Thomas Aquinas and Francisco Suárez on Possible Being

El ente posible en Tomás de Aquino y Francisco Suárez

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Abstract: In this article I consider the problematic that creation *ex nihilo* presents for Christian metaphysicans' speculation regarding possible being. I explore Thomas Aquinas's doctrine of possibility and show that, while he attempts to remain faithful to a metaphysics of creation, encounters a metaphysical difficult when presenting his account in terms of imitation. Suárez, I argue, is mindful of this difficulty and offers a corrective that unites the approaches of Thomas Aquinas as well as that of Duns Scotus. In the end, Suárez offers an original account of possible being that is faithful to the demands of a creation *ex nihilo*.

Keywords: Possibility, Being, Creation *ex* nihilo, Aquinas, Suárez.

Resumen: En este artículo, considero la problemática que la creación *ex nihilo* presenta para la especulación de los metafísicos cristianos con respecto al ser posible. Exploro la doctrina de la posibilidad de Tomás de Aquino y demuestro que, mientras intenta permanecer fiel a una metafísica de la creación, encuentra una dificultad metafísica cuando presenta su explicación en términos de imitación. Suárez, sostengo, es consciente de esta dificultad y ofrece una alternativa que une los enfoques de Tomás de Aquino y de Duns Escoto. Al final, Suárez ofrece una versión original del ente posible que es fiel a las demandas de una creación *ex nihilo*.

Palabras claves: Posibilidad, ente, creación *ex nihilo*, Aquinas, Suárez.

Framing the Problem

The role that Avicenna's metaphysics has played in the history of medieval and late scholastic metaphysics cannot be overestimated. It has, in one way or another, served as the *point de départ* for so many medieval and post-medieval metaphysical frame works. Indeed, his reflection on the nature of being is all-encompassing for, in addition to considering what there *actually* is, Avicenna also takes into account what could be but is notand might never be, that is, the *possible*. Though it does not actually exist, the possible is not nothing and, according to Avicenna, even enjoys its own proper being (*esse proprium*). To make sense of his attribution of being to the possible, one must bear in mind Avicenna's threefold account of essence (*essentia*). Essence can be taken in one of three ways:

$E_1 =_{def}$ an essence insofar as it exists as an individual thing (i.e., as a particular);
$E_2 =_{def}$ an essence insofar as it exists in the intellect (i.e., as a universal);
$E_3 =_{def}$ an essence just as it is in itself or *secundum se*[1].

Taken as it is in itself, E_3 is neither a particular nor a universal. To be a particular or a universal is a feature of the token itself precisely as a token –either E_1 or E_2– and not a feature of the type (E_3). For this reason, Avicenna goes so far as to describe existence –which accrues to an essence so as to constitute it as E_1 or E_2– as an accident[2]. To use his example of 'equinity' (*equinitas*) in the sense of E_3: "Equinity itself is nothing except equinity only; for in itself it is neither many nor one, neither existing in sensible [things] nor in the mind, nor is it some of these [things] in potency or in act, so as they are included within the essence of equinity (…)"[3]. Thus, we are famously told, "equinitas est tantum equinitas!".

For Avicenna, then, only E_1 and E_2 have an existential bearing. In contrast, E_3 has a non-existential being. What is more, the proper being that E_3 enjoys is something intrinsic to its own metaphysical constitution. This is significant for Avicenna since E_3 determines the scope of what is possible. Though a particular essence (E_3) might not exist (in the sense of either E_1 or E_2), neither E_1 nor E_2 determine its proper being and thus do not determine E_3 as something real or possible. That is to say, E_3's possibility is a feature of its own being independent from any existential circumstances. To each and every possible there corresponds the essential, non-existential being of E_3. In contrast, that which is impossible lacks E_3 on account of which its realization as either E_1 or E_2 can never occur; it is nothing in the absolute sense of the term. In short, for Avicenna, essential being (E_3) is the metaphysical determination of what is possible.

For Christian theologians, such as Thomas Aquinas and Francisco Suárez, such (essential) possible being presents certain *inconvenientiae* in so far as it clashes with

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[1] Avicenna, *Logyca* (ed. Venice, 1508): "Essentie vero rerum aut sunt in ipsis rebus: aut sunt in intellectum: unde habent tres respectus: unus respectus essentie est secundum quod ipsa est non relata adaliquid tertium esse: nec ad id quod sequitur eas secundum quod ipsa est sic. Alius respectus est secundum quod in his singularibus. Et alius secundum quod est in intellectu" (fol. 2r).
[2] See Avicenna Latinus, *Liber de prima philosophia sive scientia divina*, tr. 5, c. 2 (ed. S. Van Riet; Peeters-Leiden, 1980): "Dicemus ergo quod naturae hominis, ex hoc quod est homo, acciditut habeat esse, quamvis ex hoc quod habet esse non habet esse homo nec aliquid eius nec intrans in illum, sed post ea cum esse sequitur eam haec universalitas; sed haec universalitas non habet esse nisi in anima" (p. 239).
[3] Avicenna Latinus, *Liber de prima philosophia sive scientia divina*, tr. 5, c. 1: "Unde ipsa equinitas non est aliquid nisi equinitas tantum; ipsa enim in se nec est multa nec unum, nec existens in his sensibilibus nec in anima, nec est aliquid horum potential vel effectu, itaut hoc contineatur intra essentiam equinitas, sed ex hoc quod est equinitas tantum" (p. 228).

their commitment to the theologically-motivated, metaphysical claim that God alone is being itself and all other being, whether actual or even merely possible, ultimately has its source and resolution in God. Moreover, according to their Christian understanding, God is a free-creator cause, which means that God is not obliged to create all that is possible, which is to say, some things, though possible, remain uncreated. At the heart of a creation-metaphysics (CM), then, are at least two tenets:

> CM_1: God alone is subsistent being *a se* and all else has its being *ab alio* (i.e., from God);
> CM_2: prior to God's creation, apart from God, there is *absolutely* nothing[4].

For the Christian theologian, as we shall see, there is a dissonance between simultaneously maintaining any form of E_3 and CM_2. The reason for this is that in attributing some reality to an essence intrinsically that the essence in question has from eternity or at least according to its intelligible structure, it cannot be said that E_3 is entirely *nothing*. But insofar as E_3 is not entirely nothing CM_2, which maintains God's creation ex nihilo, cannot be maintained. As we shall see, the Herculean difficulty for the Christian theologian is to maintain CM_2 consistently, for immediately questions arise such as: what is the metaphysical status of that uncreated possibility? Why is the twin sibling of an only child, for example, a (real) possibility even if unactualized, while a square-circle is not possible at all and thus can never be considered real or actualized in any manner? Is it simply because one involves a contradiction and the other does not? But if so, what is the source of that contradiction? That is, does it consist in the unthinkable for God, or does it somehow precede God so as to determine what God Himself is able to think? While Avicenna could simply appeal to the existentially neutral possible essences (E_3) to account for the difference between what is possible and impossible, this same option is not available to the Christian theologian. The reason for this is that E_3 opposes CM_2 insofar as some reality distinct from God is posited alongside God. For the Christian, it would seem that the Euthyphro problem arises anew: is something possible because God can create it[5], or can God create something because it is possible?

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4 By "absolute nothing" I mean the complete negation and denial of any kind of being or reality whatsoever. It is that path, which, at least according to Parmenides, is completely unknowable. Absolute nothingness stands apart from the relative nothingness of Aristotle's notion of potentiality. I discuss this difference further below.

5 This is not to suggest, as Wippel (1984, pp. 170-171) observes, that God is *free* to choose what is or is not possible, for the reason that God must act in conformity with His essence, which is both necessary and eternal. I shall discuss this in further detail below.

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Both Aquinas and Suárez are keenly aware of the metaphysical difficulties involved with the nature of possibility vis-à-vis their commitment to a creation *ex nihilo*. In this paper, I argue that the different answers each thinker offers for his position stem from his own basic metaphysical commitments. What is more, I suggest that Suárez's solution builds upon Thomas's own solution, develops it in light of Duns Scotus's account of the nature of possibility, and even disentangles the Thomistic position from some problematic accretions that arose from commentarial tradition of the Thomist school. As we shall see, key to Thomas's account of possibility are: (1) extrinsic denomination, (2) freedom from internal contradiction, and (3) imitation. Both (1) and (2) are also crucial to Suárez's doctrine, whereas (3) becomes attenuated in the Jesuit's doctrine. As I see it, Suárez's doctrine of possible being offers a kind of corrective to Thomas's theory so as to make its consequences more faithful to CM_2. This is not to diminish Thomas's contribution since, historically, as Jeffrey Coombs points out, the question of what it is for creatures to be possible is one that "only the second scholastics ask (…) directly" (Coombs, 2003, p. 225). Suárez, I suggest, was precisely in such a place as to be able to offer a much more developed answer to that question –even if not the fullest answer– which would only arrive as late scholasticism further developed.

Thomas Aquinas's Solution

From among his initial metaphysical decisions Thomas, though very much influenced by Avicenna's metaphysics, decisively rejects E_3, which is to say, he rejects the claim that an essence enjoys its own proper being. Though the *De veritate*, one of Thomas's middle works, "still betrays the influence of Avicenna's essentialism", according to Rudi Te Velde (1995, p. 67), that essentialism remains tempered by Thomas's doctrine of *esse* as an existential act distinct from essence. For Thomas, without that existential act an essence is simply nothing. Thus within the *De ente et essentia*, one of Thomas's earliest works, though the Dominican quotes with approval Avicenna's claim that being (*ens*) and essence are what the intellect first knows[6], Thomas explicitly rejects Avicenna's additional claim that essence *secundum se* enjoys any reality to itself (i.e., E_3)[7]. Thomas's reasons for rejecting E_3 are for the purpose of being faithful to CM_2. But the decision to reject E_3 will come with its own set of challenging consequences. Without the ability to advert to E_3 what makes something possible?

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[6] S. Thomas, *De ente et essentia* (ed. Leonine, vol. 43, p. 369), prol.: "(…) ens autem et essentia sunt que primo intellectu concipiuntur, ut dicit Auicenna".
[7] S. Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, c. 3 (p. 379): "Et tamen ipsi nature secundum suam primam considerationem, scilicet absolutam, nullum istorum esse debetur".

Relative and Absolute Potency

Thomas's account of the 'possible' (*possibile*) often emerges in relation to Aristotle's understanding of 'potency' (δύναμις: *dunamis*) (S. Thomas, *De pot.*, q. 3, a. 14;*S. Th.*, I, q. 25, a. 3). Though there is not an identity between possibility and potency, the two are related. Thomas unfolds the nature of that relationship when he addresses Aristotle's divisions of 'potency' found in the fifth book of the *Metaphysics*, where the Stagirite explains that 'potency' has five different meanings (Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 5.12.1019a15-33). Thomas adverts to Aristotelian text but subtly recasts the discussion in terms of the 'possible', which he reduces to two main divisions. At times, a thing is called 'possible', he explains, because of (P_1) some potency (*potentia*) and at other times because of (P_2) no potency[8]. Thomas then further subdivides the prior (P_1); something is possible either because of (P_1A) an active potency or because of (P_1B) a passive potency[9]. By (P_1A) active potency Thomas means that something is possible, not because of any intrinsic property or disposition within the thing that is denominated possible, but because of some relation to an extrinsic, causal agent that is capable of producing or bringing about the so-called possible thing. To use Thomas's example, prior to its being constructed, a building is said to be possible, not because of any intrinsic reality –for in so far as it does not yet exist, it has no reality– but only on account of a builder (i.e., external agent), who is capable of constructing the building[10]. Though he does not describe it as such, possibility in this sense, for Thomas, is simply a matter of extrinsic denomination[11]. In contrast to a possible thing in the sense of P_1A, that which is possible in the sense of P_1B (i.e., through a passive potency) does involve an intrinsic disposition on the part of the possible thing. This 'disposition' is just the preceding state of potentiality. Thomas gives as example of P_1B a log that, though not actually on fire, nevertheless has the potency to combust[12]. Thus the reason why a campfire, for example, is possible is because of the pre-existence of the *potentially* combustible matter of the log.

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[8] S. Thomas, *De pot.*, q. 3, a. 14 (Turin-Rome: Marietti, 1927): "(…) possible dicitur quandoque quidem secundum aliquam potentiam, quandoque, vero secundum nullam potentiam (…)" (p. 87).

[9] S. Thomas, *De pot.*, q. 3, a. 14: "(…) secundum potentiam quidem vel activam, vel passivam" (pp. 87-88).

