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SUÁREZ ON FORMS, UNIVERSALS AND UNDERSTANDING

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1. INTRODUCTION

Suárez' view on the "classical" problem of universals has been given widely different interpretations in the secondary literature.¹ When trying to spell out Suárez' position on these matters, commentators have – rightly – focused on *Metaphysical disputations* numbers 5 and 6, dealing with individual and formal unity, respectively. However, as interpretations based on these disputations differ widely, it might be worthwhile to take a look at this question from a slightly different angle.

To this end, I shall look at what Suárez has to say on the question of the status of substantial forms, together with an exposition of his account of abstraction and understanding. For reasons that, I hope, will become obvious in the course of the article, I believe that the treatment of these themes together will also present a fresh look at the question of the status of universals in Suárez, complementing those which are ordinarily given.

¹ For a view on Suárez as a nominalist, see Francisco L. Peccorini: "Knowledge of the Singular: Aquinas, Suarez and Recent Interpreters", in: *The Thomist* 38 (1974), p. 606–655. For an account of Suárez as a (moderate) realist, see Daniel Heider: "Suárez on Universals: Moderate Nominalism or Moderate Realism?", paper given at the Conference *Suárez's Metaphysics. Disputationes metaphysicae in Their Systematic and Historical Context*, Prague, October 1–3, 2008. For yet another assessment of Suárez' philosophy in this area, as a "realist conceptualist," see J. F. Ross: "Suarez on 'Universals'", in: *The Journal of Philosophy* 59 (1962), p. 736–48. For a good general account of Suárez' views on universal, where the different strands of his thinking in these areas (realist, nominalist, conceptualist) are spelled out nicely without a judgment of where his "real" allegiance lies, see Carlos P. Noreña: "Ockham and Suarez on the Ontological Status of Universal Concepts", in: *New Scholasticism* 55 (1981), p. 348–362.

I shall begin with an exposé of Suárez' treatment of substantial form and its relation to matter. A short section on the notion of metaphysical form in the context of metaphysics will tie together the accounts of Suárez' metaphysics and of his theory of understanding. In the second main section, Suárez' views on understanding, singularity and universals will be treated. In the final section, the account will be wound up by linking the two parts together and some consequences for the general understanding of Suárez' metaphysics will be spelled out.

My main thesis is that, although Suárez is careful to walk a middle way between realism and nominalism on the question on the status of the universal, his account of the metaphysical forms in the context of dealing with substantial forms, as well as in his account of cognition, generally supports a moderate nominalist reading of Suárez.

2. METAPHYSICS: MATTER, SUBSTANTIAL FORMS AND METAPHYSICAL FORMS

I shall begin this account in the area of metaphysics, where I will go from Suárez' treatment of the more general notions of matter and form, over substantial forms and souls, to the merely analogically termed metaphysical "forms".

2.1 Matter and form

According to Suárez, a substantial form is "a certain simple and incomplete substance," and it is only together with matter, in a composite whole, that it constitutes a complete substance.^{2,3} The form is in some ways prior in nature to matter, since it is the act of matter, but this does not mean that it is prior in time.⁴ According to Suárez, the substantial form has two main effects: (i) the form-matter composite, i.e. the thing itself, and (ii) the matter, which is the other component, besides the form, in the thing.⁵

² DM XV.5, §1: "*substantia quaedam simplex et incompleta*".

³ The following abbreviations are used: DA – *Tractatus Tertius. De Anima* (commentary on ST I, qq. 75–89) by Francisco Suárez; DM – *Disputationes metaphysicae* by Francisco Suárez; ST – *Summa theologiae* by Thomas Aquinas. For the Latin text of DM, I have used Francisco Suárez: *Opera omnia*, 26 vols, Paris: Vivès 1856–66. For the translation of DM XV, see Suárez, Francisco, 2000. *On the Formal Cause of Substance: Metaphysical Disputation XV*, translated by John Kronen (introduction and explanatory notes) and Jeremiah Reed, Marquette University Press, Milwaukee, WI 2000. Translations of DM, other than DM XV, are my own, unless otherwise indicated. The English translation of ST is taken from Thomas Aquinas: *Summa theologiae: complete English edition in five volumes*, London: Sheed and Ward 1981.

⁴ DM XV.6, §3: "*An vero necesse sit existentiam formae esse praeiviam ad causalitatem eius, dicendum est non esse necessarium ut sit praevia ordine durationis, quia talis antecessio est impertinens.*"

⁵ DM XV.7, §1: "*Duo tantum effectus sunt qui formae attribui possunt, scilicet, compositum et materia.*"

That substantial forms have two main kinds of effects turns out to be true only with certain qualifications, however. *First*, according to Suárez there are not *really* two effects of the substantial form (the matter *and* the composite) but only *one*. This process can be seen from two different perspectives, though. “[T]here are not two effects but one which is conceived and explained by us in different ways.”⁶ Hence, it is not as though the form causes (or “actualises”) the matter and *also* causes the composite, but, rather, it is *insofar* as it causes the composite that it causes the matter, and vice versa.⁷ *Second*, even though “it is entirely simultaneous that matter is informed by form and the composite is constituted”,⁸ it also holds true to say that “if a comparison has to be made between these, [the form] is more a part of the composite than it is an act of matter since form is not for the sake of matter but for the sake of the composite”.⁹ So the form causes both the matter and the composite in one single act; it causes the matter by actualising or informing it, and thus constitutes the composite together with the matter. It is the second of these acts, the constitution of the composite thing, which is the real terminus of the working of the substantial form, while the actualisation of matter is better described as a part of the working toward this terminus. *Third*, “the form is not nobler than the composite”.¹⁰ The substantial form exists for the production of the composite, not the other way around. The argument Suárez gives for this assessment is that “the composite includes whatever perfection is in the form and adds something [i.e. matter]; therefore it is more perfect”.¹¹ This both shows Suárez’ appraisal of matter as something in itself contributing to a thing, i.e. as not only something *merely* potential, and his view on the composite as a substantial union comprising matter and form.

Suárez now proceeds by investigating matter as relating to substantial form. Earlier in the *Metaphysical disputations* Suárez has treated the topic of matter, and here he puts this in relation to what is said about substantial forms. In one of the earlier disputations he has also shown that “matter includes true reality and a partial essence”.¹² For according to Suárez, matter has its own essence and therefore also has its own proper existence apart from form.¹³

⁶ DM XV.7, §3: “non explicari duas causalitates ut duos effectus formae, sed unum dumtaxat sub diversis habitudinibus”.

⁷ DM XV.7, §4: “etiam in substantiali forma actuari materiam et compositum constitui idem sunt”.

⁸ DM XV.7, §5: “omnino simul quod materia sit informata forma et compositum constitutum”.

⁹ *Ibid.* “si inter haec facienda esset comparatio, essentialius est pars compositi quam actus materiae, quia forma non est propter materiam, sed propter compositum”.

¹⁰ DM XV.7, §6: “sed forma non est nobilior composito”.

¹¹ DM XV.7, §7: “quia compositum includit quidquid est perfectionis in forma, et addit aliquid”.

¹² *Ibid.*: “materia habet veram realitatem et essentiam partialem”. Cf. DM XIII.4, §§8–11.

