and substantial form shows that there is in natural things a certain substantial subject fit by its own nature to be informed by some substantial act. Such a subject is imperfect and incomplete in the category of substance and, therefore, always needs to be under some substantial act. This subject, however, is not peculiar to humans but is also found in other natural things, as is self-evident. Hence, it is necessary for the generation and sustenance of the human being, and it remains after the corruption of the human being. All natural things, therefore, which are composed of matter as their subject are also composed of a substantial form, actualizing and perfecting that subject.

Furthermore, from the composition of human beings it is possible to infer that an aggregation of many accidental faculties or forms in a simple substantial subject is not enough to constitute a natural thing. For in human beings there are perhaps more accidental faculties and forms, and more perfect ones, than in other natural things, and yet these do not suffice for the constitution of any complete natural being. In addition to these accidental forms there is required a form to rule, as it were, over all those faculties and accidents and to be the source of all actions and natural changes of the human being and the subject in which the whole variety of powers and accidents is rooted and unified in a certain way. For the same reason, therefore, in the other natural beings there is needed a substantial form distinct from the accidents and more intimate and perfect than they are.

Thirdly, from the same example it is clear that the substantial generation and corruption of a human being does not consist in the acquisition or loss of any accidents, but in the union or separation of the rational soul which substantially informs the human body. Certain accidents prepare the body for this union. Once these accidents are removed, the soul departs and the human being is corrupted. It must be understood, therefore, that the corruption and generation of other natural entities occurs in the same way. For, as can be gathered from experience, there is the same mode of generation and corruption in humans as is found in other things, except for the difference in the perfection and subsistence of the human form, though we would not have inferred this difference between the human and other substantial forms solely from their manner of generation and corruption, unless it were known to us from other facts. Furthermore, *Ecclesiastes* 3 says [verse 19], "The death of man and the beasts are one, and the condition of both is equal, so that just as a man dies, the beasts also die," etc. Finally, all the indications and signs by
which substantial composition can be known in humans are found in other natural beings, especially in the living ones, as the following argument will show.

Various Indications of Substantial Form

8. The return of what has been changed to its original state. The second principal argument for the existence of substantial form is gathered from various indications arising from accidents and operations of natural beings which indicate that a substantial form lies beneath them. The first indication can be discerned even in the elements. For if water, for example, is heated, and later the external cause of the heat is removed, the water returns to its original coldness because of an intrinsic force, as experience attests. This is a sign, therefore, that there is in water a certain inner principle from which an increase of cold flows anew after all external obstacles have been removed. That principle which returns water to its original temperature, however, cannot be anything other than the substantial form; therefore, substantial forms exist.

That the return of water to its original state is from an intrinsic force is proven since there cannot be any extrinsic principle of this return. First, because, if this return were from something extrinsic, it would not be essentially [per se] and necessary but by accident, since an extrinsic agent would act on it by chance. Then, also, because, if one examines all extrinsic principles which are generally present to water, there is none from which that action could emanate since the only one that is nearby is the surrounding air. This air, however, is not naturally as cold as the water, or it often happens by accident that it is left as warm as the water itself. Hence, the air also returns itself to its own original state, so far as it is able. The heavenly and universal causes intervene only remotely, and they are by themselves not ordered to an action of this sort, as is commonly known.

9. A refutation of various theories concerning the cause of such a return. The second antecedent, namely, that no internal cause of the return of water to its coldness except the form of water itself can be conceived, is proven; for what else could it be? Some say that in certain parts of the water intense coldness always remains and from these cold parts the other parts, which had been heated, are cooled. Cajetan [Thomas de Vio] thought this was probable in his Commentary on the Summa Theologiae I, q. 54, a. 3, and it is attributed to Averroes in his Commentary on On the Soul II, commentary 1. But this view is silly and contrary to experience, for by our senses we perceive that all of the water poured in a vase is very hot, whatever part we touch. If there were some parts that were cold, they would either have been perceived by sense or would have at least have tempered the sensation of heat in a part of the water; neither, however, is the case.

Section 1: Existence of Substantial Forms

And this view is also contrary to natural science since all the water throughout all its parts is uniformly applied in two ways to fire acting naturally. Therefore, the water in all its parts is uniformly acted on in the same way. For what is there that could either impede that action or interrupt it so that it would affect some parts of the water but not others? Likewise, either those parts which are said to retain the cold can be heated, or they cannot. If they cannot, neither can they be corrupted. But if they can be heated, then, if all the water is sufficiently applied to the fire, those parts will also be heated. Or at least there could be a state in which that potency to be heated is actualized and, if that state obtains, that water will return to its original coldness, once the contrary agent is removed, as long as it had not come to the point of the corruption of the water.

10. Others reply that that action does not proceed from any principle distinct from coldness because coldness always remains to some degree, and, as soon as it is not impeded, it immediately recalls itself to its original state. For two things can be distinguished in coldness, namely, its essence and its mode of intensity. Its essence always remains whole, even if its intensity is diminished, and thus from the same essence the mode of intensity can emanate.

But this reply is also false. It is false, in the first place, because a more intense degree cannot proceed from a quality that was diminished; otherwise, even air would be able to make itself hot in the highest degree, and the same would be true of all other things. It is false, in the second place, because it often happens that there are in the water more degrees of heat than of cold; hence, even if the remote extrinsic agent had been removed, the coldness could not have conquered the intense heat. For it could in no way be helped by the subject since matter in itself is indifferent to either accident. Thirdly, this reply is false because otherwise cold and heat could never have remained at peace in diminished degrees, but the one quality would always have expelled the other by perfecting itself all the way up to the ultimate intensity. For on the part of the subject, if it were only prime matter, there would be no impediment, and we are supposing that all extrinsic causes have been removed.

11. In the elements no qualities virtually contain the primary ones. Others, finally, reply that it is necessary that there be some internal principle prior to coldness which remains whole, even if coldness is diminished, from which the return to a state of coldness would come. They, nevertheless, deny that that principle is the substantial form because such a change could not immediately arise from the substantial form, but they say it is a certain quality of a higher nature which virtually contains the primary sensible qualities.

This view, nonetheless, can be understood in two ways. In the first way it does not deny substantial form, but places that virtual quality between the substantial form and the primary sensible qualities. Understood in this way, it is not opposed to the truth which we intend to prove. In, nevertheless, unth-
ens the argument which we are pursuing; besides, it ought to be rejected as unfounded and gratuitously invented since it multiplies qualities without foundation or any experiential evidence. For the emanation of an accident from an intrinsic form does not require any intermediate accident; otherwise there would be an infinite regress. Likewise, this view must be false because it is contradictory that there be in the elements some qualities prior to the first. The primary qualities of the elements, according to Aristotle [On Generation and Corruption II, chapter 2, 329b17-330a29], are formal heat, cold, moisture, and dryness. Hence, although in compounds there may occasionally be a quality virtually containing heat or cold, that quality is, nevertheless, posterior to the balance of the primary qualities natural to the compound and is not for the intrinsic emanation of the primary qualities in the same subject, but for the production of them by its proper action in external subjects.