[10] S. Thomas, *De pot.*, q. 3, a. 14: "Secundum activam quidem, ut si dicamus possibile esse aedificatori quod aedificiet (…)" (p. 88).

[11] As we shall see, extrinsic denomination is central to Suárez's own account of possible being as well.

[12] S. Thomas, *De pot.*, q. 3, a. 14: "(…) secundum passivam vero, ut si dicamus, possibile esse ligno quod comburatur" (p. 88).

Later in his *Summa theologiae*, Thomas identifies the difference between P_1 and P_2 as a difference between 'relative' and 'absolute' possibility (*S. Th.*, I, q. 25, a. 3). Relative possibility is simply that which pertains to "some potency" (*aliqua potentia*), whether in the sense of P_1A or P_1B (S. Thomas, *De pot.*, q. 3, a. 14). Significantly, this demand for some "potency" is such that some reality or being is presupposed for both P_1A and P_1B: either the reality of an extrinsic agent (P_1A) or the reality of an underlying subject in potency (P_1B). This presupposition, however, compromises the Christian theologian's commitment to CM_2. Thomas is adamant, "the Catholic faith supposes that all that is other than God, at some time was not"[13]. But is the presupposition of P_1A necessarily incongruous with the Christian faith, more specifically CM_2? If the active potency in question is that of secondary (creaturely) causes, then, there would be obvious problems for a creation-metaphysics. Yet, if the active potency in question is simply the divine agency, then the condition of a creation *ex nihilo* that nothing other than God be presupposed would seem to be satisfied. Nevertheless, given that Aristotle framed P_1A within the context of his philosophy of nature as correlative to P_1B (one of the necessary conditions for motion –see Aristotle, *Physics* 1.6–), the unique character of God as a creative-metaphysical cause can be misconstrued if simply taken as one agent cause among others[14]. The problem, then, is that in holding P_1A, one's commitment to CM_1 is left ambiguous. For this reason, Thomas thinks that God's creative causality is more properly captured by P_2 or absolute possibility since it is, to his understanding, consistent with CM_2 and unambiguous in its fidelity to CM_1 (S. Thomas, *S. Th.*, I, q. 25, a. 3).

In conducting his project along the lines of P_2, Thomas's creation-metaphysics transcends the framework of Aristotle's natural philosophy or physics. For the Philosopher, Thomas reports, "ex nihilo nihil fieri" (S. Thomas, *De pot.*, q. 3, a. 1, ad 1). Coupled with form and privation, matter (ὕλη: hulē) or, what is the same, potency is required as a necessary condition, as Aristotle sees it, for coming-to-be (γένεσις: genesis) (Aristotle, *Physics* 1.6). But since this coming-to-be emerges from some pre-existing subject –here the underlying matter– the coming-to-be is not absolute but only relative. This maneuver allows Aristotle to circumvent Parmenides's claim that Being cannot itself come into being, but it also placed him into opposition with Christian theologians who hold that the world itself comes into being (CM_1). When placed within the context of a creation *ex nihilo*, Thomas simply denies that any preexisting subject is required for a "supernatural agent", God[15]. Indeed, while it is true that before it was made the

[13] S. Thomas, *De pot.*, q. 3, a. 14: "Supponit enim fides catholica omne id quod est praeter Deum, aliquando non fuisse" (p. 88).

[14] See *De pot.*, q. 3, a. 1, ad 1; *S. Th.*, I, q. 45, a. 2, ad 1; I, q. 45, a. 5, ad 2.

[15] S. Thomas, *De pot.*, q. 3, a. 1, ad 1: "(…) under oportet esse aliquod subjectum motus vel mutationis, quod in agente super naturali non oportet, ut dictum est" (p. 38).

world was "possible to be" (*possible erat esse*), it does not follow that that possibility was owing to any preexisting matter or potency[16]. Rather, the possibility of the world consists in two things: (1) no internal contradiction among its essential predicates and (2) the active power of God (S. Thomas, *De pot.*, q. 3, a. 14). There is a shift, then, in the meaning of possibility, which Aristotle understood as relative to some underlying potency–(P_1) relative possibility– to an understanding of possibility as (P_2) "absolute" in which nothing other than the divine power is presupposed.

The upshot of the difference between P_1 and P_2 is that, for the latter, there is no being or reality presupposed whatsoever. Thomas's reason, then, for holding P_2 is so that he can remain faithful to CM_2. John Wippel points out that "there is no place within Thomas's metaphysics for any eternally preexisting possible that would enjoy some kind of being in distinction from that of the divine essence itself" (Wippel 1984). This is a crucial point to bear in mind. As metaphysical discussions develop in Thomistic circles during the sixteenth century and beyond, the distinction Thomas defends between *esse* and essence becomes understood in terms of Henry of Ghent's distinction between *esse existentiae* and *esse essentiae* in which some pre-existential metaphysical status is attributed to the latter. But, as Thomas himself points out, prior to creation, neither *esse* nor essence has any reality whatsoever. They are simultaneously brought into being through creation[17]. Later Thomists, such as Capreolus, would have a different view about the relationship between *esse* and essence and thus place themselves at odds not only with Thomas but also Suárez as well as their accounts of the nature of possibility.

If P_2 presupposes no reality whatsoever on account of which CM_2 is preserved, then it would seem the only metaphysical structure determining the possible would have to be God Himself. But the question then is: how? Thomas's answer, as we shall see, is cast in terms of the imitative relationship that possibility has to the divine essence.

Imitation

Imitation, for Thomas, constitutes both (1) a causal relationship of similitude between God and creature and (2) the means whereby God knows anything other than Himself[18]. With respect to the latter, the claim that God is pure subsistent act

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[16] S. Thomas, *De pot.*, q. 3, a. 1, ad 2: "(…) antequam mundus esset, possible erat mundum esse; non tamen oportet quod aliqua material praeexisteret, in qua potential fundaretur" (p. 38).

[17] S. Thomas, *De pot.*, q. 3, a. 5, ad 2: "Ad secundum dicendum, quod ex hoc ipso quod quidditati esse attribuitur, non solum esse, sed ipsa quidditas creari dicitur: quia antequam esse habeat, nihil est, nisi forte intellectu creantis, ubi non est creatura, sed creatrix essentia" (p. 50).

[18] Metaphysical similitude plays a crucial role in Thomas's metaphysics of participation, especially for Louis-Bertrand Geiger, who views it as the centerpiece of participation. See his *La participation dans la philosophie de S. Thomas d'Aquin* (1942). Paris: J. Vrin (esp. part 2). For a different view of

renders problematic the claim that God knows anything other than Himself. For God to know anything other than Himself would seem to place the divine cognition into a state of potency with respect to other things. But God is pure subsistent act and can have no admixture of potentiality whatsoever. Aristotle was attuned to this problem, which is why he held that the gods were thought-thinking-thought (Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 12.9). Many theologians' way around the difficulty –including Thomas– was to maintain that God's proper cognitive object was simply the divine essence itself. What is more, as Thomas holds God's intellect and its object (viz., the divine essence) are entirely identical (S. Thomas, *S. Th.*, I, q. 14, a. 2). This means, then, that if God is going to know anything (x) other than Himself, He can only know x through Himself. To this claim, Thomas adds a corollary. In order for God to know Himself perfectly, God must not only know every actual x (past, present, and future), God must also know every possible x that will never be created (S. Thomas, *S. Th.*, I, q. 14, a. 5). To explain how God enjoys such knowledge, Thomas tells us: "[God], however, sees other things not in themselves, but in Himself, inasmuch as His essence contains the similitude [*similitudo*] of other things from Himself"[19].

Moreover, as Thomas sees it, to know x means that God has an idea of x. Framing God's knowledge of creatures in terms of the divine ideas has the salutary benefit of preserving CM_2 since nothing apart from God's own essence is presupposed for the knowledge that He has of other things. Indeed, a divine idea is entirely identical with the divine essence[20]. The Dominican explains, "an idea does not name the divine essence inasmuch as it is essence, but inasmuch as it [i.e., the idea] is a similitude or *ratio* of this or that thing" (S. Thomas, *S. Th.*, I, q. 15, a. 2, ad 1). From this Thomas thinks that a divine idea can serve a twofold function. A divine idea can (1) serve as an exemplar of some x and (2) also serve as a principle of cognition of x (S. Thomas, *S. Th.*, I, q. 15, a. 1). That which allows divine ideas to perform that twofold function is the relation of similitude that each idea has to a corresponding creature. That is, each idea is just a way in which the divine essence can be imitated by a creature. What is more, if God is to have perfect cognition of Himself, then Thomas reasons that God must have an idea corresponding to every *possible* manner in which the divine essence can be imitated.

For [God] perfectly knows His essence itself, when He knows every mode according to which He is knowable. [God], however, is able not only to know

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Thomas's doctrine of participation that emphasizes, instead, the composition of *esse* and essence, see C. Fabro's (1961) famous *Participation etcausalité*. Louvain-Paris: Béatrice-Nauwelaerts.

[19] S. Thomas, *S. Th.*, I, q. 14, a. 5 (ed. Leonine, vol. 4, p. 172): "Alia autem a se videt non in ipsis, sed in seipso, inquantum essentia sua continet similitudinem aliorum ab ipso".

[20] See *In Sent.*, I, d. 19, q. 5, a. 3, ad 2; *De ver.*, q. 2, a. 3, ad 3; *S. Th.*, I, q. 15, a. 1, ad 3.

Himself according to what He is, but according to which He is participable [*participabilis*] according to some mode of similitude by a creature[21].

Thomas further describes the twofold function of the divine ideas. As an exemplar, the idea functions as a "principle of making a thing" and, for Thomas, constitutes God's so-called practical (as opposed to speculative) knowledge. What he means by the distinction between practical and speculative knowledge is the distinction between God's knowledge of what He produces at some point in time (past, present, or future) and that which, though God could have brought it about but never will, that is, the merely possible. Concerning those things that God makes at any point in time, their corresponding divine ideas function as exemplars, that is, a "principle of making things" (S. Thomas, *S. Th.*, I, q. 15, a. 3). But, taken simply as a principle of knowledge the divine idea is simply a 'ratio' and pertains to God's speculative knowledge regarding the intelligible structure of a merely possible creature (S. Thomas, *S. Th.*, I, q. 15, a. 3). Thus, for Thomas, God has speculative knowledge even of those things that He will never produce in terms of the divine *rationes*. Thomas does, however, grant that God has a virtual practical knowledge of those things that He will never make insofar as God could make them, that is to say, they are possible. Still, for those merely possible things the divine idea does not function as an exemplar but only as a *ratio* (S. Thomas, *S. Th.*, I, q. 15, a. 3, ad 2; I, q. 14, a. 15, ad 2).

We see, then, that as Thomas construes it, in order for something to be possible it must have a corresponding divine idea, either as something that has been made (i.e., an actualized possibility) given an exemplar, or as something that could be realized but only forever remains in God's virtual power and enjoying only a corresponding divine idea as *ratio*. But, as a divine idea, whether as exemplar or *ratio*, is simply a manner in which the divine essence can be imitated, constituting a relationship of similitude, possibility is determined by the imitability of the divine essence. Wippel summarizes Thomas's account of the metaphysical basis of possibility: "The ultimate ontological foundation for a possible is the divine essence itself, insofar as it is viewed as capable of being imitated in a given way" (Wippel, 1984, p. 168). We might say, then, that what is able to imitate the divine essence is possible, while what is unable to imitate the divine essence is impossible. But is this really explanatory? To say that whatever has the possibility of imitation is possible, while that which does not have the possibility of imitation is impossible is simply the tautological proposition: 'Whatever is possible is possible'. To

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[21] S. Thomas, *S. Th.*, I, q. 15, a. 2 (p. 202): "Ipse enim essentiam suam perfecte cognoscit: unde cognoscit eam secundum omnem modum quo cognoscibilis est. Potest autem cognosci non solum secundum quod in se est, sed secundum quod est participabilis secundum aliquem modum similitudinis a creaturis".

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avoid such a tautological reduction Thomas further develops his account of the possible in terms of non-contradiction.