¹³ DM XV.8, §7; cf. DM XIII.4.

Indeed, it must have this if form is to have anything to exert its formal influence – its specific form of causation – upon.¹⁴ But there is also another side to this story; for matter has only a *partial* essence. This means that even though matter has its own existence as separate from form, it never exists without being informed. He seems to agree with Augustine when he relates to him saying that “after that first creation matter has never lacked all form, and natural causes were so arranged by the Author of nature that one form never abandons matter without another being introduced”.¹⁵

But Suárez takes it further and goes so far as to say that matter has an intrinsic “need” for form and “cannot *naturally* exist without it”.¹⁶ Here, with matter having its own existence yet never existing alone, Suárez ends up in a typical case of taking the middle ground in a disputed question, in this case regarding the status of prime matter.¹⁷

One commentator has pointed out this differing view Suárez has on matter and form compared to Thomas Aquinas. For Thomas, everything that exists in the world *necessarily* has matter and form, for it necessarily exists *as something* and *what* it is is determined by its *form*. When the world was created, it was created *as something* and thus had matter *and* form to start with. When something changes, it is *in* losing one form that it acquires another. Suárez, on the other hand, writes as if something first loses one form, and *then* acquires another. Indeed, Suárez would even admit a temporal sequence in these events, even though it never happens.¹⁸ This may seem like small differences, indeed. But as in any philosophical systems, small differences in the foundation make for bigger differences further on. And for Suárez, as for Thomas, questions regarding matter and form lie at the very centre of philosophical reasoning, having thus great importance for the shaping of their respective philosophical systems as a whole.¹⁹

¹⁴ DM XV.8, §1: “*entitas materiae supponitur ad educationem vel introductionem formae*”.

¹⁵ DM XV.8, §13: “*Post illam vero primam creationem nunquam materia caruit omni forma; atque ita sunt ab auctore naturae dispositae causae naturales ut nunquam possit una forma materiam deserere quin introducat alia*.”

¹⁶ DM XV.8, §9; emphasis added: “*indigentia*”, “*naturaliter esse non potest sine illa*”.

¹⁷ On the unity of matter and substantial form as a *per se* (as opposed to a merely accidental) unity, see John D. Kronen: “The Importance of the Concept of Substantial Unity in Suarez’s Argument for Hylomorphism”, in: *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 63 (1991), p. 335–360.

¹⁸ David M. Knight, S.J.: “Suárez’s Approach to Substantial Form”, in: *The Modern Schoolman*, vol. XXXIX, March (1962), pp. 219–239, especially pp. 235–6.

¹⁹ For different possible interpretations of Suárez’ view on prime matter, and their respective advantages and problems, see John D. Kronen et al.: “The Problem of the Continuant: Aquinas and Suárez on Prime Matter and Substantial Generation”, in *The Review of Metaphysics* 53 (2000), p. 863–885, especially pp. 873–6.

2.2 Material forms and human souls

When treating the topic of matter and form it is also important to make a distinction between the human soul, i.e. the substantial form of the human being, and the form of purely material things. For the human, rational souls differ considerably from all the other substantial forms, as they “are spiritual, substantial and independent of matter [and] they come to be out of nothing by true creation”,²⁰ while “all other substantial forms [...] are educed from the potency of the pre-existing matter”²¹ and, hence, “are not properly said to be created”.²² Human substantial forms, or souls, are *truly created* or given existence directly by God. Material forms, on the other hand, are created *mediately*; the word “created” can only properly be used of that which is given existence directly by God, and therefore material forms cannot be said to be created in the proper use of the word. For this process of matter causing forms Suárez reserves the name *eduction*; material forms are *educed* from matter.²³

Material forms, or forms of material things other than human beings, “do not exist, with regard to their own entity, without the material concurrence of a subject”.²⁴ Hence, the *only* way in which a material form can be created and subsist is in a composite with matter.²⁵ And even though Suárez speaks of a “co-generation” of the form along with the composite,²⁶ the form in material things is still secondary: “the composite not only comes to be first, but also it alone, absolutely speaking, comes to be [...], while the form only comes to be along with it”.²⁷ In other words, the real and full *terminus* or end point of an action of generation of a material thing is not the form but the composite.

With the creation of the human soul, things turn out to be a bit different. For even though the creation of the human soul in a way depends on matter and “the disposition of the body”²⁸ for its coming to be, it is called “true” creation because “there is no concurrence that is essential and in the genus of

²⁰ DM XV.2, §10: “esse spirituales, et substantiales, et independentes a materia [...] fieri ex nihilo per veram creationem”.

²¹ DM XV.2, §13: “omnibus aliis formis substantialibus [...] ex potentia praeiacentis materiae educi”.

²² DM XV.2, §14: “proprie de his formis dici non creari”.

²³ For the Medieval and Late-Scholastic background to these issues, see Olaf Pluta: “How Matter Becomes Mind: Late-Medieval Theories of Emergence”, in: *Forming the Mind: Conceptions about the Internal Senses and the Mind/Body Problem in Medieval and Early Modern Times*, eds. Henrik Lagerlund and Olaf Pluta, Dordrecht: Springer 2007, p. 149–167.

²⁴ DM XV.4, §3: “non sunt etiam quoad entitatem suam sine concursu materiali subiecti”.

²⁵ DM XV.4, §§3–4.

²⁶ DM XV.4, §4: “distingui solet duplex terminus”.

²⁷ DM XV.4, §5: “compositum non solum prius fit, sed etiam absolute illud solum fit [...] forma vero solum confit”.

²⁸ “Dispositio corporis”.

material cause for the very being or coming to be of the rational soul”.²⁹ Matter “does not have an essential influence on the being or coming to be of such a soul”.³⁰ And even though the human soul is a “natural and proportionate act of matter”,³¹ Suárez states that “the rational soul comes to be in itself, at least by a priority of nature, and receives its own being *as independent of matter*, and *afterward* it is united to matter by another action by which the whole composite is generated”.³² While the material form is educed from matter and made in the same act as the matter-form composite, the human soul is created as a separate entity and joined to matter in an act separate from its creation. And even though the soul is then made the act of matter (or the body), the matter is not even a co-cause of its creation.

It is interesting to see here how Suárez at this point relates to Thomas Aquinas. For Thomas, as for Suárez, the soul is created and not educed from matter.³³ It is further something subsistent³⁴ and incorruptible.³⁵ But whereas for Suárez the soul is created directly as a singular substantial form, for Thomas the matter is an “individuating principle” which makes a form of a human being into *this* particular human soul. This is one of the characteristics which make a human soul different from an angel: for whereas the angels are not individuated through matter, and must hence each be its own species, a particular human soul is *this* soul because it is “the form of a certain matter”.³⁶ Hence, whereas Thomas runs into the problem of how the form of a human being can be *this* form rather than another, Suárez does not. For Suárez, it is rather the substantial form, in this case the soul, which is the individuating principle of matter.³⁷ As will be seen, these differences will also echo in their respective views on abstraction and understanding.