This response can be understood in another way so that it intends to do away with substantial form and put a quality in its place. Understood in this way, however, it is easily refuted because that intermediate quality is not directly and in itself sensed but is known from the effect of natural emanation. On what basis, therefore, is that internal principle said to be an accidental quality and not the substantial form? Likewise, that principle is the primary act of matter, composing with matter this natural being which we call water. It is, therefore, a substantial and not an accidental act.

Likewise, that form is the root not only of coldness but also of moistness, density, and the other properties which the element of water requires, for the same argument can be made concerning these. That is, if these qualities are changed through a contrary action from that natural state which water demands, as soon as the contrary action ceases, the qualities will immediately return to their natural state. Therefore, these qualities have some prior form from which they are derived and which remains unchanged. Hence, either to the individual qualities there correspond individual root—so to speak—or virtual forms, something which nature abhors and which is completely unnecessary, or there is one form in which all those properties are rooted and, as it were, gathered, and this seems most true. That form, then, is not accidental, but of a superior order. There is, therefore, a substantial form from which such a return proceeds, as is the common view: Avicenna, Sufficientia, book I, chapter 5, 59 Paul Sencinas, Commentary on the Metaphysic 9, q. 8, 51 Dominic de Soto, Commentary on the Physics 2, q. 1, 52 and others.

12. From this another piece of evidence can be drawn which is a confirmation of the preceding. For it is established by an experience which is almost obvious that, even in inanimate things or the elements, substantial corruption is distinct from alteration. I am speaking specifically about inanimate things so that a fortiori the induction will be made universal; for in animate things this is even more evident as will become clear. We experience that an alteration—for example, the heating of water or of iron—is sometimes so forceful that the most intense heat is felt in those things; and, nevertheless, if the action of the contrary agent ceases, those things remain whole, or mostly whole, in their own substance and also easily return to the accidental state. Sometimes, however, the alteration continues to such a degree that a complete transformation of the thing occurs so that, even if the agent is removed, the substance which was acted on can never return to its original state or recover its prior actions or similar accidents. Sometimes a thing is even changed into a less noble sensible substance, such as cinders, slag, etc. Finally, sometimes a thing is entirely consumed in a way that cannot be perceived, because it is transformed into a more subtle and imperceptible body. This, therefore, is an obvious sign that alteration is sometimes simple and remains within the sphere of accidental change, but sometimes it has connected with it a greater change of a thing. This change cannot, however, be explained as anything other than the dissolution of the substantial composite itself as the substantial form recedes. Substantial forms, therefore, exist.

The last assertion is proven because, if the whole substance of the thing always remained equally whole, however far an alteration proceeded, it would in itself always have the same relationship to its accidents. It would after any alteration, therefore, always remain unchanged under any accidents whatsoever, insofar as this depends upon it and when the contrary agent is removed, or it would always return to the same accidents, once those agents are removed.

13. This argument is confirmed because we see that some accidents are so inseparable from certain subjects that, if they are destroyed or greatly diminished, a complete change occurs in their subjects so that they cannot return to their original state by any intrinsic force. That inseparability, therefore, proceeds from a connection of such accidents with some principle intrinsic to these things. 54

This principle cannot be prime matter or that first subject which remains under every change, because with respect to it there is no accident among those which can be acquired or lost through alteration which is inseparable. 55 Nor can this principle be an accident if we are speaking of the first and radical principle. 56 For, even though one accident is inseparable in relation to another, as rarity is inseparable in relation to heat, or whiteness in relation to a certain balance of the primary qualities, that balance, nevertheless, is inseparable from another prior form of the nature which was abandoned. We must necessarily, therefore, insist upon some form which is first in relation to inseparable accidents. This form is, therefore, substantial and not accidental since it constitutes the proper essence in which the accidental properties naturally and inseparably exist.
14. The subordination of properties among themselves is an indication of substantial form. Finally, from this sort of evidence another argument can be drawn. For in one natural being many properties are unitd which at times are so subordinated to one another that one arises from the other, as the will arises from the intellect. At times, however, they do not have a mutual subordination, as heat and humidity in the air, whiteness and sweetness in milk, or the many senses in an animal. Therefore, this multitude and variety of properties, especially when they are related in the latter way, require a single form in which all are united. Otherwise, they would be merely accidentally gathered in the same subject and, when one was completely destroyed, another would not recede because of that. But experience teaches us that the opposite is the case. This is, therefore, a sign that such accidents which are required in such a subject and exist in a certain number, weight, and measure do not have that connection in relation to the first subject alone, namely, prime matter, but in relation to a composite which, by reason of its form, requires that order of the accidents among themselves.

It is usual to confirm this argument specifically by referring to composite bodies in which we see that certain contrary accidents, when reduced to certain levels, are preserved in the same compound. This, however, cannot come from the qualities themselves, as is clear enough in itself, since they are rather in conflict by their nature. Furthermore, it cannot come from an extrinsic cause or from matter, as is easily seen. Therefore, it necessarily comes from the form. This confirmation, nonetheless, either has no force at all or is not an argument distinct from the preceding ones. For, when the four primary qualities have been reduced to that harmony in which they are simultaneously able to exist in the same subject, they do not need another internal cause or principle in order that they may be perpetually preserved in it in the same state, but only need the removal of the external corrupting agent. For those qualities established at that level are not properly contrary, nor can they have any action among themselves. Indeed, if they could have an action among themselves, the substantial form would not be able to impede or reconcile them. Because of this it happens in the living, even in humans, where the form has the greatest unity, that the form cannot impede action among the various heterogeneous parts. For, though the qualities are so balanced in the individual parts that they agree among themselves in relation to their proper subject, they are not so balanced in relation to the qualities of another dissimilar part.

Therefore, the existence of the substantial form cannot be inferred from the conservation of a balance constituted from contrary qualities, taken by itself. It can, nevertheless, very well be inferred from the fact that in such a balance the qualities are not only permitted, so to speak, to remain in this form but, when the one is taken away, the other of them is augmented or diminished by an extrinsic agent, when that agent is removed, the balance will return immediately to its prior proportion. This is especially clear in animals; this is, therefore, an obvious sign that such a balance is due to some form in which these qualities are connected. This sign, however, coincides with that concerning the return of a thing to its natural state.

15. The fact that, when a thing is intensely acting in one way, its power to act in another is reduced is evidence for the substantial form. This argument is finally confirmed by another indication drawn from the action of certain natural agents. We experience that, if a thing which has many faculties of operation acts intensely through one faculty, it is impeded so that it cannot act through another faculty or so that it cannot act with such great force. This is, therefore, a sign that these faculties are subordinate to the same form which operates through them as a principle. For, if they had no subordination among themselves or operated without any common principle, each of them would operate independently of the others, and there would be no reason why the force of one would impede the force of the others more than if they were in diverse subjects. But the best explanation for this phenomenon is given by supposing that all these faculties are subordinate to the same form. For, since a form is finite in power, while it is intensely applied to one operation, it is withdrawn from another, and it can focus itself with such great force on one operation that its power is exhausted in it.