Non-contradiction

If something is possible because it can imitate the divine essence in some fashion, what determines whether something is able to imitate the divine essence? Something is absolutely possible (P_2), explains Thomas, "from the relation of terms [of a proposition] to one another (…) since the predicate is not repugnant to the subject, as 'Socrates sits'"[22]. There is nothing contradictory, to use Thomas's example, between 'Socrates' and 'sitting', nor for that matter between 'gold' and 'mountain.' While the latter (viz., a gold mountain) might not actually exist –at least as far as can be empirically determined– there is no contradiction in its essential nature, which means it is possible. More precisely, it is possible not *a se*, because it has no intrinsic reality prior to creation, but owing to the extrinsic causal power of God, who is able to bring about something that can imitate His essence. In contrast, something is 'impossible' when a contradiction is involved (S. Thomas, *S. Th.*, I, q. 25, a. 3). Such impossibility, moreover, is not relative to some agent or patient but is simply impossible, Thomas tells us, *secundum se* (S. Thomas, *S. Th.*, I, q. 25, a. 3). By that, I take Thomas to mean simply that something's impossibility does not stem from some defect in an agent (e.g., a blind person's inability to see color) or from some lack of proper disposition in a subject (e.g., the inability to transmit light through an opaque medium).Rather, its impossibility stems from a contradiction in the essential structure or *rationes* of the impossible object.

Be that as it may, in framing non-contradiction propositionally, has not Thomas simply wandered into the domain of logic rather than give a proper metaphysical explanation? When discussing absolute possibility (P_2) how can Thomas unproblematically shift to a discussion of terms forming a proposition? Indeed, should we take Thomas's account of possibility to be simply a matter of conceivability? Thomas himself tells us that what is contradictory cannot be conceived? (*S. Th.*, I, q. 25, a. 3). James Ross thinks that the Dominican master commits that "old mistake" of reducing the possible to the conceivable (Ross, 2012, p. 159, n. 21). According to Ross, what Thomas describes (and, as we shall see, Suárez too) is simply a matter of formal or logical possibility as opposed to metaphysical possibility (Ross, 2012, p. 157). The reason Ross thinks conceivability is an insufficient basis for possibility is because, as he sees it, "Consistency is context bound, not free-floating" (Ross, 2012, p. 158). That

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[22] S. Thomas, *S. Th.*, I, q. 25, a. 3 (p. 293): "ex habitudine terminorum: possibile quidem, quia praedicatum non repugnat subiecto, ut Socratem sedere (…)".

is to say, conceivability –and the concepts and judgments flowing there from– a is metaphysically subsequent to the reality in question and cannot thereby serve as a determination of being. Early human beings, for example, might not have been able to *conceive* of the molecular structure of water because they did not have an understanding of the atomic structures that constitute water. As Ross puts it, one may not know the "overflow *de re* conditions" of something's possibility. Nevertheless, that two atoms of hydrogen and one atom of oxygen should synthesize to form water is *possible* in itself even if not conceivable. Ross's point is that at times the *de re* overflow conditions are "cognitively inaccessible" yet nevertheless constitutive of something's possibility (Ross, 2012, pp. 159-163). This would seem to militate against Thomas's account when he tells us, "For that which implies a contradiction implies, is not able to be a word, since no intellect is able to conceive that"[23].

Yet, is Ross's account of logical possibility the same as what Thomas presents us when he tells us that something is possible because it involves no contradiction? I think there is more to Thomas's account than mere conceivability. When addressing the question of divine omnipotence, Thomas turns to the famous medieval axiom that *omne agens agit sibi simile*. Each agent produces its like and, moreover, to each agent corresponds "a possible thing as its proper object, according to the *ratio* of that act by which its active power in founded"[24]. Now God is pure, infinite, subsistent being itself (*ipsum esse subsistens*), which means that God's proper effect, as it were, is to bring something into existence by communicating *esse*. Anything that can participate in God's being, that is to say, imitate God, is then said to be "absolutely possible". Furthermore, as Thomas argues, the only thing contrary to being is non-being[25]. He concludes, then, that whatever involves being and non-being (a contradiction) at the same time and in the same respect is itself contrary to being. That is to say, it is not able to receive being from God, not because of any defect in the divine agent, "but because it is not able to have the nature [*ratio*] of makeablity [*factibilis*] or of possibility"[26]. Accordingly, because God can communicate being (i.e., create) to anything that is able to imitate the divine essence, God is properly said to be omnipotent.

Is conceivability involved here? Yes, but for Thomas conceivability follows upon the structures of being itself. He certainly does not think that conceivability exhausts

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[23] S. Thomas, *S. Th.*, I, q. 25, a. 3 (p. 294): "Id enim quod contradictionem implicat, *verbum* esse non potest: quia nullus intellectus potest illud concipere".

[24] S. Thomas, *S. Th.*, I, q. 25, a. 3 (p. 293): "a unicuique potentiae activae correspondet possibile ut obiectum proprium, secundum rationem illius actus in quo fundatur potentia activa (…)".

[25] S. Thomas, *S. Th.*, I, q. 25, a. 3 (p. 293): "Nihil autem opponitur rationi entis, nisi non ens".

[26] S. Thomas, *S. Th.*, I, q. 25, a. 3 (p. 293): "sed quia non potest habere rationem factibilis neque possibilis".

those structures. Thomas's point is simple: that which exists, while it exists, cannot not exist. Can that be formalized logically? Yes, but, the principle of contradiction is itself founded upon the nature of being, as Thomas himself points out, "And therefore the first principle that *something cannot be simultaneously affirmed and denied* is indemonstrable because it is founded upon the *ratio* of being and non-being: and upon this principle all others are founded"[27]. Such being the case, if possibility, in part, is a feature of non-contradiction, which itself pertains to the structure of being, and if all being is ultimately resolved in terms of God, who, according to Thomas, is just subsistent being itself, then the structures of possibility must somehow be reduced to the structure of the divine being itself. Wippel (1984) notes that, for Thomas, "The ultimate ontological foundation for a possible is the divine essence itself, insofar as it is viewed as capable of being imitated in a given way" (p. 168). Again, the key to the metaphysical situation here is metaphysical 'imitation' spelled out in terms of non-contradiction. God is being itself, and thus whatever opposes being (viz., a contradiction) stands in opposition to the very essence of what God is. For that reason, it cannot imitate the divine essence and stands outside the pale of possibility.

Aftermath

While Thomas's account of possibility turns, in part, upon similitude or the imitability of divine essence, he has opened himself upon to certain metaphysical difficulties of which subsequent generations of thinkers were only too keenly aware. Imitation is a relation, but all relations involve at least two or more terms. The question, then, is what is being opposed to the divine essence as its term of relation? Is it something outside the divine being? Thomas is attuned to this concern when he explains that the multiplication of the divine ideas –again, the various forms of imitability of the divine essence– stems not from things themselves "but by the divine intellect comparing its own essence with these things" (*S. Th.*, I, q. 15, a. 2, ad 3). But this still raises the question: what are these "things"?

Thomas, of course, has no intention of positing any kind of reality outside of God to account for possibility, but insofar as he develops his account of possibility in terms of imitability and insofar as imitability is a relation, it is difficult to understand how the terminus of the imitability relationship –the "*res*," as Thomas calls it– does not enjoy some sort of metaphysical reality. What is more, since God knows eternally the ways in which His essence can be imitated, it is difficult to understand how the metaphysical

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[27] S. Thomas, *S. Th.*, I-II, q. 94, a. 2 (ed. Leonine, vol. 7, pp. 169–70): "Et ideo primum principium indemonstrabile est quod *non est simul affirmare et negare*, quod fundatur supra ratione mentis et non entis: et super hoc principio omnia alia fundantur (…)". Cf. Wippel (2000, pp. 41-42).

reality of the termini of His imitability relations cannot themselves be eternal. Richard Cross frames the situation succinctly, "if there are genuine relations of imitability in the divine essence, this requires that there are objects to which the divine essence is related; it requires, in short, that the divine essence is really imitated" (Cross, 2005, p. 62). Again, Thomas himself does not intend to posit any co-eternal realities alongside God, but it is difficult to see how his theory does not lead to that conclusion.

Henry of Ghent, however, was perfectly willing to draw precisely such a conclusion when marked a distinction between *esse essentiae* and *esse existentiae*. For Henry, *esse essentiae* is the non-existential being that an essence has in its intentional relation to the divine ideas. What is more, *esse essentiae* is a reality distinct from God (Henninger, 1989, p. 44). As Henry explains, in God's very eternal act of knowing, He not only eternally knows a creature as an imitation of the divine essence –a claim already found in Thomas Aquinas– but as an object distinct from Himself (Wippel, 1984, p. 177). What is more, this relationship is eternal since the term of the relationship is the eternal divine essence[28]. A creature's existential being or *esse existentiae*, however, is temporal since God confers existence upon a creature at some specific time. Henry further explains that *esse essentiae* and *esse existentiae* are related to the divine intellect and will respectively. While a creature's *esse essentiae* stands in a formal relationship of exemplarity to a corresponding divine idea, the creature's existential reality (its *esse existentiae*) results from a relationship to the divine will. Through God's free creative-choice, He actualizes through efficient causality whatever *esse essentiae* He wishes by bestowing upon *esse existentiae*[29]. In short, Henry, it would seem, has given rise to Avicenna's E$_3$, which would seem to present certain difficulties for one committed to Christian doctrine.

Duns Scotus was very aware of those difficulties and emerged as a major critic of Henry's doctrine of *esse essentiae* for the reason that, to the Franciscan's lights, it undermines a creation *ex nihilo*. If something has true and essential being (*esse essentiae*), then whatever has such being (*esse essentiae*) is not simply nothing, which is to say, it is something. Scotus thinks that Henry is committed to the claim that a creature enjoys essential being from eternity, although it receives its existential being at a given point[30].

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[28] For an excellent account of Henry's account of *esse essentiae* in relation to God see Henninger (1989, pp. 44-47).

[29] Henry, *Quodlibet*, 1, q. 9 (Paris, 1518; reprint Louvain, 1961): "Et est hic distinguendum de esse secundum quod distinguit Avicenna in quinto in fine Metaphysica suae (…). Primum esse habet essentiae creaturae essentialiter: secundum tantum participative: inquantum habet formale exemplar in deo (…). Secundum esse non habet creatura ex sua essentia: sed a deo: inquantum est effectus voluntatis divina eiuxta exemplareius in mente divina" (fol. 7r).

[30] Duns Scotus, *Lectura*, I, d. 36, q. un., n. 13 (ed. Vatican, vol. 17, 464): "Si res, in quantum aeternaliter fundat relationem ad Deum et ad cognitionem Dei, sit res habens esse essentiale et verum esse reale extra animam, tun creation non erit entis de nihilo, sicut patet, quid quod habet

Scotus complains: "If a thing has essential being from eternity and through creation does not acquire anything except existential being, which is a certain relation, creation is nothing other than making a new relation, and thus it seems less a matter of creation than alteration"[31]. In other words, for Scotus, an 'eternal creation' is not really a creation at all since there is "a contradiction included in something's being created from eternity"[32].

For his part, Scotus rejects Henry's notion of *esse essentiae*, which has a twofold consequence. First, imitation of the divine essence will no longer serve as the mechanism through which God knows creatures. From this follows the second consequence: possibility itself will no longer be determined on the basis of imitation[33]. Scotus develops his account of divine cognition in terms of *esse intelligibile*. Unlike *esse essentiae*, Scotus's *esse intelligible* is not construed in terms of the metaphysics of imitability. Rather, *esse intelligibile* emerges spontaneously from God's creative thought and requires neither model nor archetype. Only the supreme actuality of the divine intellect is at work[34]. Importantly, the production of *esse intelligibile* does not in itself constitute an act of creation since in producing *esse intelligibile* something is not produced into being without qualification (*simpliciter*) but is brought into being only in a certain manner (*secundum quid*)[35]. Scotus gives his account of divine cognition by breaking it

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esse quiddativum, non est simpliciter nihil –et creatura per positionem ab aeterno habuit esse essentiae".

[31] Duns Scotus, *Lectura*, I, d. 36, q. un., n. 16 (pp. 464, 465): "(…) si res habuit esse essentiae ab aeterno et per creationem non acquirat nisi esse existentiae, quod dicit respectum quedam, ergo creare nihil aliud erit quam facere unum respectum, et sic minus est creare quam alterare". For an exposition of Duns Scotus's critique of Henry of Ghent see A. Vos (2007). *The Philosophy of John Duns Scotus*. Edinburgh University Press (pp. 274-279).