A more fundamental reason why Suárez does not run into this problem of the individuation of the soul is that for Suárez, as for William of Ockham, everything that exists is singular.³⁸ “[E]very thing which exists is necessarily

²⁹ DM XV.2, §10: “*non est concursus per se et in genere causae materialis in ipsum esse vel fieri animae rationalis*”.

³⁰ *Ibid.*: “*non influat per se in fieri vel esse animae*”.

³¹ DM XV.2, §12: “*actus naturalis et proportionatus materiae*”.

³² DM XV.2, §16; emphasis added: “*prius enim, saltem natura, in se fit et accipit esse suum independens a materia, et postea alia actione unitur qua totum compositum generatur*”.

³³ ST I, q. 90, a. 2. See note 52 below, though.

³⁴ See ST I, q. 75, a. 2.

³⁵ See ST I, q. 75, a. 6.

³⁶ ST I, q. 76, a. 2, ad 1.

³⁷ Cf. James B. South: “Singular and Universal in Suárez’s Account of Cognition”, in *The Review of Metaphysics*, vol. 55, June (2002), pp. 785–823, especially p. 808.

³⁸ South 2002, pp. 785–786. Cf. André Goddu: “Ockham’s Philosophy of Nature”, in: *The Cambridge Companion to Ockham*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press 1999, p. 143–167.

singular and individual”.³⁹ Hence, also the soul, which is given existence by God directly, is singular. For Thomas, the angels, who are non-material, must each be of a different species, because if there is no matter to individuate the forms there is no way to distinguish one form of a certain kind from another.⁴⁰ For Suárez, the human soul is made ontologically (though not temporally) prior to its union with the body, and can hence also be distinguished from other human souls without this association with matter.

2.3 Mutual causing of matter and form

Both in the case of material and human forms, on the face of it there seems to be a paradox involved. For at the same time as the form causes the matter, the form is also dependent on matter – in the case of humans it is naturally *joined* to it, in the case of material forms it is even *educed* from it. To solve this difficulty Suárez distinguishes between two kinds of dependence: as upon a *proper cause* (“*propria causa*”), or as upon a *condition* (“*conditione*”), where the first dependence is the stronger one.⁴¹ In the case of the dependence of matter upon form Suárez argues for the second kind, even though that it is a case of the first kind of dependence “can be maintained with probability”.⁴² Through this looser dependence of matter upon form Suárez can explain why “it is not contradictory that there is such a mutual nexus between matter and form as between causes which are causes of each other”.⁴³ Hence, Suárez claims that because form is more strongly dependent upon matter than matter is upon form, he is not being paradoxical when he claims that matter and form cause each other. Suárez invites his readers to further delve into this question by giving cross-references to other parts of the *Metaphysical disputations*, a thread which will not be taken up in this context, however.

Suárez then goes on to clarify his position that matter and form can exist and be conserved independently of each other.⁴⁴ In the case of the more disputed question of the conservation of matter as separated from form Suárez, according to himself, prefers Scotus’ position to that of Thomas in holding that matter can exist without form.⁴⁵ An *a priori* argument for this is that “just as matter has its own incomplete *essential* entity, it also has its own

³⁹ DM VI.2, §2: “*omnis res, quae existit, necessario est singularis et individua*”.

⁴⁰ ST I, q. 76, a. 2, ad 1.

⁴¹ DM XV.8, §17.

⁴² DM XV.8, §21: “*potest [...] probabiliter sustineri*”.

⁴³ DM XV.8, §20: “*non repugnat huiusmodi mutuus nexus inter materiam et formam tamquam inter causas quae mutuo et vicissim sunt sibi per se causae*”.

⁴⁴ DM XV.9.

⁴⁵ DM XV.9, §2–3.

incomplete *existential* entity”.⁴⁶ The conservation of matter as separated from form is for Suárez just a parallel case of the conservation of form as separated from matter.⁴⁷ Suárez ends this clarification of the possibility of matter to exist without form by underscoring that we are here in fact dealing with prime matter, *not* proximate matter (as e.g. the body is to the living person).⁴⁸ Matter without *any* form is able to exist all on its own.

This account of the interplay between matter and form, and the possibility of their respective conservation apart from each other, is important because it shows Suárez’ attitude towards matter and form as substances, though incomplete, in their own right. As one commentator of Suárez points out, what in Thomas is primarily two of the causes of a substance, for Suárez becomes primarily incomplete substances.⁴⁹ In Suárez, the concentration is not upon the substance and its causes, but rather on the matter and the form taken separately and the (efficient and final) causes for *their* respective existence.⁵⁰ Matter and form go from principles which explain being, as they were in Thomas, to beings whose existence need to be explained.⁵¹ And even though it is highly possible that Suárez would oppose this description, because his difference from Thomas does not lie so much in a change of vocabulary as in a change of the meaning of words,⁵² it is hard to overlook this shift of attention from the substance to its constituents.

2.4 One formal cause for each substance

A further question Suárez asks is “whether in one single matter there can be only one substantial form”.⁵³ Even though he describes the position affirming that forms are multiplied in the composite according to essential predicates – i.e. Scotus’ position – as “out of date”,⁵⁴ he still takes great care to refute it. First⁵⁵ he refutes Scotus’ notion of “form of corporeity”, which gives three-dimensional being to material substances. This property is instead, according to Suárez, given by the substantial form itself.

⁴⁶ DM XV.9, §5; emphasis added: “*materia, sicut habet suam partialem entitatem essentiae, ita et existentiae*”.

⁴⁷ DM XV.9, §5: “*Namque haec existentia partialis materiae non manat intrinsece a forma*”.

⁴⁸ DM XV.9, §10: “*agimus de materia prima, non de materia proxima*”.

⁴⁹ Knight 1962, p. 219.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 220.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 221.

⁵² “*It should be evident that such terms as eduction and formal causality have radically different meanings in St. Thomas and in Suarez.*” – Knight 1962, p. 238.

⁵³ DM XV.10, §2: “*an [...] in una materia tantum esse possit una forma substantialis*”.

⁵⁴ DM XV.10, §4: “*haec sententia antiquata iam est*”.

⁵⁵ In DM XV.10, §7–15.

The main example used in his refutation of multiple substantial forms in one substance is the human, rational soul, being the substantial form of the human being. In the case of the human soul he says, for example, that animality and rationality of humans “are multiplied only through the abstraction and precision of our intellects”,⁵⁶ and are hence not *really* multiplied in the human being. This passage is also interesting as it connects his view of the substantial forms to that of abstraction and understanding, an area to which I shall return.

Concerning substantial forms in general, Suárez further states that “the substantial form is [...] entirely indivisible and invariable so long as it remains in the same matter”.⁵⁷ The substantial form is simple, hence indivisible, and is what individuates the thing over time, making an oak tree the *same* tree when it is 5 and 75 years old; hence, the substantial form is invariable, being the constant entity over time in a substance. Also, to keep all the activities of something to be the activities of some *one* thing, and also to keep these activities coordinated, the *one* substantial form is required: “[t]he multitude of actions, faculties or organs [...] especially requires the oneness of the form”.⁵⁸

These are some of Suárez’ arguments for his thesis that “in one natural composite there is only one substantial form”.⁵⁹ In this question Suárez thus sides with Thomas Aquinas’ position, that there is one and only one substantial form for each substance. This position of his becomes important in his account of *essences* or *metaphysical forms*.