The antecedent is explained by some in natural things or agents which, while they act intensely to overcome a contrary, are not able to protect themselves entirely from also being partially overcome or influenced by the contrary. This experience, nevertheless, from the reaction undergone by natural agents does not come from the subordination of many faculties to one form, but from the fact that a thing is not always as capable of resisting as of acting. Hence, even the hottest iron, when it heats water, is acted upon in return by the water, although the form of iron contributes absolutely nothing to that action. In fact, the actions of diverse faculties do not intervene in this case, but there is rather the action of one quality, namely, heat, and a passion opposed to it to a certain extent, which comes from the fact that the heat is not as powerful to resist as it is to act. On this point I believe that one can hardly find any experience in inanimate things which would prove the antecedent. For in accidental actions which do not come from life it does not seem that some concurrence of the substantial form intervenes proximately so that by reason of it the action of one faculty is diminished by the force of another.

In living beings, however, and especially in us, we clearly experience such an effect, for when thought is focused interiorly, it often impedes us from sensing things present to us. Aware, how medication often impedes the action
of the nutritive part. Nor does it matter if someone should say that this comes from the concurrence of the vital spirits necessary for the operations of these faculties which, while they flow to one faculty, leave another. This is not relevant, first of all, because the very concurrence of the vital spirits with one faculty rather than with another is a sign of one form using these spirits and faculties for two actions; otherwise, there would be no reason why the spirits would flow to one faculty more than to another. The second reason this is not relevant is that intellectual operation is not produced by means of the vital spirits, and yet intellectual effort and attention impede lower actions. Nor can this be attributed to the cooperation of the imagination, which does require the concurrence of the spirits; for intellectual attention, especially if it is very intense and concerned with things of a higher order, greatly reduces even the action of the imagination. Therefore, this sort of occurrence does not come from the vital spirits, but from the occupation of the same soul with some operation.

Causes Demonstrating the Existence of the Substantial Form

16. Substantial form is not impossible. The third principal argument for the existence of substantial form can be drawn a priori from the proper causes of the substantial form, which are the final, the efficient, and the material. After all, substantial form does not have a formal cause since it is itself a form; hence, no positive argument for form can be gathered from it. We can, nonetheless, suppose that for its part there is no repugnance in there being in natural things such a kind of being or incomplete substance as substantial form. For what repugnance could be imagined or thought of in this?

Again, it is not contradictory that there exist in the nature of things substantial acts of the highest order which are substantitive and do not inform anything, such as the angels. And it is not contradictory that there is a substantial act of a middle order which both subsists and is actuating or informing, as has been said concerning the rational soul. It will, therefore, not be contradictory that there exist substantial acts of the lowest order, that is, which are actuating and not completely substantiv. And these we call substantial forms. Likewise, such an act [i.e., a substantial form] would be contradictory either because it is an act or because it is substantial or because it is contradictory for these two to be joined together in the same thing. But none of these can be stated with probability. It is not contradictory, therefore, for its part that there exists a substantial form.

But, if it is not contradictory on its part, it will readily be proven that it is not contradictory because of the other causes or that it is even necessary. The first two parts of the first antecedent seem evident (per se notae).

Section 1: Existence of Substantial Forms

The first part is evident because it is evident that there really exist in things entities which are acts and perfections of other things; for in that way brightness is an act of something white and understanding an act of one who understands. The second part is evident because it is also evident that there are in things substantial entities since these are the foundation of all the others.

The third part of the above argument remains to be proven, namely, that it is not contradictory that these two properties or natures be joined in the same entity. This, however, is clear, first, because nothing can be found in either of these natures which would be intrinsically incompatible with the other. It is clear, second, because the nature of act bespeaks, of itself, perfection. Therefore, if it is not contradictory for it to be joined with accidental being, why is it contradictory that it be joined with substantial being? Finally, because the nature of a substantial entity looks to perfection without qualification, it seems to conflict more with the nature of potentiality than with the nature of actuality. But the first is not contradictory, as is clear from prime matter; therefore, neither is the second.

A new argument arises from this since potency and act in every genus correspond proportionally to each other, but it is not contradictory that there exists in natural things a substantial potency which is an incomplete and imperfect being in the genus of substance, as was shown above (in MD XIII), and is manifest from the composition of the human being. Therefore, it will not be contradictory that there exists an act proportional to that potency by which the potency can be actualized in any natural thing and that this act exists and is conserved in a way consonant to it.

17. The existence of substantial form is demonstrated from the material and efficient cause. And so from this an argument can be easily taken from the nature of the material cause. For, since matter is a substantial potency, it contains in its own genus and in receptive potency every act proportionate to itself; therefore, it is capable of causing every act in its own genus if it is not contradictory for some other reason. Hence, in this respect the substantial material form has a sufficient reason for its being able to exist.

Again, an argument is derived from the efficient cause because, if we are talking about the First Cause, He cannot be lacking power by which He could produce in the universe substantial forms which actuate matter, whether in dependence on or independently of matter, according to various grades and perfections of such forms, on the supposition that they are not contradictory. Therefore, since such forms are necessary in the nature of things, they have been produced by such a cause. If, however, we are talking about proximate causes, we must later see which one is able to intervene in relation to which form. Now it is sufficient to say that such a cause cannot be lacking, if such an effect is necessary to the constitution of natural things; hence, if created cause occasionally lack this power, it pertains to the causality of the
First Cause that He should also supply the function of the proximate cause, which, strictly speaking, only happens in the rational soul in terms of its production. For all other forms are made in such a way that it is not impossible that they be produced by created agents, since they are made with the concurrence of matter, as we will immediately explain. Whether there is, indeed, sufficient power for such a production in created agents, we will discuss in dealing with the efficient cause.

18. The chief argument for form is from its end. The chief argument, then, ought to be taken from the end of the substantial form, which is to constitute and complete the essence of a natural being. This end or effect is absolutely necessary in the nature of things. Otherwise, nothing among physical things would be complete and perfect in its own substantial nature, nor would there be the multitude and variety of substantial species which chiefly constitutes the wonderful order and beauty of the physical world.