[32] Duns Scotus, *Lectura*, I, d. 36, q. un., n. 17 (p. 465): "Quaero igitur an lapis praeceditis tam productionem secundum aliquod esse verum? Non potest hoc dici, quia tunc ante esse essentiae esset aliud esse verum extram animam; igitur omnino nihil ante illud esse. Igiturista productio qua sic producitur lapis in esse essentiae, est ali cuius et de pure nihilo, igitur est creatio; igitur ab aeterno fuit creatio, quia alicuius et de nihilo,--quod est contra eos et contra veritatem: dicunt quod contradictionem includit quod aliquid creetur ab aeterno (…)".

[33] For an excellent treatment of the relationship between God's self-knowledge and possibility throughout late medieval and post-scholastic frameworks, see M. Renemann (2015). Suárez's Doctrine of Concepts: How Divine and Human Intellection are Intertwined. In V. M. Salas & R. L. Fastiggi (Eds.).*A Companion to Francisco Suárez*,. Leiden: Brill (c. 13).

[34] See *Ordinatio*, I, d. 35, q. un., n. 47 (ed. Vatican, vol. 6, p. 264): "(…) per hoc enim quod intellectus divinus est in actu per essentiam sua mutest ratio intelligendi, habet actum primum sufficientem ad producendum omne aliud in esse cognito, et producendo illud in esse cognito, producit ipsum habens dependentiam ad ipsum metut intelligentiam (…) sicut in aliis dicetur quod causa sub ratione mere absoluta est actus primus a quo procedit effectus, et effectus productus habet relationem ad causam (...)".

[35] See *Ordinatio*, II, d. 1, q. 2, n. 84 (ed. Vatican, vol. 7): "Potestali quid produci (licet non creari) de simpliciter nihilo, id est non de aliquot secundum esse essentiae nec esse existentiae,

down into a number of logical (as opposed to temporal) instants[36]. It is only in the final instant, after having produced something in *esse intelligibile*, that God compares that thought-object to His own essence and perceives the imitation of *esse intelligibile* to the divine essence.

What is crucial to recognize here is that no relation of imitability between a creature's essence and the divine essence is required for God's knowledge of *esse intelligibile* (Cross, 2005, p. 64). Moreover, if imitation is no longer the basis of God's knowledge of things other than Himself, God's knowledge of His own essence no longer functions as the basis of possibility either. Rather, God knows Himself absolutely and, in conferring esse intelligible upon other things, does not in the "first instant" of His knowledge know esse intelligible as related (through imitation) to the divine essence.[37] The nature of possibility as Duns Scotus construes it has generated considerable scholarly debate but, as Tobias Hoffmann points out, there is some consensus that, according to Scotus, "God does not bestow the modal status on the possibles" (Hoffmann, 2009, p. 360). Limitation in space prevents a full exploration of Scotus's own account, but suffice it to say that, for Scotus, possibility emerges from something's enjoying *esse intelligibile*, which *esse* of course has its principle in the divine intellect. The possible, he says, is that which functions as the object of divine omnipotence, as that to which existence is not repugnant and, of itself, is not necessarily. A stone, to use Scotus's example, is produced in *esse intelligibile* and is thus the terminus of God's intellectual activity[38]. As such, because the

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nec secundum aliquod esse secundum quid, -quia creatura producitur in esse intelligibili non de aliquo esse, nec simpliciter nec secundum quid, nec possibili ex parte sui in isto esse; istud tamen 'produci' non est creari, quia non creatur aliquid in esse simpliciter, sed producitur ad esse secundum quid".

[36] *Ordinatio*, I, d. 35, q. un., n. 32 (ed. Vatican, vol. 6, p. 258): "Deus in primo instant intelligit essentiam suam sub ratione mere absoluta; in secundo instant producit lapidem in esse intelligibili et intelligit lapidem, ita quod ibi est relatio in lapide intellect ad intellectionem divinam, sed nulla adhuc in intellectione divina ad lapidem, sec intellection divina terminat relationem 'lapidis ut intellecti' ad ipsam; in tertio instanti, forte, intellectus divines potest comparare suam intellectionem ad quod cumque intelligible ad quod nos possumus comparare, et tunc comparando se ad lapidem intellectum, potest causare in se relationem rationis; et in quarto instant potest quasi reflecti super istam relationem causatam in tertio instanti, et tunc illa relatio rationis erit cognita. Sic ergo non est relatio rationis necessaria ad intelligendum lapidem (…)".

[37] Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio*, I, d. 35, q. un, n. 51 (ed. Vatican, vol. 6, p. 266): "(…) quia in illo signo naturae in quo ponitur *a* esse intellectum per essentiam intellectam, ponitur intelligere esse huius, et tamen tunc non intelligitur aliqua relatio –etiam ipsius *a*– quia asbsolutum praecedit relationem".

[38] Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio*, I, d. 43, q. un., n. 7 (p. 354): "(…) possibile, secundum quod est terminus vel obiectum omnipotentiae, est illud cui non repugnant esse et quod non post ex se necessario (…)".

stone is not incompatible with being and "of itself it is formally [*ex se formaliter*] possible and quasi-principatively [*quasi principative*] through the divine intellect"[39].

As Hoffmann notes, here Scotus's construal of possibility follows upon two things: (1) the "eidetic character" of the possible (*ex se formaliter*) and God's intellectual activity (*principative*) (Hoffmann, 2009, p. 367). Importantly for Scotus, while the possibles depend upon God for their *being*, they do not depend upon God for their modal status, that is to say, their very *possibility*. Possibles' modal status as 'possible' follows from the formal character they enjoy –their eidetic natures– which character is not contradictory to existence. Thus, only after God's producing something in intelligible being (*esse intelligibile*) in the "first instant of nature", does that thing in the "second instant of nature" have possibility in itself "since formally to be is not repugnant to it"[40].

While I cannot pursue Scotus's account of possibility further, we see that imitability has been displaced as one of the central conditions for what makes something possible. Rather, possibility flows from the formal nature that a thought-object (*esse intelligible*) enjoys in itself as consistent with existence. What is more, Scotus's account of *esse intelligible*, at least as Suárez reads him, does not reintroduce E_3 as Thomas's account of imitability had. This means, then, that the Scotistic account of possibility is more faithful to CM_2, and it is this Scotistic innovation in accounting for possibility that Suárez will have to take into consideration when developing his own doctrine. In this regard Víctor Sanz goes so far as to suggest that Suárez's doctrine is "inscribed in a tradition that has its roots in Scotism"[41]. While this may be true, if Suárez supports Scotus's teaching, it will be for the purpose of elucidating the parameters of the Jesuit's own account, which, as we shall see, nevertheless retains many points of congruence with Thomas Aquinas. There is more than a little truth to be found, then, in Norman Wells' claim that Suárez's ambition is, at bottom, irenic in his efforts to break through the merely "verbal disagreements" of the various schools (Wells, 1983, pp. 9-10).

Francisco Suárez's Solution

To return to the problem raised by the Avicennian framework, if the Islamic philosopher's account of E_3 runs contrary to the Christian theologian's commitment

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[39] Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio*, I, d. 43, q. un., n. 7 (p. 354): "(…) ergo est ex se formaliter possibilis et quasi principative per intellectum divinum".

[40] See Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio*, I, d. 43, q. un., n. 14 (p. 358): "(…) res producta in tali esse ab intellectu divino –scilicet intelligibili– in primo instant naturae, habet se ipsa esse possibile in secundo instant naturae, quia formaliter non repugnant sibi esse".

[41] Victor Sanz (1989) suggests that, in fact, Suárez is actually "inscribed in a tradition that has its roots in Scotism" (pp. 13-14). While this may be true enough, if Suárez supports Scotus's teaching, it will only be for the purpose of elucidating the parameters of the Jesuit's own account.

to CM_2, then it seems the easiest solution would be simply to deny the reality of E_3. This is what Thomas did and, as it turns out, Suárez also employs the same strategy. The Jesuit tells us that, prior to God's creation of a creature, the creature's essence "of itself has no true real being [esse], and in this precise sense of *esse existentiae*, the essence is not some thing [*rem aliquam*] but is *entirely nothing*"[42]. Unactualized essences lack not only existence, as Avicenna had taught, they do not even possess the being of possibility or any intrinsic reality (E_3) whatsoever. This is a simple enough counter to the Avicennian account and it has the benefit of resolving all being in terms of God's creative initiative, outside of which (at least prior to creation) there is absolutely nothing in congruence with CM_2. What is more, Suárez's motive for this metaphysical decision is, as it was for Thomas, clearly theological: "This principle is not only true, but it is also certain according to faith"[43]. For the Christian theologian: "Only God is of Himself a necessary being, and without that [God] nothing is made, and without His effecting nothing is, [nor] does something have real being in itself"[44]. Nevertheless, the theological framework determining Suárez's project, in turn, generates a new set of metaphysical challenges that arises precisely because the solutions following from the dismissal of E_3 are no longer available. As we shall see, the metaphysical tradition that preceded him helped Suárez develop his solution.

Uncreated Essences

In the thirty-first disputation of the *Disputationes metaphysicae* Suárez establishes the metaphysical framework that will determine his understanding of the nature of possibility. In that disputation he addresses the nature of possibility vis-à-vis the relationship between essence and existence as found within creatures. The *Doctor eximius* both (1) defends his thesis that within creatures there is only a rational distinction (*distinction rationalis*) between essence and existence –thereby rejecting the Thomist real distinction and the Scotist modal distinction– and (2) disentangles the consequences that emerge from his thesis. As becomes immediately apparent in his disquisition, Suárez's fundamental reason for holding only a rational distinction

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[42] See Suárez, DM, 31.2.1 (vol. 26, p. 229): "Principio statue undum est, essentiam creaturae, seu creaturam de se, et prius quam a Deo fiat, nullum habere in se verum esse reale, et in hoc sensu, praeciso esse existentiae, essentiam non esse rem aliquam, sed omnino esse nihil" (My emphases). All citations of Suárez texts will be taken from the Luis Vivès *Opera omnia* edition, Paris, 1866.

[43] Suárez, DM, 31.2.1 (vol. 26, p. 229): "Hoc principium non solum verum est, sed etiam certum, secundum fidem".

[44] Suárez, DM, 31.2.3 (vol. 26, p. 230): "(…) solus Deus est ens ex se necessarium, et sine illo factum est nihil, et sine effectione ejus nihil est, aut aliquod esse reale in se habet".

stems from the fact that, as he sees it, both the real and modal distinctions inevitably lead to E$_3$ and thus compromise CM$_2$.

Suárez's account of possibility develops in large part from the notion of *ens diminutum*. Among various medieval philosophers, *ens diminutum* has a special place in the metaphysical thought of Duns Scotus (Maurer, 1950, p. 221). Armand Maurer's research has shown that the phrase 'ens diminutum' derives from a medieval mistranslation of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* 6, wherein the Greek term 'λοιπόν: loipon'('remaining') is (mis)translated by the Arabic term 'nāquis' ('diminished'). When the mistranslated text was subsequently translated from Arabic into Latin, the term 'diminutum' was used to capture the meaning of 'nāquis' (Suárez, DM, 31.2.3, p. 230) Whatever philological interest there may be here, what is of philosophical significance is what *ens diminutum* came to signify and thus how it affected the development of later medieval and post-medieval metaphysical thought. The passage (*Metaphysics*,6) that gives rise to the mistranslation identifies three meanings of 'being': real being (i.e., being in the categories), accidental being (i.e., *ens per accidens*), and being as true (*Metaphysics*, 6.2.1026a33). Since the metaphysician is only concerned with real being, *ens per accidens* and *verum ens* (being as true) are set aside as what "remain" (i.e., *ens diminutum*) (*Metaphysics*, 6.4.1027b33; Maurer, 1950, p. 216). For many medieval thinkers, *ens diminutum* generally signified both *ens per accidens* and *verum ens* as they stood together in contrast to real being[45].Scotus, however, leaving aside the consideration of *ens per accidens*, restricted *ens diminutum* exclusively to the signification of *verum ens*, which is the being that something has precisely as it is known or produced in the mind, that is, the being of a thought-object[46]. But, insofar as Scotus identifies *ens diminutum* with being-known and given that being-known is an extrinsic relation, *ens diminutum* signifies nothing

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[45] See, e.g., Roger Bacon, *Quaestiones supra libros prime philosophiae Aristotelis*, lib. 6, ad obj. (Oxford: Clarendoniano, 1930): "Ad aliud dico, quod hec scientia [i.e., metaphysics] est certissima quantum ad alias part esentis de quibus determinat, tamen loquendo de illa [ens per accidens] quantum ad istam partem diminutissimam que est ens per accidens est incertitude in ista scientia, nec propter hoc debet dici incerta, quia de aliis determinans est certa, et imocertissima" (184). Cf. Maurer (1950, pp. 217-218).