2.5 Metaphysical forms

In the last section of the disputation *De causa formali substantiali*, Suárez treats the topic of *metaphysical forms*. The notion of metaphysical form as treated in the context of his metaphysics remains rather obscure, and many aspects are not fully developed. But I think it is still important to make a short account of it at this point, because it is important for the transition from Suárez’ metaphysics to his theory of understanding, where it will also make more sense.

⁵⁶ DM XV.10, §4: “*multiplacentur solum per abstractionem et praecisionem nostri intellectus*”.

⁵⁷ DM XV.10, §45: “*forma substantialis [...] sit omnino indivisibilis et invariabilis, quamdiu manet in eadem materia*”.

⁵⁸ DM XV.10, §64: “*Multitudo etiam actionum, facultatum aut organorum [...] requirit maxime formae unitatem*.” See also Kronen 1991, where it is argued that Suárez’ main concern with relation to the substantial form and the substantial unity is *unity* rather than *change*.

⁵⁹ DM XV.10, §61: “*in uno composito naturali unam tantum esse formam substantialem*”. This is the case in the natural order. It is not a contradiction *per se*, though, that there are more than one substantial form informing the same matter, or, put in another way, that there are more than one thing at the same place at the same time. Hence, it is within the power of God to make this happen, even though it is not possible solely within the natural order (cf. DM XV.10, §59).

Hence, the account below is, and must be, rather dense, but it will be clearer when further treated in later sections.

So, first of all, a metaphysical form “is called form only by analogy and by a certain metaphor”.⁶⁰ Hence it is not a form in the sense that it can exercise formal causality or actualise some subject, but it has some kind of “*quasi* material causality”⁶¹ in that it “constitutes a thing in itself in its metaphysical composition”.⁶² There is only one metaphysical form for each substantial thing, corresponding to the one substantial form of the thing.⁶³ In the case of a human being, the metaphysical form is “humanity”.⁶⁴ With more familiar terms, the metaphysical form is also called *essence* or *nature*.⁶⁵ This is worth repeating: what in Suárez’ terminology is called *essence* and what is called *nature* is *equivalent* to what he calls *metaphysical form*.

Further, Suárez introduces “the metaphysical form according to reason, which is also called the logical form”.⁶⁶ This is the way in which we divide the metaphysical forms in our mind in genus, difference and species. This can be done in a variety of ways, something which does not however threaten the fact that there is only one essence of each substance.⁶⁷

The notion of metaphysical form is a rather unique one for Suárez, as far as I can see. The notion of “thisness”, for example, found in the philosophy of Scotus and which it seems to resemble, Suárez outright rejects.⁶⁸ With his notion of ‘metaphysical form,’ Suárez also separates nature (another name for metaphysical form) from substantial form in a way which would have been totally foreign to e.g. Thomas Aquinas. For Thomas, the substantial form constitutes the nature of a composite thing.⁶⁹ Yet, the notion of metaphysical forms plays a pivotal role in Suárez’ philosophy, and the understanding of it seems to me a key to understanding his philosophical system.

Metaphysical forms are at one and the same time the metaphysical composition of the thing, and in this also the foundation for our understanding and

⁶⁰ DM XV.11, §1: “*solum per analogiam et quasi metaphoram quamdam forma nominatur*”.

⁶¹ DM XV.11, §7: “*non potest propriam causalitatem formalem exercere*”, “*causalitatem [...] quasi materialem*”.

⁶² DM XV.11, §2: “*in compositione metaphysica constituit essentialiter rem ipsam*”.

⁶³ DM XV.11, §10: “*intelligitur [...] hanc formam tantum esse posse unam respectu eiusdem*”.

⁶⁴ DM XV.11, §3: “*humanitas*”.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*: “*ipsamet essentia et forma totius idem est quod uniuscuiusque rei natura*”.

⁶⁶ DM XV.11, §12: “*forma metaphysica secundum rationem (quae logica etiam appellatur)*”.

⁶⁷ DM XV.11, §18: “*multitudo differentiarum essentialium non obstat unitati et compositioni per se ex genere et differentia*”.

⁶⁸ Cf. John P. Doyle: “Suárez, Francisco (1548–1617)”, in: *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol. 9, London and New York: Routledge 1998, p. 189–196, especially p. 191.

⁶⁹ Cf. e.g. ST III, q. 13, a. 1.

what makes our understanding be understanding *of some thing*. The brief treatment of metaphysical forms given above thus in many ways connects Suárez metaphysics with his theory of understanding, and what place metaphysical and logical forms really take in Suárez' philosophy will be further expounded below. I will thus now proceed to Suárez' account of understanding.

3. METAPHYSICS OF MIND: UNDERSTANDING AND UNIVERSALS

Understanding is a basic act of the intellect, and thus of every human being. *That* human beings understand Suárez never questions. What Suárez wants to come to grips with is *what* an act of understanding *is*. *Through what* do we understand, and what is the possible *objects* of our understanding? As will be seen, this account of human understanding will also lead right into the middle of the discussion on the status of universals.

3.1 The intellect

What is the object of our intellect? What is it possible for us to understand through our intellect? First of all, "whatever has any being, can be perceived by our intellect".⁷⁰ This is confirmed by "experience and induction: for our intellect perceives God, angels and material things".⁷¹ Hence, "whatever is an entity is possible to understand".⁷² Everything that exists is a possible object for our understanding. From this it follows that "[t]he adequate object of our intellects, considered in themselves, is being taken in all its width".⁷³ This follows from the thesis that everything that exists can be an object of the intellect; hence, the range of the working of the intellect is the whole field of being, and nothing else.

*It is hence determined that the object of the intellect is true and real being, and that nothing can be grasped, unless it is true or evident.*⁷⁴

This range of the intellect is then put in relation to the range of the will, another mental power. They, so to say, span the same fields.

*[I]n a similar way we below speak of the will, because the good is also put as the object of the will.*⁷⁵

⁷⁰ DA IV.1, §2: "quidquid entitatem aliquam habet, potest ab intellectu nostro cognosci".

⁷¹ *Ibid.*: "experientia [...] et inductione: namque intellectus noster cognoscit Deum, Angelos, et res materiales".

⁷² *Ibid.*: "quidquid habet entitatem est intelligibile".

⁷³ DA IV.1, §3: "Objectum adæquatum intellectus nostri secundum se considerati est ens in tota latitudine sua spectatum."

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*: "Statutum ergo sit objectum intellectus esse ens verum et reale, nihilque cognosci posse, quod tale non sit vera, vel apparenter."

This concurrence of the objects of intellect and will is not accidental, because according to Suárez “[t]he true and the good in an object are not really distinct”, they but “fall under different formal characters – namely, the intelligible and the desirable”.⁷⁶ Everything that exists is true, i.e. a possible object of our understanding, and good, i.e. a possible object of our will or desire. These are *essential properties* of *being*, and are two features which are common to *everything* that exists.⁷⁷

3.2 Acquiring the intelligible species

It is the natural state of our soul, the substantial form of a human being, to be united with a body. It is also through the senses, which require a body to function, that we are able to acquire the intelligible species through which we understand.