For this end, therefore, substantial form is absolutely necessary. For, since matter is a very imperfect being, it is not possible for the complete essence of anything to consist in it alone. Second, because matter, insofar as it is the first subject, is one and the same in all natural things. The essence of these things, therefore, cannot consist solely in it; otherwise, all things would be of one essence and would only differ accidentally. Such a state of affairs is incompatible with the greatness and beauty of the universe, which chiefly arises from the variety of species. This seems to be the meaning of the words of Genesis I [verses 12 and 31], “Making seed according to its own kind” or “according to its own species.” And it often repeats “according to their own species,” and “in its own kind,” and finally concludes: “God saw all things that He had made, and they were very good,” because the complete goodness of the whole universe undoubtedly arises from that variety. This is also sufficiently shown by the variety of powers and operations and by reciprocal generations and corruptions, as has been said. Besides matter, therefore, something must be added to it by which the essence of each thing may be completed, since, however, matter is potency, that which is added to it to complete the essence will be act, for potency implies an essential relation to act.

19. That act, however, which is joined to matter to complete the essence of a thing cannot be an accidental act. It cannot be such an act, in the first place, because no essence which is truly and essentially (per se) one is made out of an act and a potency of diverse orders. But the essence of a natural and substantial thing ought to be truly and essentially one; otherwise, the thing would not be one substance. It cannot be such an act, in the second place, because, since matter is a substantial potency, it is not completed through an accidental act, and so it cannot compose a true essence of a natural thing with such an act.

In the third place, it cannot be an accidental act because, supposing it is, I ask of what is it the accident? For either it is the accident of the composite of that act and potency as such. But this is contradictory because, since the composite is intrinsically constituted from such a form, the form cannot be an accident of it, just as whiteness is also not an accident of something white, insofar as it is white, but it is an accident of the subject which is white. Or the form is an accident of matter or the substantial subject, and so I ask again why it is said to be an accident of it. Is it because matter is able to exist with such an act and also without it? But this reason is not sufficient; otherwise, the rational soul would also be an accident of the body. This, therefore, is common to both a substantial act and an accidental act. Or is it because such a form depends on matter for its own being? This reason is also not enough, because the parts of a substance can also depend on other parts of the same substance, and matter in its own way depends on form. There are, therefore, various kinds of dependence, and it is not contradictory for an incomplete substance to depend on a subject of the same order.

Finally, the form which completes matter may be said to be an accident because in its own being it has an entity so imperfect and diminished that it is of an order lower than the whole genus of substance. And this is, first of all, said gratuitously and without grounds. For on what basis is it established that the act of matter, to which matter itself is essentially (per se) and primarily ordered and which with matter completes the essence of natural things, is so diminished and incomplete an entity? Secondly, it is incompatible with the end of such a form because, as I said, one substantial essence cannot be composed from a substantial subject and an accidental form, especially since form is that which gives the final grade and completion to an essence. On account of this Aristotle rightly said, in Physics I, chapter 6, [189a34] “substance is not composed out of non-substances.” It is established, however, that natural things and their essences are substantial and essentially one; therefore, the philosophical teaching concerning substantial forms is absolutely certain.

Solution to the Arguments

20. Of the reasons for doubting originally given, the first two have been answered from what has been said. In reply to the first it is denied that there are lacking in natural things sufficient indications and effects by which one can justifiably arrive at a knowledge of substantial forms. And it is further denied that all actions and changes can be maintained without substantial forms. In reply to the second, it is denied that a subsisting and informing form is contradictory, either in diverse states or even in the same state, as we will explain at greater length below when dealing with subsistence. It is also denied that it is contradictory for a form to depend on a subject and also to be
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substantial, as was stated a little earlier. We will show, however, the way in which this dependence differs from the inherence of an accident in the following disputation. The third argument against substantial forms indeed presents a special difficulty which it will be best to treat in the following section.

Notes

1 Suárez is referring to his treatment of prime matter in dispositions XIII and XIV. He first, in XIII, treated matter as the subject of substantial forms and then, in XIV, treated it as the subject of accidental forms. He will use the same order in treating form, starting in the present disposition with the substantial form and in the next disposition moving on to the accidental form.

2 Matter is, for Suárez, the primary subject of all forms and the underlying substrate of all change (MD XIII, 1). It is the primary subject because all material forms, in some way, exist in it, while it does not exist in anything else. Things other than matter, however, can exercise material causality, insofar as they are subjects for some form. Thus the soul, as the proper subject of the intellect and will, could be said to be their material cause, even though the soul is a substantial form, not matter (cf. MD XIV, 2, 4).

3 Form is, for Suárez, any intrinsic feature of a thing, which gives it a definite essence or perfection, whether in the substantial or accidental order. Thus Suárez says that the form is like a substantial quality of a thing making it to be, substantially, such and such, e.g., a tree, a cat, a man (cf. MD XXII, intro., 3). Accidental form, on the other hand, is an actuality, making a thing to be such and such accidentally, e.g., white, round, intelligent, etc.

4 Substantial being is that being which exists "in itself," not "in another" (MD XXXII, 1, 1). Since a human exists in itself, she is a substantial being, and the form, i.e., her soul, that makes her to be a human, is thus substantial. Accidental being, on the other hand, is that being which exists "in another" (MD XXXII, 1, 5). Whiteness and intelligence, for example, exist in substances really distinct from themselves, and thus they are accidents.

5 MD XII.

6 The scholastics distinguished three most general modes of predication: the universal mode, the equivocal mode, and the analogical mode (cf. Cajetan, The Analogy of Names). A term was said to be predicating of several subjects universally if it is predicated of them in exactly the same sense. Thus "animal" is universally predicated of "cat" and "dog." A term was said to be predicated equivocally of several subjects if it is predicated of them in entirely distinct senses. Thus "bank" is predicated equivocally of "river" and "financial institution." Finally, a term was said to be predicated analogously of several subjects, if it is predicated of them in partially the same, partially different ways. Thus "wisdom" is predicated analogously of God and creatures because God is infinitely wise by His very essence, whereas creatures are finitely wise by means of an accidental quality, specifically, a habitus (see MD XLIV, 13, 10-11).

7 There are two reasons why the general nature of form is analogous: (1) Its concept can be predicated of both substances and accidents, but substances and accidents, though they both exist, exist in distinct ways, since a substance exists in itself, and an accident exists in a substance (MD XXXI, 2, 11); (2) Its concept can be predi- cated of both material and immaterial creatures, which also exist in distinct ways (see note 6). Suarez, therefore, nowhere treats form as such in a distinct Disputation, but treats different kinds of forms in different Dispositions. All forms, however, have in common that they are "intrinsic causes which give being to things" (MD, XIII, 3).

8 Usually form and matter are treated together in scholastic works which deal with hylo-morphism, and most scholastics probably thought that, once they had proven the existence of prime matter, they had proven the existence of substantial form. For matter, being a pure potency, cannot exist except as informed (cf. Aquinas, De principio, naturae, chap. 2, para. 17).

9 Suarez, in contrast to Aristotle and some of the schoolmen, held that matter, though in some sense pure potency, has an existence of its own separate from form (MD XIII, 9, 5). Therefore, it can support accidents, such as quantity, which are natural to it. It follows that, for Suarez, proving that matter exists does not automatically prove that form does. Thus Suarez treats each in a separate Disputation.