[46] See, e.g., Scotus, *Ordinatio*, I, d, 36, q. un., n. 36 (ed. Vatican, vol. 6, p. 285): "Et ratio realis istius 'secundum quid et simpliciter' videtur esse ista, quod primo) entis videtur esse in ens extra animam et ens in anima (…) et ideo de nullo ente nec de aliquo esse sequitur, si habet esse esse deminutum in anima, quod propter hoc habeat esse simpliciter, -quia illud esse est secundum quid, absolute, quod tamen accipitur 'simpliciter' in quantum comparator ad animam ut fundamentum illius esse in anima"; *Ordinatio*, I, d, 36, q. un., n. 44 (p. 288): "(…) secundum esse deminitum (quod est 'esse' verum) quod esse est esse secundum quid (…)"; *Ordinatio*, I, d, 36, q. un., n. 54 (p. 292): "(…) dico quod ista proportio est relation cogniti ad cognoscentem, et haec est deminuens ens in quo fundatur (…) relation autem 'deminuens ens' non oportet quod requirat secum entitatem simpliciter illius entis quod determinat".

intrinsic or positive whatsoever in the known thing. Rather, *ens diminutum* denotes only a relation of reason or, what is the same, second intentions (Maurer, 1950, p. 221). That is to say, for Scotus at least, *ens diminutum* does not constitute a form of E_3 since the former is entirely a matter of extrinsic denomination whereas the latter enjoys its own reality intrinsically[47].

Aware of Scotus's actual teaching with respect to *ens diminutum*, Suárez corrects the Thomists when they claim that Scotus attributes some kind of reality to essences prior to their creation when he describes them in terms of *ens diminutum* thereby deftly reintroducing E_3 and compromising CM_2. Suárez states his agreement with the Subtle Doctor on the point that "the essences of creatures, although they should be known by God from eternity, are nothing, nor do they have true, real being [*esse*], before they receive it efficiently through the free will of God"[48]. Moreover, he points out that, ironically, it is some of the Thomists themselves who, given their commitment to a real distinction, actually espouse E_3 by attributing a real, intrinsic being to creaturely essences prior to their creation and thereby compromise CM_2[49].

As Suárez understands it, a real distinction is that which intervenes between a 'thing' and a 'thing' (*distinctio rei a re*) and thus renders a creature's essence and existence two distinct *res*[50]. It is precisely such a real distinction that is at play in the metaphysics of Johannes Capreolus, the *Princeps Thomistarum*. Capreolus develops his understanding of the relationship between creaturely essence and existence in terms of the distinction that Henry of Ghent had established between *esse essentiae* and *esse existentiae*[51]. While God creates out of "existential nothing" (*ex nihilo exis-*

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[47] This is not to suggest that Scotus's thinking on *esse intelligibile* and *ens diminutum* are entirely identical with Suárez's thoughts on the nature of unactualizedes sences and possibility. For differences between the two authors, see Renemann, M. (2014). *Suárez's Doctrine on Concepts: How Divine and Human Intellection are Intertwined*. Leiden: Brill (pp. 324-328).

[48] Suárez, DM, 31.2.1 (p. 229): "(...) essentiale creaturarum, etiam si a Deo sint cognitae ab aeterno, nihil sunt, nullum que verum esse reale habent, ante quam per liberam Dei efficientiam illud recipient".

[49] Suárez, DM, 7.1.1 (vol. 25, p. 250): "Primo enim per se notum est, dari in rebus distinctionem realem, quae ad majorem explicationem appellari solet distinctio rei a re, quae in hoc consistit, quod una res non sit alia, neque e contrario (...)".

[50] Whether Thomas Aquinas would recognize his own teaching in what his Thomist successors advance is an entirely different question and, as much literature has suggested, probably radically different in doctrine. The fact remains, however, that these were the Thomistic data, as it were, that Suárez had at hand. Be that as it may, given what we have seen thus far concerning Thomas Aquinas's view, the explanation that Capreolus provides seems entirely dissonant with his Dominican predecessor.

[51] Capreolus, *Defensiones theologiae divi Thomae Aquinatis* (ed. C. Paban and T. Pègues; Turin, 1902), tomus III, lib. 2, d. 1, q. 2, a. 3: "Quia, sicut dicit Henricus, et bene, meo judico, essential habet duplex esse, scilicet esse essentiae, et esse existentiae (...)" (p. 76).

tentiae), Capreolus tells us that God does not create out of "essential nothing" (*ex nihilo essentiae*)[52]. The implication here, of course, is that creatures enjoy their *esse essentiae* from eternity and are only brought into actual existence when they receive the really distinct *esse existentiae* through God's creative act. Importantly, the distinction between *esse essentiae* and *esse existentiae* appears to have the salutary character of establishing a basis for eternal truths (viz., *esse essentiae*) and possibility, despite the fact that the particular individuals instantiating essences only have temporal and contingent existence (*esse existentiae*). Nevertheless, insofar as *esse essentiae* is tantamount to Avicenna's E_3 Capreolus's account would seem to be incongruous with CM_2 for reasons we shall presently see.

Just as Scotus had subjected Henry's position to severe critique for its failure to accommodate the metaphysical exigencies of a creation *ex nihilo*[53], we recall, so does Suárez argue against Capreolus on similar grounds. The *Doctor eximius* tells us that that which has no existence (i.e., *esse essentiae*), is either (I) simply and entirely nothing or (II) it is not, which is to say that it is something. Given that Capreolus concedes that creatures have *esse essentiae*, which, as he admits, is not nothing, his position is contrary to (I). If (II) is the case, then, absolutely speaking, God does not create *ex nihilo* for God creates out of something –*esse essentiae* (i.e., E_3)–that is already real. In short, like Henry of Ghent, Capreolus's account is consistent with the claim that God does not really create anything at all. The most that could be said is that God, like the *Timaeus'* s δημιουργός, produces things out of some real receptive, unproduced potency, but this is entirely incongruous with CM_2.[54] What is more, Suárez warns, Capreolus's account would even allow creatures to "glory in themselves" since they would have something through their own selves (viz., *esse essentiae*) that they do not receive from God![55]

Be that as it may, if in itself a creaturely essence is entirely nothing, what sense does it make to call an unactualized essence "real," as Suárez does so frequently?

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[52] Suárez, DM, 31.2.4 (vol. 26, p. 230): "Neque aliquid juvat, quod Capreolus supra, ex aliorum sententia, respondet, Deum creasse omnia ex nihilo existentiae, non vero ex nihilo essentiae".

[53] See nn. 31, 32 supra.

[54] Suárez, DM, 31.2.4 (vol. 26, p. 230): "Aut enim quod nil habet existentiae, est simpliciter et omnino nihil, aut non. Si non, ergo absolute et simpliciter non creavit Deus omnia ex nihilo, nec produxit omnia entia, seu omne id quod vere est aliquid reale, et consequenter nullum ens proprie creavit, sed unum ex alio produxit, tanquam ex potentia reali receptive et improducta, scilicet existentiam, seu rem existentem ex essentia reali, quae dicitur esse potentia receptive ipsius esse, et improducta".

[55] Suárez, DM, 31.2.4 (vol. 26, p. 230): "Unde ulterius fit, creaturam posse quai gloriari, quod ex se habeat aliquid quod non habet a Deo, nec participatum ab illo. Haec autem omnia et similia sunt contra fidem et naturalem rationem".

Is it not the case that designating such essences as "real" attributes to them what the term itself suggests, namely, some 'reality' and lapse into a form of E_3? Suárez thinks not for the ascription is merely one of extrinsic denomination. When he calls essences 'real' or 'possible' it cannot be understood that any *intrinsic* reality is being signified. Rather, following along the lines of Scotistic *ens diminutum*, Suárez means that the reality or possibility that the essences in question enjoy is entirely *extrinsic* and consists in the irrelationship to God thought-objects or as an object of divine power (DM, 31.2.2). John P. Doyle gives a preliminary description of extrinsic denomination, as Suárez understands it, saying that it is "a designation of something, not from anything inherent in itself, but from some disposition, coordination, or relationship which it has toward or with something else" (Doyle, *Prolegomena to a Study of Extrinsic Denomination*, 2010, p. 125). Doyle also lists some common examples of extrinsic denomination: the designation of something as to the left or right of a column, an object's being visible or audible with respect to a seer or hearer, or even an object as known with respect to a knower (Doyle, *Prolegomena*, 2010, p. 125). This last example is particularly salient with respect to Suárez's teaching since an essence is called 'real', again, not because of anything *intrinsic* to it –which, we recall is key to the nature of E_3– any more than a column is called 'to the left of' or 'to the right of' something because of anything intrinsic to the column itself. Rather, a possible creature or, what is the same, an unactualized real essence is 'real' only in the sense of being an object of the divine power. This extrinsic character is captured precisely in Scotus's notion *ens diminutum* which, as we saw, concerns the extrinsic relationship between a knower and the object known. For that reason, Suárez is keen to elucidate just what is at stake in Scotus's account of *ens diminutum* so that the Jesuit can establish that possibility posits no intrinsic reality to an essence. Put simply, a possible being's very possibility only designates an extrinsic relationship to God, who Himself has the power to create the (possible) being in question.

That said, Suárez does add a caveat. In order for God to create something, the essence of that thing must of itself be non-repugnant, that is to say, it must involve no self-contradiction[56]. Does this suggest, then, that Suárez is betraying his position and covertly introducing some intrinsic criterion into uncreated essences, as Norman Wells suggests?[57] Doyle likewise finds it problematic that Suárez's resolution of

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[56] Suárez, DM, 31.2.2 (vol. 26, p. 230): "(…) solum est esse potentiale objectivum (…), seu per denominationeme xtrinsecam a potentia Dei, et non repugnantiam ex parte essentiae creabilis".
[57] See Wells (1983, p. 24): "It is to this extent that Suárez fails to overcome the problems associated with a genuinely underived, intrinsic, pre-existential possibility in the case of creatures. (…) Suárez is saddled with an underived, intrinsic pre-existential possibility of a negative sort which is embodied in his doctrine of *non repugnantia* and *essentia realis*".

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the nature of possibility turns upon non-contradiction for the reason that the Jesuit would seem to introduce being back into an uncreated essence (Doyle, *Suarez on the Reality of the Possibles*, 2010, p. 33). Given Suárez's opposition of real essences to *entia rationis* (non-beings), Doyle complains that, for Suárez, possibles are not non-beings (i.e., *entia rationis*), which is to say, they are beings (Doyle, *Suarez on the Reality of the Possibles*, 2010, p. 39). What is more, Suárez himself also describes unactualized essences as possessing "objective potential being". But if unactualized creatures enjoy some objective potential being, is that not the same as saying that they possess being, however so it may be qualified as "objective potential"? But if unactualized essences have any degree of being on their own, how can one maintain, as Suárez claims, that they are entirely nothing and not a form of E_3?

The "Essentialism" of Essences?

A great deal of confusion concerning the putative reality of unactualized creaturely essences has plagued many interpreters of Suárez, especially among those following in the wake of Étienne Gilson's essentialist interpretation of the *Doctor eximius*. As Gilson reads him, Suárez, together with virtually every other metaphysician in the history of Western philosophy (with the sole exception of Thomas Aquinas), was an "essentialist" for whom existence played little to no metaphysical role[58]. The emphasis upon essence and the conditions it sets for actual existence, in turn, determine the nature and scope of possibility. Gilson's account, in one way or another, spawned additional interpretations, some facile –such as that of Adrian Pabst, who claims that, for Suárez, "the reality of essences precedes the actuality of existence" (Pabst, 2012, p. 329)[59] -and others that are much more subtle and astute– such as what one finds with Wells[60] and Doyle[61]. Both Wells and Doyle, in fact, not only studied under Gilson, but each, in his own way, continued Gilson's existential Tho-

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[58] See especially Gilson, É. (1952). *Being and Some Philosophers*. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies (c. 3).

[59] This work follows in the same metaphysical footsteps as that of John Milbank whose postmodern-flavored Thomism finds repugnant any medieval and post-medieval non-Thomist. See, e.g., Milbank, J. (1997). *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, Culture*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.

[60] In addition to an English translation of the thirty-first disputation of the *Disputationes metaphysicae*, Wells has also produced many scholarly articles devoted especially to the subject of Suárez on eternal truths. See, e.g., Wells, N. J. (1980-1981). Suarez on the Eternal Truths, I and II. *The Modern Schoolman*, *58*(2) 73-104, 159-174.