*[O]ur soul, in accordance with its natural state, needs to be in a body, whose form the soul is, wherefrom our intellect is also able to understand of itself, through the species received through the senses.*⁷⁸

From this Suárez draws the conclusion that the proportionate, or most appropriate, things for us to understand, in this embodied state of life at least,⁷⁹ are material objects.

*The proportionate object of the human intellect in its natural state is material or sensible things.*⁸⁰

But how are we able to acquire these intelligible species, through which we understand? Somehow, as was stated above, we get them from the senses. But the intelligible species are in the intellect, which is in the mind, i.e. the immaterial, intellectual parts of the soul. How can something immaterial come from something material? According to Suárez, we can be sure that the immaterial parts of our soul are involved in this production.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*: “*simile quid dicimus dicemus infra de voluntate, quod etiam de bono quod voluntatis objectum ponitur*”.

⁷⁶ Denis Des Chene: *Life's Form: Late Aristotelian Conceptions of the Soul*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press 2000, p. 126.

⁷⁷ For Suárez' view on transcendentals, see Jorge J. E. Gracia: “Suarez and the Doctrine of the Transcendentals”, in: *Topoi: an International Review of Philosophy* 11 (1992), p. 121–133.

⁷⁸ DA IV.1, §5: “*anima nostra secundum naturalem suam [con]ditionem (?) postulat esse in corpore, cujus forma est, unde intellectus noster etiam ex se vindicat intelligere per species a sensibus acceptas*”.

⁷⁹ Unless I explicitly state otherwise, I will here below talk of a human being in his or her embodied state.

⁸⁰ DA IV.1, §5: “*Objectum proportionatum intellectui humano secundum statum naturalem suum est res sensibiles, seu materialis*.”

*It is a certain conclusion, that it is necessarily the spiritual capacities whose power create the intelligible species: for the effect of this production is immaterial as well.*⁸¹

But, Suárez underscores, the working of the immaterial parts of the soul is not enough.

*[I]t does not solely depend on this, but also the phantasms existing in the inner senses are necessary, and somehow these cooperate for this kind of production.*⁸²

So, for the production of the intelligible species it is necessary for a phantasm and the intellectual parts of the soul to unite. If this were not the case, we could create intelligible species of things “without being in this thing dependent on any senses”, but “the opposite is proved by experience”.⁸³ But still, with this said we do not yet really know *how* this making of intelligible species is attained. One thing Suárez considers himself to be in a position to do at this stage, though, is to name the part of the intellect which is active in this production: the agent intellect (*intellectus agens*).

*The difficulty which is therefore left is the way in which the agent intellect and the phantasm come together for the production of the species.*⁸⁴

3.3 The object of the intellect

To delve deeper into the question of what the object of the intellect is, Suárez proceeds to pose the question whether the object of the intellect is the singular or the universal. Once again, Suárez underscores that it is the material and singular that is the object of the basic act of the intellect, as of the will.

*In a similar way, love reaches for the singular and material, and it is in the will, which follows the intellect: therefore, the intellect treats, in its proper act, this singular.*⁸⁵

The materially singular is thus conceived by something spiritual or incorporeal when an intelligible species is created by the agent intellect.

⁸¹ DA IV.2, §4: “Conclusio certa sit, necessarium esse virtutem spiritualem, cujus vi fiant species intelligibiles: siquidem effectus quidam productibiles sunt, atque immateriales.”

⁸² *Ibid.*: “non solum illam, sed etiam phantasma in sensu interiori existens esse necessarium, et aliquomodo concurrere ad talem productionem”.

⁸³ *Ibid.*: “neque in ea re haberet dependentiam a sensu aliquo”, “contrarium experientia demonstrat”.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*: “Difficultas ergo superest circa modum, quo intellectus agens, et phantasma convenient ad productionem speciei.”

⁸⁵ DA IV.3, §3: “Similiter charitas ad singularia materialia tendit, et est in voluntate, quæ intellectum sequitur: concipit ergo intellectus proprio actu hæc singularia.”

*Our intellect conceives the materially singular through its own proper species [...] such a species can be produced by the agent intellect.*⁸⁶

Note that Suárez first talks about the *understanding through* the intelligible species, and then about the *production of* this species, in this quotation. Hence, also when the intelligible species has been created from the phantasm by the agent intellect, it represents the singular and material, for “the materially singular is represented by the spiritual species”.⁸⁷

At this point, Suárez departs from the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas. For while according to Suárez the materially singular can be represented by the intellect, for Thomas it can only be represented by the senses. Thus, whereas for Suárez in the sentence “Peter is a man” both “Peter” and “man” are represented by the intellect, for Thomas “man” is represented by the intellect while “Peter” is represented by a phantasm of the senses. For Thomas, this is a situation where the intellect turns to the phantasms (*conversio ad phantasma*), whereas for Suárez the whole sentence is construed in the intellect.⁸⁸

It is thus established that we can conceive of the singular through the intelligible species. This is the basic act of the intellect. Through the species it has thus abstracted from the phantasm it can understand the singular object which the phantasm is of.

*Our intellect directly conceives the materially singular without reflection.*⁸⁹

But what about the universal? Isn't universality an essential feature of understanding? When an intelligible species is created it represents something singular, and is “put into” the *possible intellect*.

*Suppose, for example, that our agent intellect produces a species of Peter in the possible intellect from a phantasm of Peter, for it has the possibility to do this [...] it does not thereby create the species of man universally.*⁹⁰

From two different people, then, for example Peter and Paul, we have two different species. These species partly coincide, partly differ.

⁸⁶ DA IV.3, §5: “Intellectus noster cognoscit singulare materiale per propriam ipsius speciem [...] talis species produci valet ab intellectu agente.”

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*: “materiale singulare repræsentari per speciem spiritualem”.

⁸⁸ Cf. South 2002, pp. 792–793; Peccorini 1974, pp. 619–620.

⁸⁹ DA IV.3, §7: “Intellectus noster cognoscit directe singularia materialia absque reflexione.”

⁹⁰ DA IV.3, §12: “Posito phantasmate Petri, verbi gratia, intellectus agens producit speciem Petri in intellectu possibili, habet siquidem virtutem ad illam efficiendam [...] ergo non efficit speciem hominis universalis.”

[S]pecies, however, of that kind partly coincide, partly differ, in the representation.⁹¹

And then that which coincides is the universal, i.e. in this case, with Peter and Paul, *man* taken universally, for example.

[A]nd hence it is also that, which is jointly represented by the species in these [individual things], which is to be considered universal.⁹²

Suárez has not yet said anything about *how* what is jointly represented is acquired, though.

Once again, “[t]he intellect can directly conceive the singular, and the first species, which are impressed in the intellect, is of singular things: therefore also that, which it first understands, is itself singular”.⁹³ But to go from this understanding of the singular to a universal understanding, another abstraction is required.

The abstraction of the intelligible species is of one kind, of the common nature of another.⁹⁴

For by the act of the agent intellect itself, the species is not yet universal; it only represents a singular thing. The making of universally representing species is instead done in the possible intellect, where the abstracted species is further processed.