10 The "exemplary forms" are a sort of Christian reworking of Plato's forms. They are the ideas in the mind of God according to which He knows all possible beings and according to which He creates; hence, the link Suarez made between them and efficient causation (MD XXV).

11 Angels were held by Suarez, and by the whole school of St. Thomas, to lack all matter. Since matter is potency with respect to form which is act, something lacking all matter would be more actual than any material being. But if more actual, then more formal since form is the most actual part of a thing, giving it being of a definite sort, as well as active powers natural to the sort of being it is; for example, a dog's power of vision follows from its very nature as determined by its form (MD XVIII, 2, 3). However, angelic "forms," although in some way more formal, because more actual, than material forms, do not exercise formal causality, precisely speaking, because they do not inform anything. Suarez briefly treats the nature of formal causality in Disposition XII, 1, 7, and at length below in section 6.

12 That is, it is a real entity, distinct from matter, which actualizes matter by joining its whole entity to matter (see below, section 6, 3).

13 Suarez treats metaphysical form in section 11. It either corresponds to Thomas's form of the whole (De ente et essentia, 2, 12) or to the specific difference marking off the specific from the generic nature of a thing. Taken as the form of the whole, the metaphysical form of material things includes matter. Though it includes matter, it was held to be a form in some sense because it is that by which (qua) a given substance exists. Thus, one might say that a human being is a human being by humanity. However, such a form does not properly inform any entity really distinct from itself, and according to Suarez it differs from the substance of which it is the form only modally (for Suarez's doctrine of modes, see MD VII, 16-22).

14 Since matter is passive and potential, the active powers of things were said by Suarez to follow from their forms. Thus form is the first principle of action of a thing (MD XVIII, 2, 3). But if that is the case, then it is the chief constituent of the essence of a thing since every essence is the root of all the active powers of a thing (MD II, 4, 6).

15 By "physics" Suarez meant the science which investigates natures embodied in matter. All science, to some degree, abstracts from matter since matter is the source of relative unintelligibility in a thing and since all sciences are concerned, not with individuals, but with universals (MD I, 2, 13-14).
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It was a much debated question in the Middle Ages whether, and to what extent, the elements are actually present in the compounds they compose. Suarez gives his view on this matter in sect. 10, para. 50-51.

13This objection to substantial forms seems to adumbrate the objection to them given by modern philosophers such as Leibniz. According to him, a being is either substantial or accidental. If it is substantial, it can exist on its own, and thus cannot inform anything else, nor be a constituent of a composite substance. On the other hand, if it can inform something else, it is an accident and so not substantial. Suarez's answer, not explicitly spelled out in this disputation, is that an accident is intrinsically ordered to inhere in a complete essence, whether or not that essence is a substance or an accident. A substantial form, however, does not inhere in a complete essence, but unites with matter to form a complete essence in the category of substance (cf. MD XVI, 1, 3). Hence, though it is not itself a substance, it goes to make up a substance, and so is "reductively" in the category of substance (MD XXXIII 1, 5).

14Suarez gave an elaborate treatment of this argument in section 2, para. 1. But the general problem posed by it is clear enough. The argument presupposes that the natural order acts, in general, according to laws inherent in it, and that we should not invoke special divine interventions to explain phenomena characteristic of that order. Substantial changes are phenomena characteristic of the natural order because things are constantly changing from being one sort of substance to being another; hence, such changes should not be explained by invoking divine intervention. But, so the objection runs, if we posit substantial forms, then we must posit that either they existed before coming to be in the composite made from them and from matter, or that they did not. Thus the form of a tree, for example, might be held to be coming to be when a new tree is generated. If it did not at all exist before it was generated, then it was created. But only God can create, and so such an explanation would resort to miraculous divine intervention. On the other hand, if it pre-existed in matter, there would not be any real coming to be of the tree's form nor, therefore, of the tree, which is contrary to experience. Hence, if forms are posited, one either must deny substantial generation, or one must invoke divine intervention, and neither of these is acceptable.

This problem was generally solved by holding that the substantial form is not made out of nothing but out of the potency of matter. The expression "to be made out of the potency of matter" is ambiguous, but Suarez gave it a clear and intelligible interpretation in sec. 2, para. 13.

15Suarez is here referring to the pre-Socratics. His view of them was largely shaped by Aristotle who taught that the pre-Socratics focused on the efficient and material causes to the neglect of formal and final causes. The correctness of Aristotle's view is, of course, another matter.

16MD XIII, 2, 2. According to Suarez the ancient philosophers did not understand the true nature of matter. In place of an incompleteness of that which is potency, they posited a multitude of very small, but in themselves complete, substances. By the "later philosophers," Suarez seems to mean the thinkers of late antiquity. Christian thinkers were not usually referred to as "philosophers," but Suarez does mention here Philoponus, who was a sixth-century Christian thinker.


18Grammaticus in libro De generatione et corrupta (Venice, 1527).

However, according to St. Thomas, whom Suarez followed in this matter, sciences can be distinguished by the degree to which their objects are considered in abstraction from matter. Physics was held, on this view, to abstract from individual or sensible matter, but not from common matter. Thus an anatomist is not concerned with the individual matter of, e.g., Mrs. Jones' heart, but since she is concerned with the human heart, she is concerned with the general sort of material with which human hearts are made. Suarez holds that all sciences which study material natures, insofar as such natures are material, belong to physics. Therefore, the scholastic notions of form and matter, as used to explain the nature of material beings, properly belong to physics for Suarez, though we would call them "metaphysical" or "ontological" notions.

The metaphysician, unlike the physicist, was held by Suarez to abstract from all matter and to consider either 1) those entities which actually exist without any matter, and in this sense metaphysics is reducible to natural theology, or 2) those aspects of all entities, like "substance" or "unity" which are not, formally speaking, material (MD II, 1, 13-14). It is in sense 2) that the metaphysician can study form since, as Suarez says, form is 1) in some sense common, that is, it is common to material and immaterial beings, 2) the chief constituent of the very essence of a thing, and "essence" as such, is not a material aspect of a thing, and, lastly, 3) one of the four primary causes, which apply, at least analogously, to all finite beings. Two of the primary causes, namely the efficient and final, apply to all beings, since God is the ultimate efficient and efficient cause. But He is not a formal or material cause since He does not inform anything and nothing informs Him. All other beings are final and efficient causes as well, and the parts of them are either formal or material causes.

It should be noted that it is probably due to the fact that Suarez is studying form from the aspect of the metaphysician, that he places little emphasis on the "physical" argument for form based on substantial change and instead emphasizes that form is necessary to constitute the complete essence and unity of a thing.

Suarez adopts the style of the medieval disputed question and begins his argument for the existence of forms by presenting objections to the view that they exist. He calls these objections "reasons for doubting." The first of these he answers in section 1, the second he partly answers in section 1 and much more fully in MD XXXIV, sect. 5, 14-21. and the third he answers in section 2.