[61] The most pertinent work of Doyle's that concerns our immediate topic is his "Suarez on the Reality of the Possibles".

mist project[62]. The reason why these interpreters view Suárez as an essentialist, who attributes (possible) being to essences independent of both real existence and God, has to do with a distinction that the Jesuit himself introduces in his doctrine of being, namely, that between participial being and nominal being[63].

Being taken as a participle pertains to what actually exists and thus signifies the act of existence (*actus essendi*)[64]. In contrast, nominal being formally signifies the essence of a thing, not as actually existing, but as it is in potential to or as it is apt to exist[65]. Moreover, given that an Aristotelian science, to which Suárez is committed, considers that which is necessary and universal (Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*,1.6-8), the Jesuit holds that the adequate object of metaphysics is nominal being, otherwise the particular and contingent character of *esse* as exercised by participial being would compromise metaphysics' scientific character[66]. Furthermore, Suárez specifies that nominal being is precisely that which has a 'real essence' (*essentia realis*) so as to distinguish it from beings of reason or *ficta* (e.g., a chimera), which do not fall under the scope of metaphysics[67]. Put simply, real beings have real essences on account of which they are apt to exist really, while *entia rationis* do not on account of which they do not enjoy an aptitude to exist[68]. But, as Suárez's essentialist interpreters read him, if nominal being does not actually exist yet it is still accorded some reality, then essence itself must enjoy being in some manner, which would just be the being of possibility or E_3[69]. Doyle thus raises

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[62] I should note that Doyle, while he considered himself a Gilsonian-existential Thomist until the end, grew much more sympathetic and appreciative of Suárez's thought. See Doyle (2010, preface).

[63] The distinction itself is not novel to Suárez's metaphysical project and has antecedents stretching back to at least Duns Scotus.

[64] Suárez, DM, 2.4.3 (vol. 25, p. 88): "Ens ergo, ut dictum est, interdum sumitur ut participium verbi *sum*, et ut sic significant actum essendi, ut exercitum, est que idem quod existens actu (…)".

[65] Suárez, DM, 2.4.3 (vol. 25, p. 88): "(…) interdum vero sumitur ut nomen significans de formali essentiam ejus rei, quae habet vel potest habere esse, et potest dici significare ipsum esse, non ut exercitum actu, sed in potential vel aptitudine (…)".

[66] Suárez, DM, 2.4.2 (vol. 25, p. 88): " Rursus constat ex communi usu, ens, etiam sumptum pro ente reali (ut nunc loquimur [i.e., ens ut nomen], non solum tribui rebús existentibus, sed etiam naturis realibus secundum se consideratos, sive existant, sive non; quomodo metaphysuca considerat ens, et hoc modo ens in decem praedicamenta dividitur".

[67] Suárez, DM, 1.1.26 (vol. 25, p. 11): "Ostensum est enim, objectum adaequatum hujus scientiae debere comprehendere Deum, et alias substantias (…) non tamen entia rationis, et omnino per accidens (…)".

[68] Suárez, DM, 2.4.5 (vol. 25, p. 89): "(…) si ens sumitur prout est significatum hujus vocis in vi nominis sumptae, ejus ratio consistit in hoc, quod sit habens essentiam realem, id est non fictum, nec chymericam, sed veram et apta madre aliter existendum".

[69] This is basically the interpretation which J.-F.Courtine (1990) offers in his *Suarez et le système de la métaphysique*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.

a critical question: "If creatures are somehow real essences, of themselves apt to exist, why … should they require a creator?" (Doyle, *The Suarezian Proof for God's Existence*, 2010, pp. 119-120).

I think Suárez's position is actually much more nuanced than the manner in which his essentialist interpreters read him. The Jesuit himself is clear: being taken nominally does not signify either being in potency or possible being. While nominal being prescinds from existence, as has already been noted, it does not *exclude* or *deny* that existence[70]. This aspect of Suárez's doctrine cannot be overlooked for it reveals the abiding existential concern that animates his metaphysical project and thwarts those interpretations that regard his metaphysics as indifferent to existence[71]. Suárez insists that *essentia realis*, which, again, is co-terminus with nominal being –the adequate object of metaphysics (DM, 2.4.3, 5)–cannot be understood without an order to existence (*ordine ad esse*) and thus to real, actual entity[72], for "existence as existence corresponds to being as such, and is intrinsic to its nature [*ratione*], whether in potency, or in act, taken just as it is being"[73]. What is more, Suárez maintains that nominal being does not immediately signify 'possible being' or 'being in potency' as can be determined from the very signification of the terms involved. Since 'being' signifies an existential orientation, possible being and being in potency must in some way negate, as it were, that existentiality through the addition of a privation or negation, which is signified by the terms 'potency' or 'possible'. Thus 'potency' signifies not a positive addition –such as a specific difference does in contracting a genus to a determinate species– but a privation or negation: the denial of *actual* existence[74]. In contrast, "being taken as a noun,

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[70] Suárez, DM, 2.4.9 (vol. 25, p. 90): "(…) *ens* enim in vi nominis sumptum significat id, quod habet essentiam realem, praescindo ab actuali existentia, non quidem excludendo illam, seunegando, sed praecisive tantum abstrahendo (…)".

[71] Sanz's (1989) account of Suárez's teaching on nominal being, when he describes it as "banishing" (*desterrar*) existence from its character, strikes me as an overemphasis, not necessarily to the degree of ontological essentialism, I concede. But there nevertheless results a view of the Suárezian metaphysics as existentially neutral, which, I hold, is far from the manner in which the Jesuit unfolds his account of *essentia realis*: "Según lo visto hasta aquí, es preciso desterrar de la noción de ente como nombre la significación de la existencia o entidad actual" (p. 27). For those who emphasize the existential character of Suárez's metaphysics see J. Hellín (1957). Existencialismo escolastico suareciano. *Pensamiento*, *12*, 157-178; *13*, 21-38 and much more recently J. Pereira (2007). *Suárez: Between Scholasticism and Modernity.* Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press.

[72] Suárez, DM, 2.4.14 (vol. 25, p. 92): "Quod vero essential aut quidditas realis sit, intelligi non potest sine ordine ad esse et realem entitatem actualem".

[73] Suárez, DM, 50.12.15 (vol. 26, p. 969): "(…) existentia, ut existential correspondet entiut sic, estque de intrinseca ratione ejus, vel in potentia, vel in actu, prout sumptum fuerit ens (...)".

[74] Suárez, DM, 2.4.12 (vol. 25, p. 91): "(…) ens autem in potentia dicit etiam reale ens, quantum ad realem essentiam, contractum et determinatum non per aliquid positivum, sed per privationem actualis existentiae".

although it precisely indicates a being having a real essence, does not add a negation, namely, the lack of actual existence, which negation or privation adds to being in potency"[75]. Suárez understands that a being's potentiality is not only a negation, but, as we have already seen, a matter of extrinsic denomination, "besides denomination from the power of an agent [potential being] includes a negation, namely, that it has not yet actually been produced by such a power"[76].

Further distinguishing being in potency from nominal being, the Jesuit points out that, while nominal being is common to both God and creatures and can truly be affirmed of both, being in potency is not since God is in no way potential. Accordingly, nominal being does not signify being in potency (Suárez, DM, 2.4.12). The same argument can be made for possible being, though Suárez leaves it for his reader to infer. Since nominal being is truly affirmed of God but possible being is not (since God is absolutely necessary) (DM, 28.1.8-10), nominal being cannot simply be reduced to possible being. Rather, possible being, just like being in potency, is a contracted determination of being (i.e., this or that kind of being). Such contraction, however, is not signified by the simple term 'being' (*ens*) for the reasons just given, "but only through these complex terms, *ens possibile*, *ens in potentia*, and the like"[77]. In the final analysis, Suárez's doctrine of being –and thus his metaphysics itself– because of its existential orientation, cannot be reduced to either being in potency or even to that which is possible, for these latter two add a negation to restrict being's existential character[78].

Nevertheless, in telling us that real essence is that which is free from contradiction, is it not the case that Suárez simply reduces being to the thinkable? If such were the case, then indeed possibility would seem to be a function of the thinkable. Jean-François Courtine (1990) interprets the Jesuit in such a manner (1990). Commenting on the question concerning where the metaphysical emphasis is placed, Sanz rightly observes that issue comes down to whether possibility is a mode of being or being is a determination of the possible[79]. While interpreters such as Courtine, Doyle, and Wells

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[75] Suárez, DM, 2.4.11 (vol. 25, p. 91): "(…) ens nominaliter sumptum, licet praecise dicat ens habens essentiam realem, non vero addit negationem, scilicet carendi existential actuali, quam negationem seu privationem addit ens in potentia".

[76] Suárez, DM, 31.3.4 (vol. 26, p. 234): "(…) sed potius praeter denominationem a potential agentis include renegationem, scilicet, quod non dum actu prodierit a tali potentia (…)".

[77] Suárez, DM, 2.4.12 (vol. 25, p. 91): "Ens autem sic contractum, seu prout in tali statu conceptum, non significatur per hanc vocem *ens*, nec per aliquam aliamin complexam quae mihi nota sit, sed solum per hoc terminus complexos, *ens possibile*, *ens in potentia*, et similes (…)".

[78] On this point see J. Pereira (2007, pp. 108, 120).

[79] Sanz (1989, p. 13): "En el terreno de las modalidades del ser según el pensamiento del Eximio, no está de más preguntarse si es la posibilidad un modo de ser o, por el contrario, el ser una determinación de lo posible".

come down on side of the latter (i.e., that being is a determination of the possible), I am not convinced they accurately represent Suárez's doctrine. I readily concede that Suárez describes *essential realis* as free of internal contradiction[80], but he also insists that *essential realis* is not a mere product of the intellect. That is to say, thinkablity does not "unproblematically" constitute being for Suárez, as John Milbank suggests (Milbank, 1997, pp. 40-41).Rather, as we have seen to be the case with Thomas Aquinas, the exigencies of being itself determine thought. The Jesuit, after all, is keenly aware of the difference between real being (as that which enjoys *essential realis*) and beings of reason (which do not have an *essentia realis*). As we have already seen, to distinguish the two Suárez turns to the notion of 'aptitude'. Whereas that which has an *essential realis* is 'apt' to exist, a being of reason is not. Nevertheless, this notion of aptitude itself raises a question: how can something be apt to exist without itself being something? Further still, how is that 'something' not just an intrinsic possibility (as is the case with E_3) the consequence of which would be to place something coeternally alongside God in opposition to CM_2?

Suárez offers the outline of an answer to these questions in the midst of responding to a series of objections to his claim that, prior to its creation, a creature's essence is absolutely nothing so as to maintain the absolute rejection of E_3 and congruence with CM_2. The objections all argue that creaturely essences must enjoy some sort of real and intrinsic being since: (1) they terminate God's cognition and so must be something; (2) the essential predicates of an essence are eternally true, but all truth is based on being; (3); created things have essential structures of themselves that are the same whether they are produced or not (e.g., an actually existing human and a possible human both fall under the same genus and species) and so must enjoy some essential being; (4) if there is no being to an essence prior to God's creation, a real essence will be the same as a being of reason; and (5) according to Thomas's threefold division of being(viz., essence, existence, and being as the truth of a proposition), essence enjoys its being from eternity (DM, 31.2.6).

Each of the objections, we observe, challenge Suárez's claim that an uncreated essence is simply nothing. 'Nothing', after all, cannot function as a cognitive terminus, or an eternal truth maker, or a difference of real beings and *entia rationis*, etc. In response, Suárez argues that what he calls 'potential being' is sufficient to overcome, in one way or another, each of the concerns that the objections raise and, crucially, that such being posits nothing real or intrinsic to an uncreated essence. That is, attributing potential being to real essences does not give rise to E_3 on Suárez's view.

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[80] Suárez, DM, 2.4.7 (vol. 25, p. 89): "(…) dicimus essentiam realem esse, quae in sese nullam involvit repugnantiam, neque est mere conficta per intellectum".

Obviously, the nature of potential being and its distinction from real being will be critical in determining Suárez's account of the nature of possibility.