The truth is clear from what has been said, that the agent intellect cannot produce such a [universal] species. This abstracting operation is therefore done by the possible intellect, which considers the universal nature without the individuating conditions, thereby also the nature, as universal and abstract, is represented through its act.⁹⁵

Below is a schematic picture which summarizes what has up until this point been said concerning the intellect and understanding.

⁹¹ DA IV.3, §13: “species autem ejusmodi partim in repræsentatione convenient, partim differunt”.

⁹² *Ibid.*: “tum etiam id, quod commune illis per species repræsentantur, quod est considerare universalia”.

⁹³ DA IV.3, §15: “Intellectus potest directe cognoscere singulare, ac prima species, quæ in intellectu imprimatur, est rei singularis: ergo id, quod prius concipitur, ipsum est singulare.”

⁹⁴ DA IV.3, §19: “Abstractio alia est speciei intelligibilis, alia naturæ communis.”

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*: “Verum, ex dictis liquet intellectum agentem talem aliquam speciem non producere. Ea ergo abstractio operatio est intellectus possibilis, qua naturam universalem considerat absque conditionibus individuantibus, sic enim per actum illum repræsentantur natura, ut universalis, atque abstracta.”

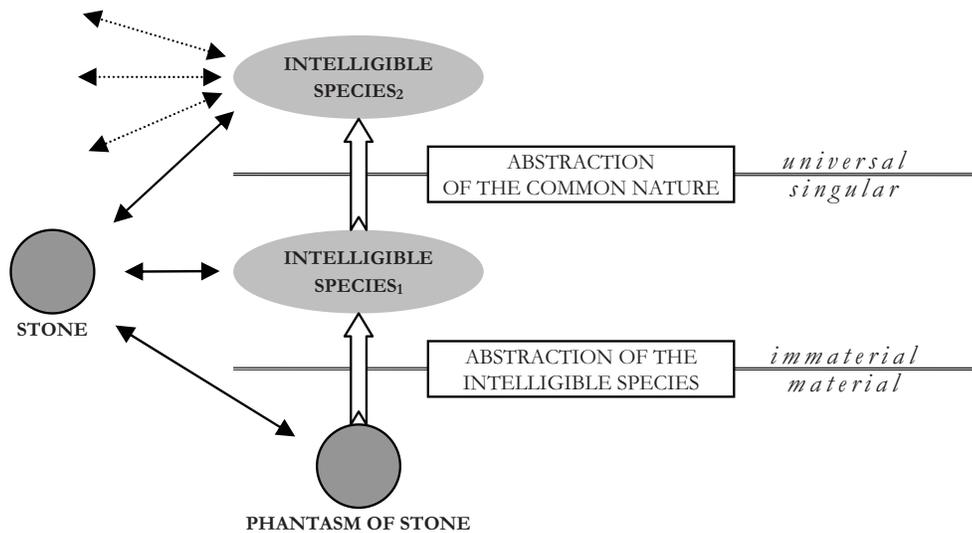


FIG. 1. THE PHANTASM AND INTELLIGIBLE SPECIES OF A STONE.
INTELLIGIBLE SPECIES₁ IS IMMATERIAL AND REPRESENTS SOMETHING SINGULARLY.
INTELLIGIBLE SPECIES₂ IS IMMATERIAL AND REPRESENTS UNIVERSALLY.

In this underscoring of the primacy of the singular in understanding, Suárez seems to follow William of Ockham’s line of thought rather than Thomas’. For Ockham also thought that what the mind comes to know first is the singular. Indeed, this is intimately linked with theses in the metaphysical area, where Suárez agrees with Ockham that all that really exists is singular and that commonality of these singulars is dependent on some activity of the mind.⁹⁶

Thomas, on the other hand, thought that the intellect only has direct cognition of the universal in the thing, and that the individual thing is only known indirectly by the intellect, through the senses. Furthermore, according to Thomas, what is abstracted by the agent intellect is something universal, and no further abstracting activity needs be deployed to reach this state of the intelligible species, as Suárez would have it.

*Our intellect cannot know the singular in material things directly and primarily [...] [W]hat is abstracted from individual matter is the universal. Hence the intellect knows directly the universal only. But indirectly, and as it were by a kind of reflection, it can know the singular.*⁹⁷

I will come back to this topic in the concluding discussions.

⁹⁶ Cf. South 2002, pp. 785–6.
⁹⁷ ST I, q. 86, a. 1. Cf. South 2002, pp. 791–192.

3.4 The different universalities

Answering to the different kinds of abstractions are two different ways in which the word *nature* can be understood. The first one Suárez calls the essence of a thing; the second is the kind of existence nature has in the intellect, “which without doubt is abstract”.⁹⁸ The first one is real, nature as it exists in the thing, while the other is abstract.

*The first one is really given in nature, or rather is nature itself, and is cognised by the intellect through direct cognition.*⁹⁹

As of the other kind of nature, “it is certainly not itself real in the nature, because real nature, as we have said, is not abstract”.¹⁰⁰ Note here also Suárez’ division between the real and the abstract; the real and the abstract respectively define two mutually excluding sets.

This discussion of the different kinds of natures ends up in a division into three different uses of the word *universal*, and hence three kinds of universality.

*From this it can be established that three universalities can be considered in nature. First, that which can be called universal as a part of a thing: second, that which has [universality] from the intellect through extrinsic denomination and abstraction [...]: third, the relation, which is like the application of the second universality to the nature itself.*¹⁰¹

But how can Suárez at this point write that there is universality “as a part of a thing”, given what has been said above? How does that square with his thesis that it is only through the universal abstraction that there can be universality? To answer this question it is helpful to briefly take a look at the *Metaphysical disputations*. Here Suárez writes that, on the one hand, “all things that are actual entities or that exist or can immediately exist are singular and individual”,¹⁰² but, on the other hand, “those natures which we call universal or common are real and truly exist in things themselves”.¹⁰³ Hence, everything

⁹⁸ DA IV.3, §21: “nimirum esse abstractum”.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*: “Primum realiter datur in natura, seu ipsa est natura, cognosciturque ab intellectu directa cognitione.”

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*: “non est quidem in natura ipsa realiter, quia natura, ut diximus, realiter non est abstracta”.

¹⁰¹ DA IV.3, §22: “Ex his constat triplicem posse considerari universalitatem in natura. Primam, qua a parte rei dicitur universalis: alteram, quam habet ab intellectu per extrinsecam denominationem et abstractionem [...]: tertiam relationis, quæ est quasi applicatio secundæ universalitatis ad naturam ipsam.”

¹⁰² DM, V, 1, §4: “res omnes, quæ sunt actualia entia, seu quæ existent, vel existere possunt immediate, esse singulares ac individuas”.

¹⁰³ DM, VI, 2, §1: “naturas illas, quas nos universales et communes denominamus, reales esse, et in rebus ipsis vere existere”

that exists is singular, but universals exist in the singular things. How does this cohere? Suárez straightens the question: “the natures become universals in act only through an operation of the intellect which supposes some foundation on the part of things themselves; this is why it is said that universals in potency exist in reality”.¹⁰⁴ Hence, when Suárez writes that there is universality *in* the things, he means that this is a *potential* universality which only becomes actual in the intellect. This should be borne in mind in what follows.¹⁰⁵

To go back to the *De Anima* and the three kinds of universality, these different kinds of universality are labelled: the first one is called *physical*, the second *metaphysical* and the third *logical*.¹⁰⁶ The physically universal, hence the *first* kind of universal, exists in the material thing, and is not created by the intellect through any kind of abstraction; it has real being. But it still has a relation to the universal in the intellect.