This objection has a contemporary ring to it. Substantial forms, as is true of substance itself (cf. MD XXXIX 1, 11-12), cannot be directly experienced by us; we know of them only through inference. But the first objection holds that we have no good reason to infer them since all substances could be composed of a certain simple substantial subject, presumably prime matter, and a number of accidents. Suarez spends most of section 1 of this disputation showing that we do have good reasons for inferring the existence of substantial forms and that, indeed, they are necessary to complete the essence of any material thing.

The elements, for Suarez, are the four accepted by the ancients: earth, air, fire, and water. In scholastic terminology an element is a substance which is not formed by the mixture of any other substances. Therefore, its sole constituents are matter and an elemental form. Compounds, on the other hand, in some sense arise from and are composed out of the elements. Thus, if the elements are merely an aggregate of properties in a simple substance, compounds will be mixtures of those properties in a simple substance.
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Form is here being given predicates which chiefly apply to substance, but which apply to the form in a derivative sense since the form constitutes the substance. See MD XXXIII sect. 1 for a detailed account of the various ways in which the parts of a substance can be considered to be themselves substances.

What Aristotle means by "entelechy" is the subject of some debate, but it seems to refer, in some way, to the dynamic aspect of form, that is, to the form when taken as the root of the active powers of a thing. It was in this sense that Leibniz understood the term when he equated the active power of his monads with entelechy, and their passive power with prime matter (cf. his New System of Nature and of the Communication of Substances, in Leibniz Selections, ed. by Philip D. Wiener [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951], par. 3, p. 108).


Antinomias is a figure of speech whereby a thing of a certain sort is named after an individual held to exemplify a certain quality. Thus, "He was a veritable Carus in his singing of Celeste Aida." Suarez, however, seems to take it to mean something like "par excellence."

Sect. 5-6.

Suarez is probably here thinking of the Council of Vienne (1311-1312) under Clement V, which taught that the "rational or intellectual soul is truly and essentially [per se] the form of the human body" (cf. Denninger, Enchiridion symbolorum, ed. Adolfo Schönnerer [Fribourg: Herder, 1964], p. 284, para. 902, De anima ut forma corporis).

Suarez here adopts an argument for substantial form which is based on metaphysical principles rather than on physical ones (see notes 10-11) and which is very different from the traditional argument for form from substantial change. In it he assumes what he shows elsewhere (De anima, Disp. 2, Q. 3, namely) 1) the soul is able to exist apart from the body and 2) the soul is the substantial form of the body.

For Suarez's arguments for this proposition see his De anima, Disp. 2, Q. 3.

The soul, by definition, is the first principle of life (cf. Aquinas, ST I, 75, 1). But if it is the principle of life, it does not cause life in an extrinsic substance but is itself the intrinsic, so to speak, principle of life. If the soul merely moved the body as the angelic forms move the heavens, the body, strictly speaking, would be dead, not alive (cf. ST I, 76, 1).

This inference seems rather quick, but makes sense in the light of what Suarez has already said in a previous disputation concerning the four causes (MD XLI). Granted the body is distinct from the soul and indeed is material, since it is sensible and extended, and granted that the soul, though substantial, actually informs the body and makes it to be the living body of a human being, the soul is by definition for Suarez the substantial form of the human body.

Sect. 5.

Suarez had argued in MD XIII, 10, 8, that the heavenly bodies are made of matter just as the sublunar or terrestrial bodies are. There was some debate about this in the Middle Ages because the heavenly bodies were held to be incorruptible and the main traditional argument for the existence of matter was from substantial change (MD XIII, 10, 2-3). Suarez argued, however, as did Aquinas, that the fact that the heavenly bodies are sensible and extended shows they are composed of matter since quantity and the other sensible properties are rooted in matter.

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There are three reasons why it is evident that material substances other than human beings have in them prime matter according to Suarez: 1) because of the fact that humans assimilate such things into themselves and are transformed into such things after death, which would not be possible without a common underlying subject; 2) because all corporeal things are sensible and extended, and such properties must arise from a passive principle common to them all (see preceding note); and, finally, 3) because the passive principle in humans called prime matter must always be in need of some form. Hence, when it is not under the human form, it must be under another material form; therefore, other corporeal substances are constituted out of it and their own respective forms.

That corporeal substances other than the human have in them, not only matter, but also form, follows from two facts. The first is that matter alone cannot complete the essence of anything; this is spelled out clearly in para. 19. The second is that such things are not only similar to humans in being sensible, extended and mutable, but are different from humans and from each other due to certain essential features which could not have arisen from matter since matter is common to all corporeal substances; hence, there is in them a principle which determines matter, namely, form.

This argument is not very clear as stated here but what Suarez intends by it becomes clearer below (para. 20). It is, in effect, a response to the fact that, even though Suarez gave for doubting that substantial forms exist. This reason asserts that we can conceive of the essence of natural things as consisting of a cluster of accidents in a simple subject. Such a simple subject would presumably be prime matter. A contemporary form of this view might hold that subject to be a "bare particular." Hence, on this view a corporeal substance would be constituted by prime matter and a certain collection of accidents. Suarez, however, that these accidents must be related and organized in some way if we are to have a unified substance. They must be so organized by being rooted, so to speak, by or in the substance itself. Matter, however, cannot root them, as is made clear below (para. 13), because it is indifferent to all of them; hence, they must be rooted and thus unified by a substantial formal principle.

Suarez holds substantial change to be a fact, though he argues for it at length in MD XIII, sect. 1, and, more briefly, later in this disputation, para. 12. Substantial change could not consist in a mere alteration of features in a substance, according to the scholastics, since such an alteration leaves the substance intact, e.g., when a man gains weight. Hence, they held that substantial change is a change of a more radical kind in a substantial principle, i.e., prime matter, which bears and changes substantial determinations or features, i.e., substantial forms.

The physics of this example, which depends on the notion that coldness is natural to water, is outdated but the general point can still be made. It is based on the idea that some features of a thing are essential to it in such a way that, even if these features are for a time removed by the action of an external cause, the features will return once that cause ceases acting, owing to a force or principle intrinsic to the thing. Thus one might cut the leaf of a plant, robbing it of its natural shape and size, but the plant will itself return the leaf to its natural size and shape, and this must chiefly be ascribed to a power intrinsic to the plant.

The argument here is that something that always happens cannot happen by chance. Hence, if an extrinsic agent caused water to return to its natural coldness, then, since water always does return to its coldness, unless the heat is so intense that the...
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water evaporates, this must be due to something that naturally and perpetually acts on the water. The only causes which naturally and perpetually act on the water are the surrounding air and the heavenly bodies, since they perpetually influence the earth. But, Suarez argues, neither of these can account for such a return of water to its original coldness; thus, no extrinsic cause can.