Potential Being (i.e., Objective Potency)

The first thing that must be noted in coming to terms with what Suárez means by 'potential being' is that he does not have passive potency in mind or any relative possibility (P_1) for that matter. He explains that objective potency "asserts no real and positive potency which actually would be"[81]. What is more, for the Jesuit, objective potency is, as we shall presently see, just the same as possible being. The key to Suárez's account of potential being or objective potency is the qualifying term 'objective'. Calling a potency 'objective' simply places it into relation with some term, x, as the object of x. What is at issue here is extrinsic denomination. Objective potency "does not posit any real and positive being in the thing, which is said to be in potency"[82], says Suárez. But if objective potency is nothing intrinsic to something, then Suárez will have achieved his goal, namely, the evacuation of all being from that which is uncreated, even that which is only possible, which is the rejection of E_3. To establish that objective potency is of itself entirely nothing he offers three arguments and an additional corroborating observation. Each of these arguments, moreover, presupposes the Christian faith-claim of a creation *ex nihilo* (viz., CM_2) and argues there from.

First, Suárez argues, the objective potency of some essence is either something (α) produced or (β) unproduced. If the latter (β) is the case, then it would be nothing distinct from the creator. The reason for this claim is that whatever is not produced by God either is God or is simply nothing[83]. It must be understood, then, that such an unproduced objective potency would just be a feature of the divine power itself. If, however, an objective potency is (α) produced, it would still follow that that potency is nothing positive or intrinsic to an uncreated essence for the following reason. Either that potency would be ($α_1$) produced from eternity and of necessity or ($α_2$) freely and in time. The former ($α_1$) cannot be the case because of the theological tenet that God is a free, creator-cause. Suárez explains, "since from faith [it is known] that God does nothing of necessity *simpliciter*, nor from freedom of the will; thus from faith it is [also

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[81] Suárez, DM, 31.3.3 (vol. 26, p. 233): "(…) ergo hoc esse in potentia objective nullum dicit potentiam realem et positivam, quae actu sit".

[82] Suárez, DM, 31.3.3 (vol. 26, p. 233): "(…) esse in potentia, seu illa potential objectiva non possit esse res aliqua vera et positiva in ipsa re, quae in potential dicitur (...)".

[83] Suárez, DM, 31.2.3 (vol. 26, p. 230): "(…) quidquid a Deo factum non est, vel Deum esse, vel nihil ese (...)".

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known] that God began to operate in time"[84]. Accordingly, if objective potency is something produced, it could only be produced (α_2) "freely and in time"[85]. But, continues Suárez, before it was produced, it was in objective potency. That is to say, since the actuality of something follows upon its potentiality, it must be held that the essence's potentiality preceded its production as a condition for the very possibility of its being produced. Suárez denies, though, that that objective potentiality is anything intrinsic to the uncreated essence. Rather, the objectivity here of the potentiality in question is constituted as an extrinsic relation to some power capable of producing the 'objective potency'. "Therefore," concludes Suárez, "this being in objective potency does not assert real and positive potency, which would actually be"[86].

Second, Suárez argues that objective potency cannot be intrinsically real and positive in the produced thing for the reason that such potency would either (i) remain in the produced thing after its production or it would (ii) not remain. If (ii) is the case, then Suárez's claim holds because it cannot be understood how such a putatively intrinsic real being would be destroyed by the production or realization of an actual essence. But such a destruction or elimination would have to be conceded in order to account for the transition from the essence's potentiality to the real and positive actuality of its production. If (i) is the case and the objective potency remains after the thing's production, such a potency must not only be understood as 'objective' (i.e., extrinsically in relation to some external agent) but also as 'subjective'. By 'subjective' I take Suárez to mean a relative possibility (P_1) or, more specifically, a passive potency (P_1B). Clearly, if (i) is conceded, then CM_2 is compromised since things would not be made from nothing, "but from a presupposed potency, just as a subject or matter, out of which a thing is made"[87]. The Jesuit concludes, then, that objective potency is nothing real or intrinsic to an uncreated essence, and E_3 is avoided.

Third, Suárez reaffirms that since there is no reality whatsoever to an uncreated essence there cannot be any "real, positive potency" in an uncreated essence since real potency follows only upon real being[88]. That is to say, a condition for P_1A or P_1B is P_2. For this reason, Suárez tell us that something is called 'possible' only because of an

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[84] Suárez, DM, 31.2.3 (vol. 26, p. 230): "(…) cum de fide sit, Deum nihil agere necesario simpliciter; neque ex libera voluntate; sic enim de fide est, in tempore coepisse operari".

[85] Suárez, DM, 31.3.3 (vol. 26, p. 233): "(…) vel libere, et in tempore (…)".

[86] Suárez, DM, 31.3.3 (vol. 26, p. 233): "(…) ergo hoc esse in potentia objectiva nullum dicit potentiam reale met positivam, quae actu sit".

[87] Suárez, DM, 31.3.3(vol. 26, p. 233): "(…) sed ex praesupposita potentia, tanquam ex subject, vel materia ex qua fit res".

[88] Suárez, DM, 31.3.3 (vol. 26, p. 233): "(…) omnis enim potentia realis positive, est res aliqua vera, seu in aliqua realitate et entitate fundata".

extrinsic "denomination either from some active or passive potency"[89]. Here, Suárez is attempting to clarify that the objection confuses P_1 with P_2. But given that, as we saw above, P_1 and its subdivisions (P_1A and P_1B) always presuppose something preexistent, even if P_1A be at issue, the possible thing would still be referred to as 'possible' by means of extrinsic denomination and not by any intrinsic property. It is here that Suárez, while consistently rejecting E_3, identifies non-contradiction on the part of an essence as a criterion of possibility. He says, "from the part of creatures therefore is only supposed non-repugnance"[90]. It is important to note that this criterion placed on the "part of creatures" is a negation, namely, the denial of self-contradiction. So, while this criterion might be cast as intrinsic, it still posits no positive reality to an essence prior to its creation "since no reality in them [i.e., creatures before they are created] is required or can be supposed"[91]. Nevertheless, the question remains, just what is at issue in non-repugnance? While non-contradiction was an important feature of Thomas Aquinas's doctrine of possibility, Suárez develops his own account in a markedly different manner.

I shall return to Suárez's account of how non-contradiction plays into his understanding of possibility momentarily. For the time being, we see that when Suárez attributes 'potential being' or, what is the same, 'objective potency' to an uncreated essence, he has no intention of conceding E_3. As he puts it: "being in objective potency, is nothing other than being able to be an object of some power, or, more preferably, of the action or causality of some power"[92]. To claim that the 'objective' in 'objective potency' signifies something intrinsic would require that the object precede itself in order to be an object of itself. Yet, as nothing can precede or produce itself, nothing can be its own object in the sense of being an object of its own self-causal act. In short, for Suárez, 'objectivity' just denotes a relation between a cause and its potential object. Moreover, that potentiality signifies, as we have seen, "a negation, namely, that it has not yet actually proceeded from such a [causal] power"[93]. The situation here, then, is entirely a matter of extrinsic denomination.

Suárez further emphasizes the extrinsic character of possibility when he tells us that the relationship between being in act and being in potency (i.e., objective potency),

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[89] Suárez, DM, 31.3.3 (vol. 26, p. 233): "(…) per denominationem ab aliqua potentia activa, vel passive (…)".
[90] Suárez, DM, 31.3.3 (vol. 26, p. 233): "Ex parte igitur creaturarum solum supponitur non repugnantia (…)".
[91] Suárez, DM, 31.3.3 (vol. 26, p. 233): "(…) quia nihil rei in eis require aut supponi potest".
[92] Suárez, DM, 31.3.4 (vol. 26, p. 234): "(…) esse in potentia objectiva, nihil aliud est quam posse objiciali cui potentiae, vel potius actioni aut causalitati ali cujus potentiae (…)".
[93] Suárez, DM, 31.3.4 (vol. 26, p. 234): "(…) include renegationem, scilicet, quod non dum actu prodierit a tali potentia (…)".

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is just the same as the relationship between being and non-being. Being in act is not understood as the further addition of being (*esse*) to some intrinsic reality that an as-of-yet uncreated essence enjoys (DM, 31.3.8) for, "an essence in potency has nothing of entity"[94]. Jorge Secada explains, "[F]or, though on its own nothing in reality, potential essence [i.e., objective potency] in a sense exists within what could cause it" (Secada, 2000, p. 223). But to exist in the power of the cause is just to be of the very being of the cause itself. That is to say, for Suárez, possible essences exist only objectively in the divine mind (Suárez, DM, 31.2.10; cf. Secada, 2000, p. 228). In itself, that is, intrinsically, objective potency is just nothing (Sans, 1989, pp. 50-53).

Non-Repugnance and Eternal Truths

Though Suárez's reduction of possibility to extrinsic denomination vis-a-vis the divine power might have safeguarded the Christian theologian's unnegotiable commitment to CM_2, it would, unfortunately, seem to have the disastrous consequence of destroying science. That is, as already mentioned, a science as Aristotle construes it only concerns that which is necessary and universal. Individual creatures are particular and the existence they enjoy, though realized according to certain essential structures, is utterly contingent and temporal. If existence is removed from a creature, its essence falls into oblivion and cannot serve as a ground for eternal and necessary truths (e.g., 'a human being is an animal' or 'rust is iron oxide'). Suárez neatly sums up the dilemma: "if existence is withdrawn, essence is nothing, therefore neither is substance, nor accident, and consequently neither is body, nor soul, nor any other such thing; therefore no essential attribute is rightly able to be predicated of that"[95]. In short, the question is: how can an Aristotelian science be preserved without some form of E_3?

Perhaps one might expect Suárez to employ the same tactic that he did against Avicenna's notion of essential being and simply reject that there are eternal and necessary truths. This was the approach Francisco Zumel (1540-1670) and Michael de Palacios took (Wells, 1983, p. 210, n. 108). They held that propositions regarding creatures only come to be true as creatures come to exist and cease to be true once creatures cease to be (DM, 31.12.39). Nevertheless, Suárez, aligning himself with several Church Fathers, especially Augustine, rejects the idea that there are no eternally necessary truths (DM, 31.12.39).

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[94] Suárez, DM, 31.3.5 (vol. 26, p. 234): "(…) essentiam in potentia nihil habere entitatis (…)".
[95] Suárez, DM, 31.12.38 (vol. 26, p. 294): "(…) si, ablata existentia, (…) essentia nihil est, ergo nec est substantia, neque accidens, et consequenter neque corpus, neque anima, neque alia hujus modi; ergo nullum essentiale attributum potest de illa jure praedicari". Cf. Curley, E. M. (1984). Descartes on the Creation of Eternal Truths. *The Philosophical Review*, *93*, 585.

If not a function of creaturely essences which have no eternal being, are eternal truths grounded somehow in the divine being? That had been the opinion of Thomas Aquinas, who, we recall, held that eternal, necessary truths have their truth and therefore being in the divine intellect[96]. Amazingly, Suárez rejects this claim and herein the crucial difference between the Jesuit and his Dominican predecessor emerges. Suárez's reason for rejecting Thomas's claim is that not only are necessary truths in the divine intellect (e.g., 'a human being is an animal'), so too are contingent truths (e.g., 'Socrates is snub-nosed'). But if to be an eternal necessary truth were just to be in the divine intellect, then all truths –contingent ones included– would be eternal and necessary, which is absurd. For Suárez, eternally necessary truths are not "true because they are known by God, but rather they are known because they are true, otherwise it would not be possible to render a reason why God would necessarily know them to be true"[97]. The Jesuit adds –in what would later serve as a fundamental disagreement with Descartes (Curley, 1984, pp. 586-588)– that the necessity of such truths cannot emerge from the divine will's election. If eternal truths depended upon divine volition, they would not be necessary of themselves (DM, 31.12.40). Moreover, Suárez, like Thomas had before him, marks a distinction between the divine speculative intellect and the divine operative intellect. While the latter knows things as they actually exist (e.g., Mars actually has two orbiting satellites, Phobos and Deimos), the former merely considers the truth of its object, it does not make that object actually to be. For example, God could speculatively consider the necessary predicates that pertain to the essence of a twin sibling of an only child or of the essential structure of a gold mountain without actually bringing the twin or mountain into being. Suárez concludes, "therefore enunciations of this kind, which are said to be in the first, and indeed also are in the second mode of per se predication, have perpetual truth, not only as they are in the divine intellect, but also in themselves, and prescinding from it"[98].

Suárez's thesis may well seem counterintuitive from a Christian perspective since it suggests that eternal truths are, in a sense, independent from God, which would seem to run contrary to CM_2. That something can be true independently from God seems outrageous *prima facie* for the Christian theologian since, as Aristotle himself points out, truth depends upon being: "From the fact that something is or is not,

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[96] Cf. S. Thomas, *S. Th.*, I, q. 10, a. 3, ad 3; I, q. 16, a. 7 ad 1; *De ver.*, q. 1, a. 5, ad 11.