*The universal of the first kind is not made by the intellect, but the cognition of it (i.e. the universal of the first kind) is placed under it (i.e. the intellect).*¹⁰⁷

*The universal of the first kind is real being.*¹⁰⁸

The *second* kind of universality, though, is formed through abstraction. This kind of universality, metaphysical, is that which the intelligible species has after the universal abstraction.

*The universal of the second kind is produced through the abstraction of the intellect.*¹⁰⁹

What the universality of the *third* kind is, the logical universality, is harder to come to grips with. Somehow it consists of a relation between a universal of the second kind and a universal of the first kind. It is the way in which these two connect.

*The universal of the third kind [...] is called logical, and consists of a rational relation through a reflexive act, which is also called a comparative conception.*¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁴ DM, VI, 2, §8: “naturas fieri actu universales solum opere intellectus, praecedente fundamento aliquo ex parte ipsarum rerum, propter quod dicuntur esse a parte rei potentia universales.”

¹⁰⁵ Translations of DM in the section above taken from Jorge Secada: *Cartesian Metaphysics: The Late Scholastic Origins of Modern Philosophy*, New York: Cambridge University Press 2000., pp. 117-8; also, cf. *ibid.*, pp. 117-9 for a discussion of the topic.

¹⁰⁶ See DA IV.3, §22.

¹⁰⁷ DA IV.3, §23: “Universale primo modo non fit ab intellectu, sed illius cognitioni supponitur.”

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*: “Universale primo modo ens reale est.”

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*: “Universale secundo modo per abstractionem intellectus efficitur.”

This universal of the third kind, though, is not itself rational (i.e. something in the intellect), but the real nature (the universal of the first kind) as it exists under the *direct* cognition of the intellect (through the universal of the second kind).

*[A]ctually, though, this relation is not rational, but the real nature itself, as it exists under the direct conception of the mental, and as it is denominated by this conception.*¹¹¹

To understand this logical universality, I would like to go back to the account at the end of the section on matter and form. There it was stated that our mind can “divide and abstract things in various ways, and for this reason it can conceive many predicates of genus and difference in the same thing”.¹¹² Hence the metaphysically universal intelligible species “corresponds to” the nature in the thing. But the nature of something is another name for its metaphysical form, of which there is only one in each thing, corresponding to the substantial form of the being. In human beings, this is the humanity of the particular human being. But of a human being, we can not *only* say that it is human. It is also, e.g., an animal. Here the logical form comes in. As far as I can see, the logical form is the way in which the metaphysically universal metaphysical form relates to the nature in the thing, or rather the metaphysical constitution *of* the thing, and “highlights” it in different ways. There are no mere animals, but only different species of animals. Hence, there is no such thing as a metaphysical form corresponding to “animal” inhering in any substance. This is, instead, a logical universal, conceived by the mind when it relates the metaphysical form in act, existing in the intellect, in a certain way to different animals.

In the picture below, some of what has been said about the universalities, abstraction and understanding is schematically summarized.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*: “Universale tertio modo [...] logicum vocatur, in relationeque rationis consistit per actum reflexum, qui etiam notitia comparativa dicitur.”

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*: “revera tamen rationis relatio non est, sed natura ipsa realis, ut existens sub directa conceptione mentis, atque ut a tali conceptione denominata.”

¹¹² DM XV.11, §18: “eamdem rem variis modis praescindere et abstrahere, et ideo potest in eadem, plura praedicata generis et differentiae concipere”.

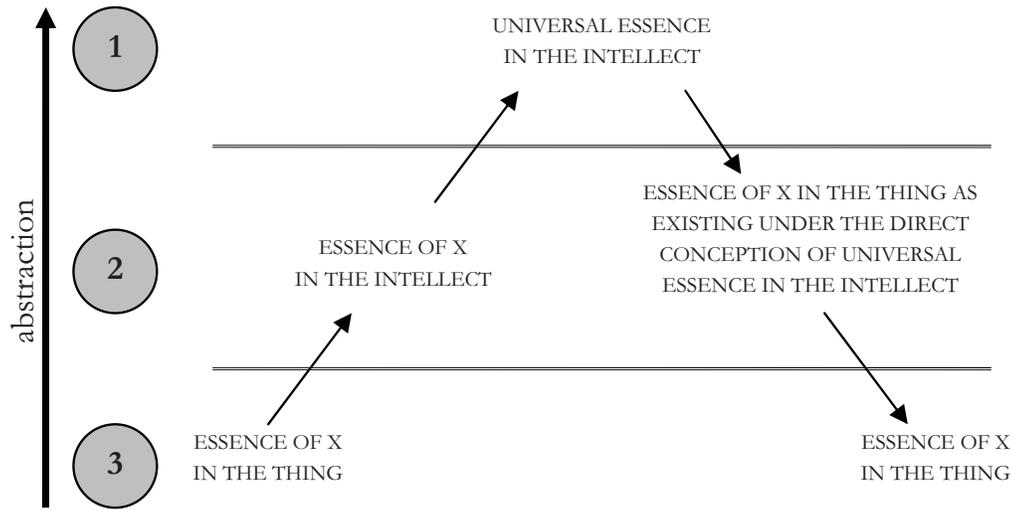


FIG. 2 THE DIFFERENT LEVELS OF UNIVERSALITY:

1) METAPHYSICAL UNIVERSALITY; 2) LOGICAL UNIVERSALITY; 3) PHYSICAL UNIVERSALITY.

NOTE THAT ESSENCE IS ANOTHER NAME FOR METAPHYSICAL FORM OR NATURE.

ESSENCES ON THE LEVEL OF METAPHYSICAL AND LOGICAL UNIVERSALITY CAN ALSO BE CALLED UNIVERSAL AND SINGULAR INTELLIGIBLE SPECIES, RESPECTIVELY. IT IS THROUGH THE ESSENCE OF X IN THE THING, AS IT EXISTS UNDER THE DIRECT CONCEPTION OF THE UNIVERSAL ESSENCE IN THE INTELLECT (LEVEL 2, TO THE RIGHT), THAT WE UNDERSTAND THE THING.

As is seen, while fig. 1 showed the relation of the intelligible species to the *thing* as a substantial unity, fig. 2 above relates the *essence* of the thing, being a physical universal, to the two levels of abstracted intelligible species.

3.5 On the refutation of some misconceptions

Having set his own record straight on these issues, Suárez puts his head to the task of sorting out some misconceptions found in other philosophers concerning them. On the one hand, he refutes the Platonic (or, rather, *Neo-Platonic*) conception that we have a *direct* access to the universals, or ideas.¹¹³ On the other hand, he counters the suggestion that abstraction is done through a comparison of particulars,¹¹⁴ an opinion later defended by e.g. Gassendi, the adversary of Descartes. Between these positions Suárez wants to take the middle way. We abstract intelligible species from the singular, not by comparison but by real abstraction (literally “drawing out”) of the nature of a thing. The univer-

¹¹³ See DA IV.3, §25.