Now that Suarez has proven that the cause of the return of water to its coldness is not an extrinsic cause but some intrinsic cause, he must prove that it is neither another accident in the water, nor matter, but a substantial form. By so doing he will prove that such a form must be posited in order to account for such a phenomenon.

Suarez, Thomas Aquiniani Opera omnia cum commentariis Thomae de Vito Caietani, Leonine ed. (Rome, 1891).

Aristotelis Opera cum Averrois commentariis, t. 2 (Venice: apud Junianet, 1562).

The notion here is that if any part of water could not be heated, which is an accidental change, it could not be substantially changed either; for anything which could not even be accidentally changed, a fortiori, could not be substantially changed. But, according to Aristotelian physics, all sublunar bodies can be substantially changed. In that case they can be accidentally changed as well, hence, all the parts of the water can be heated.

Suarez here considers the view that the principle that causes the water to return to its original coldness is neither some degree of coldness always present to the water, nor the water's substantial form, but some quality distinct from either, virtually containing coldness. Javelli held this in his Metaphysics, VII, q. 9. This answer to the present question is probably based on the Thomistic notion that no finite substance immediately acts by reason of its substantial form but only by reason of some intermediate power really distinct from the substantial form (STI, 54, 1).

Suarez's position on this matter is curious. On the one hand, he held that it is not impossible for finite substances to act immediately, and indeed he held that with respect to their properties or necessary accidents they do act immediately (cf. MD XVIII, 3, 4). On the other hand, he also held that all the specific powers we can enumerate in finite substances are really distinct from those substances (ibid. 19-22).

Hence, he thought that any contingent accidents of substances are mediated by powers distinct from them, but that those actions productive of the necessary and natural attributes of a substance, as coldness was held to be with respect to water, are caused directly by the substance's form, albeit as an instrument of the substance which produced the form.

Of course, on the Thomistic view that a finite substance cannot directly act by means of its form, this hypothesis does not multiply forms needlessly. But on Suarez's view, according to which finite substances can directly act, it does.

Suarez is arguing that if every accidental form flowed from the substance by means of another accidental form, there would be an infinite regress. But the Thomist is not forced to hold this. He can hold, for example, that the first necessary properties of a thing are directly caused in it by the agent that caused the thing to exist. This is what John of St. Thomas explicitly held in Naturalis philosophiae Pars IV, ed by P. Beau Reiser (Turin: Marietti, 1820). Question II, Art. XI p. 65. Suarez himself inclines to the view that the remote cause of the necessary properties of a thing is the generator of the thing (MD XVIII, 3, 14).

The argument here is that the primary qualities are necessarily the first qualities of any thing, not emanating from any other quality, but only from the form. Hence, Suarez wants to hold that any quality virtually containing the first would not give the first to its subject but would be the means by which the subject might cause one of the primary qualities in another subject.

The notion here seems to be that whatever rooms the necessary or essential properties of a substance must itself be constitutive of the substance's very essence. Hence, it must be a substantial and not an accidental form.

Avicennae peripatetici philosophi de medicorum facie prius Opera omnia (Venice, 1508; rep. Frankfurt-Main: Minerva, 1961), pp. 13 ff.


Super octo libros Physicorum questiones (Salamanca, 1555).

Since substantial forms are incapable of alteration for Suarez, it seems strange that he would say that such substances remain "mostly" whole. He cannot mean that they remain mostly iron, or mostly water, but only that they remain mostly whole in terms of their quantities, or that they remain mostly whole in terms of the degree to which their natural properties are still present in them.

Since for Suarez all essences have certain accidental properties natural to them, if an essence or form is still present, so will its natural accidents be. But after certain changes the natural accidents of the substantial essence that existed prior to the change are no longer present; hence, the substantial essence is no longer present.

Matter as such, which is a purely passive principle, cannot give the sufficient reason why certain accidents are inseparably connected to a given substance. But all substances, since they are essences, must have certain essential accidents which are inseparable from them. Hence, there is in them something more than matter.

Since it is the nature of an accident to exist in another, one cannot have an infinite series of accidents, each of which exists in another accident; one must stop, eventually, at a thing which is not an accident, that is, at a substance which exists in itself.

This is an allusion to the book of Wisdom 11:20.

Suarez here appeals to the unity of substance to establish the existence of substantial form. A substance cannot consist simply of matter since matter is pure potency (see below para. 18 and MD XIII); hence, it cannot consist of matter along with a heap of accidents either. The reason is that accidents have between themselves only an accidental unity and cannot grant essential completion to a substance. Besides, if there were no form grounding the accidents and providing a sufficient reason why some were inseparably bound to the substance and others were not, the properties which one enumerated as essential to a thing would be arbitrary and relative to one's language or particular interests. That is probably why some contemporary philosophers have trouble with the notion of a substantial essence; cf. Irving Copi, "Essence and Accident," in Naming, Necessity and Natural Kinds, ed. by Stephen P. Schwartz (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1977), pp. 80-81. For once you get rid of the form at the single principle which gives deterministic substantial being to a thing and which causes the necessary properties of it, defining essence becomes a matter of picking out certain features of a thing as opposed to others. But then one can always say that the features of a thing which are considered essential are relative to one's point of view. Thus, qua white thing, for example, it is not accidental that a white rose is white. And in order to substantiate the claim that, nevertheless, the white rose's very nature as a white thing is not essential to it, one must be able to say under some features are essential to it and why
whiteness is not among them. And that seems to require positing a single substantial principle which, in virtue of its very nature, demands certain features, even if, as Suarez points out, such features are not directly demanded by each other.

The meaning here seems to be that there is not one mixture of the primary qualities in a compound but many different ones, at least in those beings which have heterogeneous parts. Thus, the distinct mixtures of the diverse parts might not agree, e.g., when the stomach secretes acids into the throat, they burn the throat, even though the same acids do not burn the stomach. Suarez says this has to do with the mixture of the qualities themselves, not the form, as is proven by the fact that the form cannot prevent the mixture of the various parts from being incompatible with each other.

According to Suarez, the fact that in compounds various opposing qualities harmonize does not prove the existence of substantial form, but rather the fact that, after the balance of these mixtures has been upset by an extrinsic cause, that balance automatically returns, once the extrinsic cause recedes. Thus a certain acid might upset the balance of qualities in the stomach and burn it, but, once that acid is removed, the body naturally causes the stomach to return to a natural state of balance among the chemicals in it. As Suarez notes, this is the same argument as the one above concerning the return of the proper qualities of a substance after they have been done away with by an extrinsic cause.

A finite agent has a finite power of acting, so it makes sense that it cannot do several actions at once, just as the mind cannot focus on several different topics at once. But if there were no substantial active principle in a thing, which is what form is, Suarez thinks it would be difficult to explain why, when one faculty of a thing is active, the others are not. For if they were not all different capacities of a single substantial active principle, each could act without affecting the others.