[97] Suárez, DM, 31.12.40 (vol. 26, p. 295): "Rursus neque illae enuntiationes sunt verae quia cognoscuntur a Deo, sed potius ideo cognoscuntur, quia verae sunt, alio qui nulla reddi posset ratio, cur Deus necessario cognosceret illas esse vera (…)".

[98] Suárez, DM, 31.12.40 (vol. 26, p. 295): "(…) igitur hujus modi enuntiationes, quae dicuntur esse in primo, imo etiam quae sunt in secundo modo dicendi per se, habent perpetuam veritatem, non solum ut sunt in divino intellectu, sed etiam secundum se, ac praescindendo ab illo".

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a proposition is true or false" (Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 4.7.1011b26–28). To suggest, then, that there are necessary truths and that these truths are somehow independent of God would seem to imply that there is a being or some reality serving as a truth-maker, which being is independent of God. What is more, as we have seen, in order to maintain CM$_2$ in developing his account of possibility Suárez consistently rejects the claim that there is any co-eternal reality alongside God (E$_3$). Moreover, to avoid such a conclusion was the very reason he posits a real identity between a creature's essence and existence in the first place. To suggest, then, that eternal truths are true in themselves seems to betray every conviction and metaphysical thesis that Suárez has thus far defended.

Nevertheless, as Jorge Secada correctly explains, the present dilemma stems from "confus[ing] an existential with a definitional predication" (Secada, 2000, p. 227). That is, for Suárez the copula 'is' (*est*) functions in a twofold manner (DM, 31.12.44). On the one hand, 'is' can indicate a real connection between two actual, real terms pertaining to an existing thing, "when it is said '*man is an animal*', the thing itself is signified thus to be"[99]. On the other hand, 'is' can also indicate that a certain predicate pertains to the nature of the subject term, whether that term is existent or not (DM, 31.12.44). The first sense of 'is' corresponds to the Aristotelian claim made above about truth following from the being of something. Suárez himself points out that truth depends precisely upon the existence of the terms involved such that what is indicated is a "real and actual duration"[100]. To say, for example, that 'Socrates is an animal' in the first sense of 'is', is true only if Socrates actually exists and indeed only so long as he exists. What is more, since the truth of such propositions depends upon the actual existence of its terms, and, insofar as the terms are contingent, the truth of such propositions has an efficient cause (God) that sustains the being signified by the terms of the proposition (DM, 31.12.44). According to the first sense of 'is', then, a metaphysical reality is indicated, which reality serves as a truth-maker for its co-responding propositions. In this way, since what is under discussion is contingent, dependent being, then of course Suárez readily admits that such truth is entirely dependent upon God just as all being is dependent upon God.

Taken in the second sense, however, the conditions for a proposition's being true do not depend upon existence, which is the same as saying they do not have a relation to God as an efficient cause. But if propositions are true not in relation to some actual real being (as was the case with the first kind of propositions), then what serves as the truth-makers of these second kinds of necessary and eternal propositions? Suárez an-

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[99] Suárez, DM, 31.12.44 (vol. 26, p. 296): "(…) cum dicitur, *homo est animal*, significetur rei spa ita esse".
[100] Suárez, DM, 31.12.44 (vol. 26, p. 296): "(…) significat realem et actualem durationem (…)".

swers that they are determined by hypothetical or conditional relations (DM, 31.12.45). "For when we say that a man is an animal, abstracting from time, we say nothing other than [the fact that] this is nature of man cannot be brought about without being an animal. Whence, just as this conditional is eternal, 'If it is a human being, it is an animal,' or, 'If it runs, it moves,' thus these [propositions] are eternal, 'Man is an animal,' or 'Running is motion'"[101]. In reducing necessary and eternal truths to hypothetical or conditional propositions, Suárez relativizes them to God, which means that God alone is metaphysically necessary. While there might be a necessary connection between the terms of an eternal truth, that necessity remains metaphysically conditional. The necessity of eternal truths, then, is of a non-ontological order since creatures need not exist. But *if* they do, then there are (hypothetically) necessary features of created beings on account of which there can be science without introducing E₃.

Nevertheless, Suárez confronts a difficulty regarding these necessary truths vis-a-vis possibility. As we saw, Ross argues that possibility cannot be a function of conceivability or thinkability. Yet, in grounding eternal truths upon formal identities and relations of thought, anything conceivable –including fictions– wouldseem to be possible. Suárez himself acknowledges this dilemma: "For this conditional is equally true, 'If a stone is an animal, it is able to sense, and that, 'If a man is an animal, he is able to sense'"[102]. What is more, given the reduction of the conditional statements to their indicative mood that we saw Suárez effect earlier with the propositions 'man is an animal' and 'running is motion', it seems one could accomplish the same and yield the necessarily true proposition that 'the stone is a sentient being'. The claim that such a proposition is an eternal and necessary truth would seem to be absurd since it is impossible for a stone to be sentient. This, however, could be just to beg the question since one could still ask: why is it impossible for a stone to be sentient?

Earlier we saw that, for Suárez, possibility is an extrinsic denomination of some object relative to the divine power. As God is both omniscient and omnipotent, the impossibility of a stone's being sentient, for example, cannot be a defect or limitation on the part of divine cognition or volition. Rather, the impossibility concerns the negative criterion Suárez identified earlier: non-repugnance. Non-repugnance serves as the distinction between those conditional propositions that are necessarily true and possible, as opposed to those that are not. Yet, non-repugnance here does not

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[101] Suárez, DM, 31.12.45 (vol. 26, p. 297): "(…) cum enim dicimus hominem esse animal, abstrahendo a tempore, nihil aliud dicimus, nisi hanc esse hominis naturam, ut non posit fieri homo quin sit animal. Unde, sicut haec conditionalis est perpetua, *Si est homo*, *est animal*, vel, *Si curri*, *movetur*, ita haec est perpetua, *Homo est animal*, vel, *Curus est motus*".
[102] Suárez, DM, 31.12.45 (vol. 26, p. 297): "(…) aeque enim vera est haec conditionalis, *Si lapis est animal*, *est sensibibilis* [sic.], acista, *Si homo est animal*, *est sensibilis*".

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function in the same way that it did for Thomas since what is at issue is not a possible thing's imitation of the divine essence. Non-contradiction for the Jesuit pertains to the intrinsic relation that an eternal truth has to itself. Suárez explains, "Nevertheless, in this we are able to assign a difference between necessary connections, conceived and enunciated between possible things or real essences, and between fictitious things or beings of reason, that is those [former] the connection is necessary according to an intrinsic relation among the terms abstracting from actual existence, as, however, it would be possible in an order to actual existence"[103]. The reason why the proposition 'man is an animal' is *necessary* is because of the hypothetical relationship between the terms, which relationship has no efficient cause but depends solely on the formal identity of the terms involved. The reason why it is *possible*, however, is because there is a cause (God) capable of effecting the existence of the terms (DM, 31.12.45). Herein consists the key difference between Scotus and Suárez. As Hoffman has suggested, for Scotus, God is the cause of the being of entities but is not the cause of their modal status (Hoffmann, 2009). For Suárez, however, God is both the cause of their being and, insofar (1) as the formal identities constituting hypothetical relations are objectively present in the divine mind as God's thought-objects and (2) insofar as God has the power to realize what He can think without contradiction, so are those things possible. Here, the Jesuit comes somewhat closer to Thomas's thinking than to Scotus since, for the Dominican, impossibility is, as we have seen, a function of contradictory predicates. "Therefore this is repugnant to absolute possibility, which is placed under that of divine omnipotence, which implies in itself being and non-being simultaneously"[104]. More than that, what is possible, precisely because it is a matter of extrinsic denomination, requires a cause capable of bringing about the existence of the non-contradictory terms. "And according to this," says Suárez, "the truth of such enunciations depends on a cause capable of effecting the existence of the terms"[105]. It is difficult to reconcile Suárez's account presented here with Doyle's claim that "if these non-repugnant possibles were not in themselves what they are, then there would be not only no divine Word but also no divine omnipotence, no divine science, and even no God" (Doyle, *Suarez on the Reality of the Possibles*, 2010,

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[103] Suárez, DM, 31.12.45 (vol. 26, p. 297): "Quamquam in hoc possimus discrimen assignare inter conexiones necessarias, conceptas et enunciates inter res possibiles seu essentias reales, et inter res fictitias vel entia rationis, quod in illis ita est connexio necessaria secundum intrinsecam habitudinem extremorum abstrahentium ab actuali existentia, ut tamen sit possibilis in ordine ad actualem existentiam (…)".

[104] S. Thomas, *S. Th.*, I, q. 25, a. 3 (ed. Leonine, vol. 4, p. 293): "Hoc igitur repugnat rationi possibilis absoluti, quod subditur divinae omnipotentiae, quod implicat in se esse et non esse simul".

[105] Suárez, DM, 31.12.45 (vol. 26, p. 297): "(…) et quo ad hoc pendet veritas talium enuntiationum a causa potente efficere existentiam extremorum".

p. 37). Edwin Curley, on my view, seems to have the more accurate reading of Suárez: "[T]here is nothing in Suarez which says that the eternal truths are true independently of God" (Curley, 1984, p. 586). What is more, as Secada notes, Suárez's claims about possibles being true apart from God "incorporate an implicit *per impossibile* qualification" (Secada, 2000, p. 302, n. 37). That is: "[Possibles] do not imply any ontological dependence or posteriority on the part of God; for they express only the ultimate modal structure of all being and reality, a structure which is founded in God, the only necessary substance" (Secada, 2000, p. 302, n. 37). Again, we must bear in mind that possibility cannot be construed in the fashion of something intrinsic to the creature, for that possibility is entirely objective or, what is the same, extrinsic. As beings of reason involve a formal contradiction (e.g., in the case of the 'sensing stone,' which is the contradiction 'inanimate animate being'), they are not possible[106]. Thus Suárez holds: "But in the case of fictional beings, the necessary connections only come to be without a relationship, even with regard to the possible, to existing but merely with a relation to the imagination or fiction of the mind" (DM, 31.12.45).

Conclusion

From what we have seen the principle challenge for the Christian theologian is fidelity to CM_2 and the consistent rejection of E_3. Both Thomas Aquinas and Suárez were aware of the balance they had to maintain between satisfying the demands of an Aristotelian science that considers universal and necessary truths without positing E_3. Thomas's success in that regard was rather dubious insofar as, turning to imitability, the shadowy being of a relative terminus seems to have been planted and would blossom to full maturity in Henry of Ghent's notion of *esse essentiae*. Accordingly, it is difficult to see how Thomas is able to avoid E_3 and preserve CM_2.

No doubt with that problem precisely in mind, we see that Suárez is equally committed to maintaining fidelity to both his theological commitments and the rigors of an Aristotelian science. What is possible, for Suárez, has absolutely no being whatsoever within its own constitution and is entirely a matter of extrinsic denomination. Thomas, we saw, thought very much the same. But unlike Thomas, Suárez must ground the necessity of eternal truths that correspond to unactualized possibi-

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[106] Does Suárez claim run afoul of Ross's argument that conceivability cannot be the criterion of possibility since the knower is not always aware of the "*de re* overflow conditions" pertaining to what is possible? I do not think so since Ross's argument can only hold for a finite intellect that, precisely as finite, cannot exhaust all the de re overflow conditions. An infinite intellect, Suárez could argue, is such that it can exhaustively comprehend all essences without any overflow remainders.

lities not in an imitative relationship to God but within the hypothetical necessities that creatures bring to bear. In sum, there is for Suárez a distinction between (formal) necessity, on the one hand, and (metaphysical) possibility, on the other. While creatures enjoy a necessity unto themselves just as their natures are properly of themselves, that necessity does not command any metaphysical reality. In this way, we see that Suárez remains committed to CM_2. What is more, even that formal necessity is simply a feature of God's speculative thought, which, infinitely expansive in itself, knows all that is in some way intelligible. But, for Suárez, in the final analysis not all that is intelligible to the divine mind need be, for God remains a free creator. As such, all being, without remainder, is reduced to God, which is to say that Suárez's creation-metaphysics is simply an expression of deeply held theological convictions that, as Colossians 1:16-17 puts it, "omnia per ipso et in ipso create sunt et ipse est ante omnes et omnia in ipso constant".

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