¹¹⁴ See DA IV.3, §26.

sal exists *potentially* in the thing.¹¹⁵ This singular, further, from which we abstract, must be sensible (at least in this life).

*[T]he sensitive cognition is the beginning of the intellectual cognition, for it determines the agent intellect to the production of such a species: therefore, that which was cognised by the senses, and represented in a phantasm, is represented by the intelligible species produced by the agent intellect.*¹¹⁶

*Our intellect does not form a proper and distinct concept of things which are not in themselves sensible.*¹¹⁷

Of things which are not sensible we have, in this life, only *analogical* concepts, such as of God and angels.¹¹⁸ Our soul, and the workings of its non corporeal parts, we know through its acts, such as understanding and willing.

*[T]he soul does not know itself through itself, as we have said, but through the perception of its proper acts.*¹¹⁹

Hence, it is only because we have first been understanding and willing, and have experience of it from ordinary life, that an enquiry such as that undertaken above is possible and relevant.

4. CONCLUSION

So how does Suárez' metaphysics of form and matter relate to his philosophical psychology of understanding? And in what way does his "metaphysics of understanding and knowledge" contribute to determining Suárez' views on forms and universals?

Let me start out by giving a brief summary of what has been laid out above. Everything that exists is singular; the material forms are educed from matter, and the human soul is created as a singular thing directly by God. This has effect on our understanding, where we first understand the singular, and thereafter actualise the potential universality by our intellect. A further step is needed in the process of abstraction to reach the universal.

¹¹⁵ Cf. Secada 2000, p. 122.

¹¹⁶ DA IV.4, §1: "*cognitio sensitiva est principium cognitionis intellectivæ, nam determinat intellectum agentem ad productionem talis speciei: ergo talis est repræsentata per speciem intelligibilem productam ab intellectu agente, qualis fuerat per sensuum cognita, repræsentataque in phantasmate.*"

¹¹⁷ DA IV.4, §2: "*Intellectus noster non format proprium et distinctum conceptum rerum, quæ sensibiles per se non sunt.*"

¹¹⁸ See DA IV.4, §2.

¹¹⁹ DA IV.5, §2: "*anima non per seipsam, ut diximus, se cognoscit, sed in cognitionem sui [...] actus proprios.*"

It is important to note that in some ways Suárez has an allegiance to the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas, but that he also feels himself free to deviate from the letter of this philosophy in substantial ways. For example, for Thomas, a realist, there really are *universalia in re*, brought to actualisation by a mere abstraction from matter by the agent intellect. From this view comes among other things, I would claim, his problem of the distinction between different human souls in their disembodied state. For Suárez, on the other hand, everything that exists, including the human soul, is *singular of itself* with a certain potency to universality which can be actualised, not by a mere abstraction by the agent intellect, but by a further process on the part of the possible intellect. On Thomas' view, the difficult thesis to defend is the immortality of the soul and its individuality after the separation from the body. On Suárez' view, the crux becomes explaining how we can have objective understanding and knowledge as well as how to account for the complex interrelations between matter and form.

The substantial forms of material things are educed from matter, those of the human beings are created separately and joined to matter. In each of these cases it is a *singular* form that is produced or created, *not* a universal form that is individuated by matter. Suárez hence gets other problems than, e.g., Thomas Aquinas, in whose philosophy the individuality of the human soul after the death of a person is problematic. On the other hand, Suárez is confronted with issues regarding the unity of body and soul, abstraction and the connection between our concepts and the things "out there" which Thomas Aquinas doesn't have to face. In this way, the problem of dualism is present in Suárez' philosophy (though – of course – not in the same ways as it would be in Early Modern and later philosophy). Further, the agent intellect is not so "prominent" as to be able to fully bridge the gap between the singular and the universal. As is so often the case in philosophy, the choice of philosophical system largely depends on which problems one chooses to confront.

In Suárez there is a clear main thread throughout his metaphysics and his theory of understanding. After discussing the views of earlier philosophers on an issue, he always takes a position consonant with his earlier theses. He considers his philosophy to be essentially *one*, coherent system. The thesis of the singularity of everything that exists, also of the form, is held consistently throughout his exposure of his theory of understanding, giving due importance to the singular in these matters. The one substantial form of each thing is matched by the one metaphysical form, which is pivotal in our abstraction and subsequent understanding. To uphold the objectivity of understanding he introduces his dictum that "universals in potency exist in reality". At the same

time he can account for the fact that we can deepen the understanding of something of which we already have a concept, in that the metaphysical form of each thing is singular and hence unique for that thing.

One commentator of Suárez, who puts Suárez close to Ockham, seems to want to transmit his label on Ockham as a “nominalistic realist” to Suárez. This, seemingly paradoxical, label captures the difficulties of labelling altogether – an observation made by the commentator as well.¹²⁰ However, the differences in the account of the process of abstraction and understanding between Thomas and Suárez *do* render Suárez more of a nominalist than Thomas, as these differences also reflect back on fundamental metaphysical assumptions. On the other hand, his view on the universals in potency in the things, brought to actuality in the intellect, render him more of a realist than Ockham. However, given the prominent position of the understanding of the singular in Suárez’ philosophy – based as this is on the understanding of the fundamentally singular character of the substantial and the metaphysical forms, respectively – for what labelling is worth I would suggest the label “moderate nominalist” as a name capturing the essential stances and intuitions of Suárez’ philosophical thinking in the above treated areas of his philosophy.¹²¹

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¹²⁰ South 2002, pp. 786–7.

¹²¹ This article is based on my Master thesis (Uppsala University, 2006). I would like to thank my supervisor, Henrik Lagerlund, for invaluable support in the writing of said thesis. I would also like to thank the two anonymous reviewers whose advice helped to improve this article.

SUMMARIUM

Suarezii de formis, universalibus, notitia intellectiva sententia

Sententia Suarezii circa quaestionem famosam de statu universalium variissimis modis ab diversis interpretibus exponi solet. In disertatio quidem proposita res paulo aliter pertractatur, a Suarezii metaphysica doctrina de formis substantialibus et de cognitione intellectiva ac scientia exeundo. Quae Suarezii doctrinae diligenti analysi subiciuntur earumque conexio consideratur. Respectu quaestione supradicta, scil. quanam fuit vera Suarezii de statu universalium sententia, arguitur, Suarezium nominalismum moderatum professum esse, quae conclusio suadetur ex doctrinis suis de formis substantialibus et de cognitione intellectiva.

Translatio: Lukáš Novák

SUMMARY

Suárez on Forms, Universals and Understanding

The interpretations in the secondary literature of Suárez' position in the "classical" debate on the status of universals vary considerably. In this article, the problem is looked at from a slightly different angle: that of Suárez' basic metaphysics of substantial forms and his views concerning understanding and knowledge. These areas of Suárez' thought are thoroughly analysed and related to each other. Regarding the question of the status of universals it is argued that Suárez' thought in the areas of substantial forms and of understanding generally supports the reading of Suárez as a "moderate nominalist".