Suarez holds that iron does not actively heat, as it were, by a power natural to it, but by an accident produced in it by some extrinsic agent. Thus, the fact that when iron heats water it is also cooled by the water, does not follow from the fact that the form of iron is directing itself to its faculty of heating and so is unable to use its faculty of cooling. Rather, it follows from the fact that the quality itself of heat is less able to resist being acted on than to act.

Immanent things, although they act, do not seem to have the power of spontaneously focusing their actions and, hence, this argument for form does not hold with respect to them. For more on why animates beings require the concurrence of their substantial forms in exercising vital acts, whereas inanimate beings do not require the concurrence of their substantial forms in exercising acts commensurate to them, see MD XVIII, 5.

That is, intense thought can make one insensible to hunger.

The vital spirits were certain very fine bodies which ancient, medieval and Renaissance physicians posited as necessary for the operations of the senses. They were a sort of abomination of the nervous system.

Suarez, like most scholastics, held that the intellect so transcends matter that it makes use of no corporeal organ in carrying out its function (ST. IV. 75, 2). Hence, it could not make use of the spirits to do so either.

The imagination was the faculty most scholastics associated with the brain (ST. IV. 84, 7). This faculty was held to produce internal images, whether visual, aural, or tactile. For the scholastics, concepts are distinct from mental images, and represent aspects of reality which cannot be imaged, e.g., one cannot make an image of

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God or an angel, for they have no sensible qualities; hence, Suarez's assertion that the intellect, especially if it is contemplating spiritual things, reduces even the action of the imagination.

By an "a priori" argument, Suarez means an argument for the existence of a thing from its proper causes. Until now he has argued for the existence of substantial form as necessary to explain certain natural phenomena, i.e. he has argued from effects to their cause. Now he is going to give a more certain, as well as a more abstract, demonstration of the existence of substantial form, based on metaphysical principles central to his philosophy.

Suarez will show that the substantial form can be produced by the efficient cause and that the material cause and the final cause of substance demand that it be produced.

This argument is rather odd and, moreover, requires a knowledge of scholastic metaphysics in order to be properly understood. The reason why it is not a contradiction to suppose that forms of a superior order exist, which subsist on their own but do not inform, is that being is act and so, the more actual a being is, the more possible its existence is. For a greater degree of act and, hence, of existence surely is more possible than a lesser one. But a form without any matter is more actual than either matter or a composite made of matter and form.

A form is a certain way a substance must be, because immaterial, and yet must be the form of the body (for reasons spelled out above, in para. 7). But Suarez holds that if forms of such a degree of perfection and act can exist and can inform matter, then forms of a lesser degree will be able to exist and inform matter since there will be less of a "metaphysical distance" between them and matter.

Suarez is referring to the efficient, and especially the material and final causes. He discusses the efficient cause in MD XVII-XXI. He says this cause is extrinsic, unlike the material and formal causes, and causes, not by communicating its own being, but rather by instilling being in another. He discusses the final cause in MD XXIII. It is, generally speaking, "that on account which something is or is made" (sect. 1, para. 7).

Suarez is here speaking of accidental forms, which he thinks we know exist from experience, though he is clear that we do not directly sense that such forms are accidents, even though we do directly sense them (MD XXXVIII, 1, 12).

A "reductive" proof for the existence of substances is found in MD XXXI, 1, 5.

Since act is a perfection, if there are accidental acts there can be substantial acts because the former is less perfect than the latter and, hence, less likely to exist. But Suarez thinks we experience the existence of accidental acts, for example the color of a leaf, or the warmth of a stone.

This supposes the demonstration of the existence of prime matter found in MD XIII, 1-3. Granted that demonstration, the argument given here is that substantial being is a very perfect mode of being and perfection and act go together. Hence, if there can be a substantial potency, there can be a substantial actuality. But there is a substantial potency because there is prime matter; hence, there can be a substantial actuality.

If one were to object to this argument on the grounds that the principle of perfection, actuality and substantial being are intrinsically linked together make it impossible for there to be a substantial potency, Suarez would respond that all things are to some extent actual and perfect. Thus, to say a thing is potential is to say it is actual in some respect but that it can be informed by a new entity. Therefore,
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respect to the entity that can inform it, it is potential. For Suarez matter is not wholly potential or imperfect, but is so only relative to form (cf. MD XIII, 5).

Suarez is here arguing that if there is a substantial potency, i.e., an incomplete substantial entity, such as matter, which needs completion by another, more perfect, substantial entity, it must be possible for there to be an actuality which could complete it; for a thing is said to be potential only insofar as there could be an actuality which could complete it.

In other words, the existence of substantial form is almost a corollary of the existence of prime matter, if we have proven prime matter exists. We have already seen the reason for this in note 4. For Suarez, however, form is not so easily inferred from the existence of matter, as it would be for Aquinas; indeed, Aquinas never proves matter without, thereby, thinking he has proven form. For according to Aquinas matter cannot exist without form—so if matter exists, so must form (De principiis naturae, chap. 2, para. 17). According to Suarez, matter can exist without form, but it naturally needs or demands form since it is incomplete without it (MD XIII, 5, 11).

The First Cause, or God, can produce anything that is not contradictory. But form is not contradictory and matter seems to demand it. Hence, the First Cause will produce it to complete matter; therefore, it exists.

Cf. MD XVIII, 2.

The production of a human being requires the special intervention of the First Cause because the human soul is substantial. But Suarez thinks the production of all other forms does not require any special intervention of the First Cause because such forms are not substantial and they can be deduced from the potency of matter (see below, sect. 2, 13, and MD XVIII, 2).

In section 2 of this dissertation, para. 13.

MD XVIII, 1.

This is fairly evident if one remembers that matter is almost completely passive, having in itself no active qualities, and able to be directly informed only by quantity (cf. MD XIII, 5, 11). Such an imperfect being obviously could not constitute the complete essence of anything, insofar as every essence is a determinate what, having both qualities and active powers (MD II, 4, 6).

A common axiom of the scholastics was that every kind of potency has an act corresponding to it and in the same order as it, and vice versa, unless the act is pure act, which can admit no potency. Thus, if a potency is accidental, it is essentially completed by an accidental act and, if substantial, by a substantial act. Matter, being a substantial potency, cannot be essentially completed by an accidental act. Furthermore, since substances and accidents are in different orders of being, a substantial potency and an accidental act can only give rise to an accidental unity, such as "white man." But substances are necessarily essentially one, so that a substantial potency must be completed by a substantial act. For Suarez's view of the distinction between accidental and essential unities, see MD IV, 3.

The principle employed in this objection would seem to be that any form which can exist in a subject or not in a subject without the corruption of the subject, is an accidental form. This objection is based on a definition accepted common to the scholastics (cf. Ockham, Summa logicae, I, ch. 25). Suarez rejects this definition of accident because he thinks that all really distinct essences can, by the power of God, exist separately. Thus, for Suarez accidents are essences which are ordered, not just to any subject, but to a subject which already has a complete substantial